

ORPHEUS™



END GAME™

BOOK SIX OF A SIX-BOOK SERIES

END GAME™

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Dean Shomshak and Greg Stolze
World of Darkness created by Mark Rein·Hagen.

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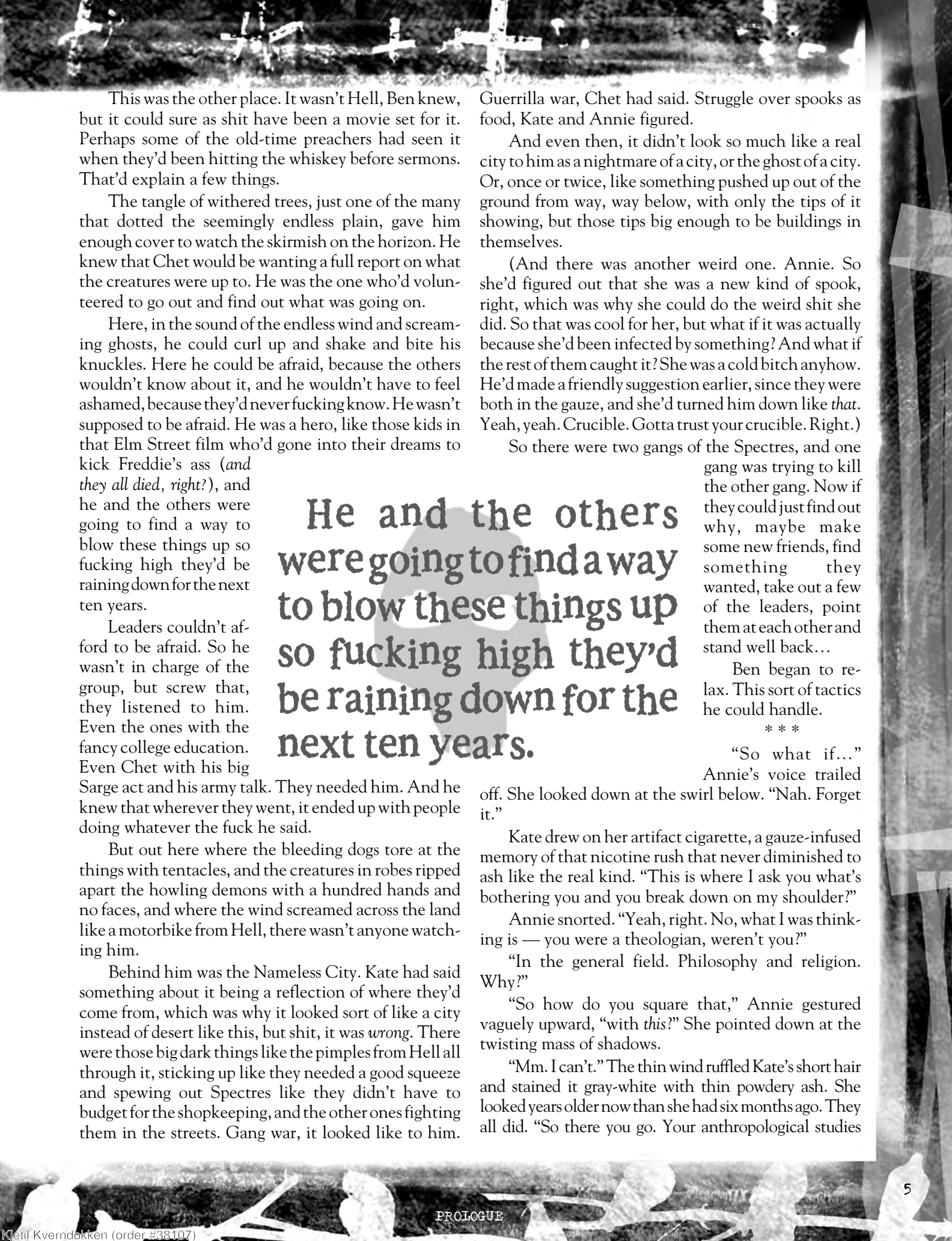
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PROLOGUE:
DANCING IN THE RUINS



BY
GENEVIEVE COGMAN



This was the other place. It wasn't Hell, Ben knew, but it could sure as shit have been a movie set for it. Perhaps some of the old-time preachers had seen it when they'd been hitting the whiskey before sermons. That'd explain a few things.

The tangle of withered trees, just one of the many that dotted the seemingly endless plain, gave him enough cover to watch the skirmish on the horizon. He knew that Chet would be wanting a full report on what the creatures were up to. He was the one who'd volunteered to go out and find out what was going on.

Here, in the sound of the endless wind and screaming ghosts, he could curl up and shake and bite his knuckles. Here he could be afraid, because the others wouldn't know about it, and he wouldn't have to feel ashamed, because they'd never fucking know. He wasn't supposed to be afraid. He was a hero, like those kids in that Elm Street film who'd gone into their dreams to kick Freddie's ass (*and they all died, right?*), and he and the others were going to find a way to blow these things up so fucking high they'd be raining down for the next ten years.

Leaders couldn't afford to be afraid. So he wasn't in charge of the group, but screw that, they listened to him. Even the ones with the fancy college education. Even Chet with his big Sarge act and his army talk. They needed him. And he knew that wherever they went, it ended up with people doing whatever the fuck he said.

But out here where the bleeding dogs tore at the things with tentacles, and the creatures in robes ripped apart the howling demons with a hundred hands and no faces, and where the wind screamed across the land like a motorbike from Hell, there wasn't anyone watching him.

Behind him was the Nameless City. Kate had said something about it being a reflection of where they'd come from, which was why it looked sort of like a city instead of desert like this, but shit, it was *wrong*. There were those big dark things like the pimples from Hell all through it, sticking up like they needed a good squeeze and spewing out Spectres like they didn't have to budget for the shopkeeping, and the other ones fighting them in the streets. Gang war, it looked like to him.

Guerrilla war, Chet had said. Struggle over spooks as food, Kate and Annie figured.

And even then, it didn't look so much like a real city to him as a nightmare of a city, or the ghost of a city. Or, once or twice, like something pushed up out of the ground from way, way below, with only the tips of it showing, but those tips big enough to be buildings in themselves.

(And there was another weird one. Annie. So she'd figured out that she was a new kind of spook, right, which was why she could do the weird shit she did. So that was cool for her, but what if it was actually because she'd been infected by something? And what if the rest of them caught it? She was a cold bitch anyhow. He'd made a friendly suggestion earlier, since they were both in the gauze, and she'd turned him down like *that*. Yeah, yeah. Crucible. Gotta trust your crucible. Right.)

So there were two gangs of the Spectres, and one gang was trying to kill the other gang. Now if they could just find out why, maybe make some new friends, find something they wanted, take out a few of the leaders, point them at each other and stand well back...

Ben began to relax. This sort of tactics he could handle.

* * *

"So what if..."

Annie's voice trailed off. She looked down at the swirl below. "Nah. Forget it."

Kate drew on her artifact cigarette, a gauze-infused memory of that nicotine rush that never diminished to ash like the real kind. "This is where I ask you what's bothering you and you break down on my shoulder?"

Annie snorted. "Yeah, right. No, what I was thinking is — you were a theologian, weren't you?"

"In the general field. Philosophy and religion. Why?"

"So how do you square that," Annie gestured vaguely upward, "with *this*?" She pointed down at the twisting mass of shadows.

"Mm. I can't." The thin wind ruffled Kate's short hair and stained it gray-white with thin powdery ash. She looked years older now than she had six months ago. They all did. "So there you go. Your anthropological studies

**He and the others
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be raining down for the
next ten years.**

with your nipple-piercing ordeals may be just as accurate as they ever were.”

“You make me feel so much better,” Annie muttered. “You’re supposed to be the one who makes the profound remarks. Can’t someone say something reassuring? Zoë?”

Zoë was staring into space, mouth curved into a smile. “Me? I was thinking that if you strung a few wires from here to there, we’d have the stunt of a lifetime. She jumps, she swings—”

“—she falls?” Annie queried.

“You have to get it right. Sometimes it feels like dropping the meat, you know? Go up, and pause in free fall before the gravity catches you. It’s all movement through the air, up, over...” She gestured. “Down.”

Kate looked from one woman to the other. “Is there some reason why you two dragged me up here to discuss stuff?”

“We’re worried,” Zoë said flatly.

“You look at me as if I was some sort of martyr. Screw that.” Kate took the cigarette from her mouth, and robbed it of the erg of Vitality sustaining its nicotine rush. She pocketed the cigarette for later. “Point; the world’s in danger. Point; we’re all probably going to die horribly. Oh yes, some of us already have. Sorry, Annie.”

Annie shrugged. She’d been dead longer than any of them had known her.

“But when Chet leads a mission and puts himself in danger to get someone out, nobody argues the point with him or calls him a latent suicide.”

“That’s because he isn’t.” Zoë leaned one elbow on the parapet. The swirling lights behind her in the sky made her look like a strange surreal Madonna. *Madonna of the Apocalypse*, Annie thought vaguely. “He’s an old soldier. His reflexes are all about keeping him alive. I know how that feels. I’m a stuntwoman. I got taught not to take risks that would kill me. You’re a ...”

She spread her hands. “You’re our way in and out. You don’t have the right to risk yourself.”

“I’m stuck with you guys,” Kate said dryly. She pulled the cigarette back out again, and lit it on the tip of her finger.

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“That stuff’ll kill you,” Annie said.

Kate’s mouth curved in what was not a smile. “I’ll be back to haunt you.”

“That stuff’ll kill you,” Annie said. They had all given up wondering how smoking cigarettes was even possible here.

Kate’s mouth curved in what was not a smile. “I’ll be back to haunt you.”

* * *

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Tom said flatly.

“He doesn’t want to talk about it,” Blink repeated. “You know, Chet, I think that Tom’s feeling a little bitter about things.”

“Tough shit.” Chet wasn’t leaning against the wall like Blink or collapsed lazily on the ground like Hoyt. He stood balanced and ready for action. Even his gauze seemed tauter than theirs — thicker, more muscular, more military. “We need to know what’s going on with them. What their plans are, who’s in charge, what those big spikes are — everything.” He paused. “Unless you’re planning to run out on us again.”

Beyond the window, the shadows swirled and danced. It had rained blood and tar half an hour ago, and Chet had stood to one side of the window through-out the shower, peering outside to make sure that nothing would sneak up on them under cover of the dark splatters.

Tom stared at his folded hands. His gauze was human again. *No it isn’t, you’re just hiding the spikes and the thorns and the darkness, it’s all lies, all lies...* “I had my reasons,” he said stiffly, “but I don’t expect you to understand them.”

Hoyt didn’t try to comment. He leaned further back, head on his arms, smiling as if he was watching the sports.

Hit him. He doesn’t care. He doesn’t understand. Hit him. You know you want to.

"That's about the stupidest damn thing I've ever heard you say," Chet said briskly. "Of course I understand. I've seen other guys do it before. You were angry, right? You wanted to hurt them, right?"

"You make it sound — ordinary."

"Damn right I do. You want to feel like some goddamn martyr, you go ahead. Just you bear in mind that all the time you're indulging yourself, those things are getting stronger out there. And you know, there's a word for someone who keeps information to himself that could save other people's lives, just because he wants to sit there and feel sorry for his sad little ass."

"Screw you," Tom said, abruptly tired of the argument. "You win, Chet. You win, all right? I'll tell you what I can remember."

Chet nodded. "Good. We're here, we've got your information, we know they're fighting each other — we may finally be able to get those bastards for good and all."

"You're worse than Kate when it comes to guilt trips, you know that?" Blink commented from where he was leaning.

Chet chuckled deep in his throat. "Hell, kids these days don't know nothing about putting the boot in where it hurts."

* * *

Ben ran across the plain and into the city, for a few brief moments purely and simply delighting in his speed. This was living. This was dying. This was real motion, using his nature as a Poltergeist to flip gravity so that he could run along the side of a wall, high above the heads of the creatures below, this place's wind whipping at his hair and blowing his leather jacket back from his torso.

A group of the larger Spectres were moving toward the city, sweeping along behind him in a cresting wave of darkness. Things like giant sharks with bone-riddled wings curved through the sky, arcing down to tear at the creatures below them and then rising again with the smaller enemies struggling between their teeth. Mangled fragments

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rained down on the sand and bone below. The constant spatter of falling body parts intermingled with screams and howls and the flapping of huge wings.

So the big flying things are attacking the dog-things with the robed guys giving them orders, right, and the dog-things and the robed guys are losing, right...

The building that the others were hiding in was three blocks on to the left. He went up the side of the building, turned a corner, flipped his gravity again and crashed through a window, curled into a ball. The shattering glass left nicks on his gauze, but nothing serious, only grazes, nothing that would slow him down. He went out through the window on the other side of the room, skittered down the wall again, and quickly glanced up and down the street.

The fight hadn't gotten here yet. Fine. Time to tell the others to move out before the Spectres came knocking on their door big-time.

* * *

"Do you believe in anything?" Zoë asked.

The conversation had dwindled down into casual questions. The city and the storm of Spectres fighting below, and the blowing desert beyond, drained the life out of any attempts to seriously discuss the situation or make plans. Annie knew that the three of them should go below soon, to rejoin the others and decide what to do next. This slow exchange of words was a way of putting it off for a few minutes longer. *As though that would delay the end of the world.*

"I believe in myself," Kate answered.

"You are so damn good at avoiding the question."

"You want to know what I really think? Fine." Kate's voice was flat with utter weariness. "We've been living on borrowed time since the moment we had our first NDE. We could all have died then, but we didn't. Every minute we've had since then was pure luck. Or the grace of God. Or cosmic coincidence. Or our own strength of will. Or whatever you want to call it. We had a

wakeup call, we ended up in Orpheus, and now the bill's come due. We've had proof that there is something that can go beyond the death of the body, and for all we know there's something that goes beyond that again. We just haven't found our way there yet. I still see no reason to believe."

"Or to disbelieve?" Annie put in.

Kate shrugged. "We're needed here. I haven't chosen to give up yet."

"Shit," Zoë breathed. She pointed to the west. A storm of Spectres was whirling toward the city from the desert and had already reached the boundaries. "They're coming this way."

"Of course they're coming this way. Did you think we'd be lucky enough that they'd go any other way?" Annie grabbed Kate's shoulder, pulling her toward the stairs. *I can feel the bones through the flesh — even though her flesh isn't here. Even her gauze is thin.* "Come on, we've got to leave!"

* * *

"They're fucking right behind me," Ben shouted as he came through the door on the ground floor. "We've got to get out of here!"

The seven others came spilling down the stairs of the ghost building, the men from a room on the third floor, the women rattling down the stairs from the roof. Outside, the wind had risen to a howling moan, and screams echoed behind it; inhuman noises, sounds that could never have been wrenched from human throats, no matter what torture had been applied. Thick heavy splattering noises burst like gunfire, and sounds of things ripping and tearing mingled with the screams.

"They're right outside," Chet stated flatly. "If we go out there, they'll spread us across the sidewalk. What the hell were you doing, boy? You were supposed to be watching the damn things!"

"I was," Ben snarled back. "They came too fucking fast, all right? Look, maybe we can hole up in here, keep our heads down 'til they're gone—"

As if in counterpoint to his words, something began to rattle at the door. At first a casual rapping, then a slow thumping pulse that made the door shiver in its frame.

Blink shrugged. "Well, I didn't order the pizza." The lights around his hands began to swirl faster.

"Ben, Hoyt, Tom, Blink, Zoë, block the damn thing," Chet ordered. "Annie, you watch the stairs to the roof. Kate, you take a look ahead, see if you can see how we get out of here."

Kate nodded. She leaned back against the wall, folding her hands in front of her, and closed her eyes. There had been a time, Ben remembered, when she'd had to do the whole Tantric meditation shit, sitting lotus, the whole deal. Now she could just pull it out of wherever

she got it from. *And she'd better pull it fast.* He twisted his will into threads of silver and yanked rubble and pieces of fallen wall and shattered floor from the nearby rooms, dragging them down the hall and shoving them in front of the shaking door.

Outside the door, a human voice screamed. "No, please — ah, God, no! Help me! Let me in!"

"A trick," said Tom, but something in his voice, his posture, said that he wasn't sure. "It's a trick. Right?"

"Sure it is," Chet said. "You'd have done that when you were with them, right?"

"Yeah."

* * *

Kate shut her eyes. *Where next?* she asked herself.

They are running through a corridor. The walls are bone and stone and darkness manifest. Spiders crawl through their substance and suckle from the pools of liquid that accumulate in corners. Chet leads the group. She herself is there, being dragged along by Annie, staggering and bleeding from her nose, looking dazed.

Kate never looks at herself for long in these visions. It's disturbing. Looking at yourself shows all the frailties

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that you try to hide in daily life. It shows why the others think she's some sort of martyr. But that's stupid. Martyrs make a conscious choice to go and sacrifice themselves. Kate has only ever done what she had to do. The need was there, and she answered it.

They aren't all there. There are only six of them. Perhaps the others are elsewhere in these corridors.

She has learned not to think about some things.

She doesn't try to see who's there and who isn't there. She looks behind them to see where the corridor comes from.

Light slants down into the corridor from a ragged gap in the roof, and through it she can see the lines of more normal walls and roof, the cellar of the building that they just came from, recognizable from when they explored it earlier, checking it from basement to roof before they decided to rest there. Shadows gather to pour down through the hole after them.

Someone screams something.

Kate opened her eyes.

* * *

"There's a tunnel beneath the basement," Kate said, opening her eyes. "We can break through."

The door creaked behind the piled-up rubble. There was a sound like cardboard tearing, and a sudden scent of wet blood and raw mud. Something outside whistled, the sound carrying over the noise of storm and battle. "Tom? Tom, are you there?"

"Retreat!" Chet yelled, pointing at the stairs. *All this time and they still can't manage a proper withdrawal.* "Down that way. Move it, move it, soldiers! You want to stay here with these bastards?" He grabbed at Tom's shoulder. "Come on, don't just stand there!"

Hoyt was grinning, the Devil's own light dancing behind his eyes. "Let me give them something to chew on, Sarge. You know you want to."

"Do it," Chet ordered sharply. Behind him, Zoë and Ben were already halfway down the basement stairs, silver shadows flapping and streaming around their gauze as they tore at the fabric of the

Hoyt was grinning, the Devil's own light dancing behind his eyes. "Let me give them something to chew on, Sarge. You know you want to."

"Do it," Chet ordered sharply.

building. Kate was still shaking her head, trying to pull herself together. Blink put a hand on her shoulder, and an instant later they were standing at the bottom of the stairs.

Hoyt folded his hands together and pointed them at the rubble that blocked the entrance. Fire blazed around them and then gushed out in a sudden cascade of brilliance that set huge shadows leaping against the walls. The stone and timber withered and cracked in the flame, and the vaguely shadowed thing behind it groaned and drew back.

Hoyt laughed. "Got it," he shouted over the noise of the fire and the crashing masonry from below, turning to punch a fist in the air. "Got it, got—"


A long limb drove through the remains of the door and the burning mass in a slamming pile-driver blow that took Hoyt squarely in the chest. It rammed him against the opposite wall so hard that the vicious nailed fingers drove through his body and grated against the stone of the wall. He cried out in shock, the blow too sudden for pain, and shuddered, darkness running out of his mouth, then slumped, eyes closing.

Annie threw herself on the thing's wrist, her body swelling and bulking with muscle 'til she was twice the size that she had been. Her own claws emerged from the backs of her hands, her jaws elongated and filled with teeth, and she tore at it, ripping and shredding at ghostly flesh and muscle and tendon. Filth filled her mouth, and she spat it out to one side.

Masonry crashed and tumbled in the cellar, and air came welling up in a gust from below, smelling of old graves and rotting wood. "Down here!" Ben called.

The huge Spectre shuddered underneath Annie, then swung from side to side, trying to shake her off. Hoyt's body went flying, colliding with the still-unsteady Kate and knocking her to the ground. Annie herself barely managed to hang on, clinging to the thing with her knees, shredding gauze and hacking at plasmatic bone.

"Retreat!" Chet yelled, pitching his voice to carry over the screams



from outside and the crashing mayhem in front of him. “Get your asses out of here and down those stairs now!” He grabbed the hesitating Tom by one arm and shoved him through the door. He saw Blink’s light at the bottom of the stairs, but it looked strange — comforting instead of beguiling, and brighter than ever somehow.

Annie jumped from the creature’s arm, flipping through the air, and shrank as she landed, running through the door after Chet.

* * *

Zoë was standing by the door as the others came running through, her power already manifesting in the air around her, plucking at her clothing and riffling through her hair like a strong wind. She could see Hoyt’s body from where she was standing, and she watched the huge bony fingers crawl around the room like a spider’s legs, searching for the crucible and finding nothing. The Spectres would be coming in next.

“Hurry,” she said, as they scrambled down into the entry of the tunnel that she and Ben had broken into. The air was foul — fouler even than before, thick with an ancient decay sweated from something far below.

The Spectres were going to sweep right into that tunnel after them, and they’d be trapped down there, with nowhere to go but ahead into danger, and no way of escape.

“Hurry.”

The creature’s arm finally withdrew with a great scraping, and the baying cries of Spectres grew louder, harsher.

“Audiences these days...” she heard Blink complain as the lights on his hands vanished into the earthy darkness.

Behind her, Chet clambered down into the tunnel. She knew that she could trust him to get the others out of

there. He’d always been so quick to take command. *Guess what, old man, I trust you at last. Hope you’re pleased.*

Spectres came flooding into the main room, turned and eddied toward her.

“Hurry! Hurry!”

She drew one last time on the crucible’s shared strength. It was like good whiskey, like a wall to lean on, like solid ground beneath her feet.

The Spectres slowed their advance, pausing to watch her. Her silver threads netted the air around her,

the thinnest of barriers between herself and the creatures. No doubt they thought that they had all the time in the world.

Zoë smiled. *Would I ever have thought that I’d be grateful they were sadists?*

“Join us,” one whispered, and the others took up the refrain. The smaller creatures began to edge closer, their fraying robes blowing back in the wind of her power to


“Join us,” one whispered, and the others took up the refrain. The smaller creatures began to edge closer, their fraying robes blowing back in the wind of her power to show rotting faces, twisted skulls, long bleeding claws.

show rotting faces, twisted skulls, long bleeding claws. The larger thing that had broken the way in for them hung back, too large to fit inside without shaking the building down upon its shoulders, but its long bony fingers clattered in counterpoint. “We’ll break everything down. Join us, Zoë.”

“Tom told us about you,” another murmured, its voice the same, its inflections the same. “Nobody ever loved you as much as we’ll love you.”

The circle began to close in on her. Fire leapt and crackled in the background, as the flames that Hoyt had started spread further into the building.

It was a pity, of course. There were things she would have liked to do, friends she didn’t want to lose, a life she was still far too busy with. Heights she wasn’t going to see, speeds she wouldn’t reach and perhaps, some day, nobody left to remember her at all.



The others should be far enough along the corridor by now.

But in the end, she had wanted to be a stuntwoman for her own sake. The reward for a stunt well done wasn't that the audience cheered and loved you for it; it was knowing that you'd done it — *you* — and the only worth that mattered then was your own. She'd seen it in Tom's eyes when they'd found him again, and when he'd pulled himself back from being like one of these creatures. He'd found himself, and that was what had made the difference.

"Join us and live forever," the first one whispered. Its face was fully visible now. Brow ridges sloped back from above burning eyes and melded into the crest that ran across the skull and down to the neck, and long-clawed hands dripped a constant stream of blood.

Where did you go when you lost yourself? You became something like that.

Zoë reached out to the walls and ceiling, calling on her anger in its highest degree. *Reality is what I say it is. Strength is what I say it is.* Silver leaped from her hands in frigid cords that twined themselves into the fabric of

the building, locking into stone and bone and cement and ash, and twisted.

The Spectres closed in on her, screaming, as she wrenched with all the determination that she had ever had. The ceiling cracked in two and shattered like dried mud, and pieces tumbled onto the thronging creatures as the whole building groaned and swayed, hesitating for a single second.

"Nobody ever did *this* one before," she whispered. And the building fell.


* * *

The collapse growled and echoed through the tunnels; the group of friends felt their umbilical anchor to Hoyt and Zoë snap and flail like live wires. Kate and Blink almost turned back, but Chet pushed them forward again. There was no turning back; hesitation was no longer a luxury they could abide. Hoyt's and Zoë's journey had ended — abruptly, heroically — but Kate, Chet, Cotton, Hayes and the rest of them, their trials were just beginning in this savage Underworld.

And no less at stake was the fate of the living world they knew and loved.




INTRODUCTION



MacReady: Why don't we just wait here for a while... see what happens.
—The Thing

Do not let yourself slow down, get tired, or lose hope. And for the love of God, stop asking me what I've seen. You don't want to know.
—Tom Hayes



All stories end. Sooner or later, no matter how engaging the movie, the credits have got to roll. When that happens, depending on the film, the viewers might applaud and cheer, sit in stunned silence, laugh, cry or immediately begin chattering about how they can't wait to see it again.

Your chronicle might not be anywhere near ending, but **Orpheus** has reached its final chapter. You're reading it now. As the title suggests, **End Game** is the last installment of the **Orpheus** limited run. With the information in this book, you can take your characters beyond the veil of death and into the Underworld to confront death directly. This is the last act of the film, where all of the sacrifice, ideas and actions the characters have taken finally pay off. The stakes here are higher than they have ever been — the fate of the world quite literally hangs in the balance.

THEN AND NOW: AN OVERVIEW

If some readers are still playing through the events of the previous two books, we recommend you hold off on reading this section until the Storyteller gives you a thumb's up on the matter.

IN THE BEFORE

Its scientists called themselves Orpheus Group, and it was the first company to offer its unusual services in the new science called projecting. Orpheus Group was a pioneer in its field, even if folks weren't willing to admit that perhaps science had actually bridged the lands of the living with the hereafter so easily. Still, many people were desperate for help in one fashion or another and willing to take a chance on this fledgling operation despite its seemingly outrageous claims. And for that trust, Orpheus Group helped them settle their issues with departed loved ones or troublesome ghosts. With each personal affirmation that projecting was legitimate, the prospect caught on like slow-moving fire. Soon, everyone knew about the hereafter... whether they chose to believe in it or not.

Unfortunately, Orpheus Group's success was built upon a foundation of secrets... many of which would haunt it throughout its brief existence. Its first skeleton was that the drug pigment owed its origin to Orpheus Group's early explorations into death. When both the drug and the corporation's projecting technologies slipped into public consumption, rivals such as NextWorld and Terrel & Squib appeared from out of the woodwork. Its second and greatest secret was an affair called Project Flatline, whereby Orpheus Group, with the NSA's help, tested the early stages of projecting on


convicts. Elements within the NSA were interested in the potential results of the endeavor but maintained minimal ties to the company, given its highly controversial nature. Everyone honestly expected few results, but Orpheus' soon-to-emerge success caught the NSA off guard. Unfortunately, the fruits of that success, the convicts, escaped their cryogenically frozen prisons and slipped out into the world as ghosts.

In **Crusade of Ashes**, Orpheus Group's past caught up with it and played a significant role in the organization's destruction. Unknown parties paid NextWorld to destroy the company and its personnel, both physically and spiritually, thus eliminating the corporation in one bloody stroke. NextWorld partially succeeded, but it allowed too many survivors to escape the pogrom — many of whom scattered to the four winds. Those elements within the NSA who were involved with Orpheus Group feared that the survivors represented a potential security risk... one that could lead investigators back to them... one that could disseminate projector technology or services to "undesirables." The NSA hired Death Merchants to eliminate the stragglers. Adding insult to injury for Orpheus' survivors, the FBI launched a massive manhunt, alleging that Orpheus Group's projectors were somehow involved in terrorist activities. It was all a bid by competing agencies within the US government to claim jurisdiction over projector-related technology.

In **Shades of Gray**, the characters remained fugitives, but now, they had the opportunity to rectify matters and reclaim their lives. One by one, the FBI, the NSA and NextWorld became forces to overcome or circumvent entirely. Unfortunately, the same antagonist responsible for sending NextWorld after the characters also laced a pigment shipment with poison. Hundreds died in the fiasco, creating immediate hues. In the process of uncovering the culprits behind this act, the characters likewise discovered a new enemy in Terrel & Squib, as well as new allies in Radio Free Death's Terrence Green and Grace Ishida. They also discovered the hives, hideous manifestations of Spectral turbulence on Earth.

In **Shadow Games**, the characters were suddenly and violently introduced to the idea that the hives led somewhere as a huge chunk of a building crashed through the Stormwall. This "ghost quake" was followed by a veritable invasion of Spectres, as well as spiritual backlash from the quake. **Shadow Games** also hints at what happened to the ghosts that existed from before the "three-year mark" and their civilization.

Finally, **The Orphan-Grinders** showed the characters that even the horror of becoming a Spectre



wasn't necessarily permanent. Those of strong enough constitution and will could return as powerful spirits called Orphan-Grinders. Good thing, too, because that chapter also introduced the beginnings of the Spectre Breed War and elaborated more on Grandmother.

And now, here we are at the end, where all of the tricks, toys and allies the characters have accumulated *might* help them win the day.

IN THE NOW

The gap of time between **The Orphan-Grinders** and **End Game** is relatively slight, ranging anywhere between a couple of weeks to a couple of months. In that time, however, two pivotal events come to the fore. The first is Tom Hayes' return to Lazarus Redux since his phoenix-like ascent as an Orphan-Grinder (though whether this occurs because of "Blink" Carruthers or, preferably, the characters helped mend that bridge is up to individual Storytellers).

Of far greater and more widespread consequence, however, is the growing friction between Spectre Breeds. Turf wars and hive clashes seemingly heralded open warfare, but their promise of violence pales in comparison to the eruption of an internecine slaughter. Something has changed in the balance of power between Grandmother and the Malfeans, and more Spectres are now rebelling against their kin. Spooks everywhere report that the once-organized harvest of souls has fractured and shattered. Human-born Spectres are fighting their inhuman cousins, offering a desperately needed reprieve to ghosts and projected entities everywhere. A Spectre civil war is in full bloom, and it rages among the living; it's both the beginning and end of events. A conflict that remained unseen in the Underworld has finally spilled over, across the Stormwall, and its repercussions will destroy humanity itself unless someone tips the balance.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

End Game is largely aimed at Storytellers, but quite a bit of material herein is fair game for the players as well. In particular, although the Storyteller should probably peruse the information on the Wasteland in Chapter Two first, she could benefit from allowing the players to read certain sections of it in preparation for a trip into this bleak vista.

THE MOVIE MODEL

This is called *denouement* in literary terms. In film terms, we have entered "the third act." Everything is

about to come to an end. The major plot twists have happened...but usually, one more change of direction and focus is waiting in the third act. Quite often, it's a big one, if not very subtle.

Consider *Aliens* once again. In the third act, the survivors are finally ready to get off the planet, but Ripley discovers that Newt is still alive and goes back after her. Finding her entails finding the queen and her eggs, which results in a rather tense confrontation, but Ripley escapes and torches the nest in the process. Back on the ship, everything is fine...until the queen appears, precipitating the final battle between her and Ripley.

Final fights are a staple of many different movie genres, and if your characters have made enemies over the course of the chronicle that they haven't dealt with, now is the time for them to meet and (hopefully) best them. But be warned — Grandmother isn't the sort of foe that they can simply beat with bigger and better weaponry. Yet, unless she is beaten, the ending of this "film" is likely to be somewhat... bleak.

TIPPING THE BALANCE

Given the scope of events, it's often difficult to envision a crucible of characters upending the machinations of entities like Grandmother or the Malfeans and their seemingly infinite hoards. The answer is simple. Beyond the Fourth-Tier powers and Vitality Emblems offered to reflect the sheer strength and quality of the human spirit itself, the answer lies in the balance of power. In any given situation, the characters are strong, but a movie is all about a sequence of circumstances coming together to forge the plot. In this case, the circumstance in question is a moment in time when the characters come into their own just as the Malfeans and Grandmother attain a tenuous balance of power. As events proceed, that balance will shift in favor of one party or another, making it more difficult for the characters to influence circumstances in their favor. Essentially, think of a car teetering on a cliff. The slightest weight will shift the car one way or another. The characters are that minute weight that can balance the car or send it over the edge. The longer they wait for events to resolve themselves instead of taking an active hand in matters, however, the harder it is to shift the car's momentum in either direction.

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

The **Prelude** gives one last look at the signature characters as they discuss their options in the face of the escalating Spectre Breed War.

The **Introduction** is the part you're reading now.

Chapter One: Breach is a Storyteller-only chapter. It presents a scenario in which Grandmother reveals her power and the world is left to deal with the consequences.

Chapter Two: Dead Cosmologies explains the Wasteland, how to travel within it and what effects it has on the characters and their abilities.

Chapter Three: The Unearthed Players Guide, as usual, presents new “crunchy bits” for the players to purchase for their characters. In this case, we present a new Horror — the shapeshifting, gauze-crafting Marrow. In addition, we present Fourth-Tier Horrors, the pinnacle of the characters’ Shade-borne powers.

Chapter Four: Storytelling the Dead gives advice for running the end of an **Orpheus** chronicle and includes a chronology of the Breed War, information on the Malfeans and Grandmother herself, and details on the Nameless City, the former capital of the civilization of the dead.

Chapter Five: Sturm und Drang presents several different scenarios for how the chronicle might end and some thoughts on how the chronicle might continue once the threat of Grandmother has been negated... or not.

RECOMMENDED VIEWING

Any movie with a great ending, one that you didn’t see coming or one that you found highly satisfying even if you *did* see it coming, is good inspiration for this sort of book. As for **End Game** specifically, try these:

A Chinese Ghost Story: This classic Hong Kong flick starring Leslie Cheung deals with ghostly lovers and demonic entities, but is perhaps more apt here for its end scene where the characters brave the netherworld itself to fight a demonic army and save the movie’s love interest.

Dark City: A little over the top, but nice nonetheless, this movie deals with a collection of creepy individuals manipulating and controlling people in an outlandish environment. The protagonist who discovers his power and battles with the forces of evil is a good analog to the characters and their plight.

Event Horizon: Could have been a good movie if they didn’t throw in the “it’s from Hell” explanation for the madness that afflicts the crew. Still, appropriate for the kind of horrors humanity can expect if the characters fail.

Outbreak: This highly tense thriller shows the CDC and USAMRIID in action, which we assure you is relevant here.

Raiders of the Lost Ark: OK, so it’s got nothing to do with ghosts. So what? It’s all about exploration, high adventure, exotic locales and generally not leaving well enough alone.

FINAL FATES

It’s only natural that folks would be curious about the final fates of the supporting characters introduced throughout the **Orpheus** story, but the fact of the matter is... that’s up to individual chronicles and Storytellers to decide. In the end, the important ingredients are the players and how their characters and interactions affect the world. The characters are the focus of the story, and to suggest that all the supporting persona have fates beyond the control of the Storyteller would be a disservice to chronicles (and frankly, it’d go against the entire principle of this incarnation of the game). **Orpheus** has always been about choice. This is your game, now. Continue the stories as you see fit, or start them from scratch. You know what’s coming and you know all the major players now. Change what you will... and have a blast. We just hope you have fun with whatever you do!

CHAPTER ONE: BREACH



Samara: Here we go, the world is spinning. When it stops, it's just beginning. Sun comes up, we all laugh. Sun goes down, we all die.

—The Ring

Next time, don't — I repeat, don't — ask how it could possibly get worse.

—Kate Dennison

The following chapter is strictly Storyteller material; as such, players who read it will find their enjoyment of the game greatly reduced. It deals with the ongoing results of the Spectre Breed War, Grandmother's response to the Malfeans, and the disasters produced both in the Underworld and in the world of the living. The characters are forced to encounter these disasters, cope with them, interact with both perpetrators and victims and — hopefully — follow the trail back into the Underworld.

In previous parts of the story, the characters have come to understand some of the underlying metaphysics of the ongoing struggle behind the Stormwall, and they have increased their own powers to the point where they can become actual players in the game, rather than merely pawns. This, then, is their chance to take the initiative. They can help heal the damage to the Stormwall, can fight back effectively against the invading Spectres and the influence of the Maelstrom, and can choose to take the battle to the enemy's home ground.

This part of the story is about consolidation of gains already made, protection of the crucible's home turf and a proactive attack on the enemy. The characters have been pushed far enough. They and their friends — and the innocents around them — have suffered long enough. It's time to fight back.

BACKGROUND

For the first time since Grandmother emerged from the depths, the Malfeans have managed to wrest back control of some Spectres. This has sparked an immediate civil war among the Spectres, with Grandmother's brood treating the breakaway faction like a cancer. Currently, the Malfeans greatly outnumber Grandmother's brood, but Grandmother is a birthing factory turning out tailor-made species upon species of Spectre as antibodies against these cancers. She is reacting on a purely maternal and biological level, trying to purge her very *self* of these malignant growths, and simultaneously expanding into new areas (such as our side of the Stormwall) in order to feed her children.

In time she will overcome the opposition. In time, her Spectres will swarm through and feast upon the living — those living, that is, who haven't already been devastated by the byproducts of her war with the Malfeans and their pawns.

That said, the characters will be able to observe this conflict in its various stages. The first clue that they may perceive is the sudden infighting between the Spectre species, and the appearance of new species to attack the old ones. Suddenly entire hives disintegrate under conflict, inter-Spectre ambushes turn previously solid Spectre-held territory into potentially lethal crossfire zones, and characters may even find themselves temporarily rescued from one group of Spectres by the arrival of another. (They are, however, advised not to rely on such rescues. Removing the characters from the scene might be one of the few points that two opposed groups of Spectres agree on.)

With the fighting even worse beyond the Stormwall, many species on either side are trying to retreat to the Underworld in order to help their side in the conflict. The point of contention here is the main means of access, the only stable foothold linking both worlds — the hives. Grandmother is currently preventing souls from entering the Underworld, meaning that her hives are the only reliable portals going one way or another.

The fighting is bad, but the real disaster occurs around one of the largest hives in a particular city, when the Malfean-directed Spectres are on the verge of winning. In order to deny them the hive, Grandmother pulls it back through the Stormwall, essentially destroying it completely. She is unwilling to do this generally, due to the energy expended in creating her footholds in this world, but she will *not* let the rebels take control of her largest anchor. Unfortunately, this breach creates a rupture in the living world, flooding the city with the Maelstrom for several days.

This is a sneak preview of the Underworld. This is a potentially huge disaster. This is where the crucible comes in.

SETTING THE STAGE

As a particular chronicle may be set around any number of cities, this disaster is not located in any specific place. It could occur in Washington DC, in Chicago, in Boston, in Houston or in any reasonably large city. The main parameter is that it must be a *large* city to have a hive that was large and stable enough to be a focus for the struggle between Grandmother and the Malfeans.

As such, the Storyteller may choose to set it in a city that she knows well, one where the chronicle is already taking place or one that she feels will have emotional resonance and offer opportunities for roleplaying. Equally, this chapter does not go into a full description of the city. It merely mentions locations common to most large American cities. Of course, events could perfectly well take place elsewhere in the world, and the Breed War is just as major an event in Europe or Australia or Asia as it is in America.

EVENTS OF IMPORTANCE

This set of events consists of four main stages. At each point, it is possible for characters to enter the action and to affect matters to some degree. In each case, we provide a discussion of the relevant background and metaphysics, potential entry points for the characters and plot options that can be used to complicate the situation and enrich the chronicle. The crucible does not exist in a vacuum; the world is being shaken by the Spectre civil war, and even if the characters choose to keep their actions and risk to a minimum, they see the results around them.

GRANDMOTHER

So, what is Grandmother? While her potential natures and history are discussed in subsequent chapters, the simple, hard fact behind this “Malfean” is that she’s a Tiamat-like mother figure of sorts... a birthing factory to monsters.

Grandmother bred the first Malfeans, but lay in slumber until the most recent and most devastating Maelstrom unearthed her. She is an immense and powerful being, enough so that she manipulated the Maelstrom and increased its pitch and fury. More so, she directed the Maelstrom into the Shroud separating the lands of the living and the dead, turning it into the so-called Stormwall and preventing ghosts from reaching the Underworld without directed effort. Her reasoning was simple. While she couldn’t generate a Maelstrom of her own accord, she knew enough to take advantage of an existing one. She needed to weaken the Stormwall sufficiently to pierce it with her hives.

The hives, in this instance, are crucial for three pivotal reasons. The first, as elaborated upon throughout the series, is that the hives act like beachheads into the living world, allowing Spectres free transit across the Stormwall to collect food. In fact, the Week of Nightmares (the first Spectre flood over three years ago) was a result of the first hive breaches.

The second reason the hives are important is that they are actually connected to Grandmother’s birth orifices, allowing her to inject her brood directly into the living world without ever being touched by the ravaging effects of the Underworld.

Finally, the third reason the hives are important is that they allow Grandmother to eventually drain herself through the hives and into the living world, essentially giving birth to herself.

The four stages are, respectively, open civil war among the Spectres; the attack on Grandmother’s biggest hive in a chosen city; the breaching of the Stormwall and the outburst of the Maelstrom; and the long-term effect of the Maelstrom and Spectres on the living city. Ideally, at the end of this sequence of events, the breach in the Stormwall has healed or is in the process of healing, and the characters has developed Fourth-Tier Horrors and has a way to access the Underworld. This is the point in their story when they make a conscious decision to take the battle to the enemy, knowing something of the enemy’s true nature and potential threat, and conscious that they cannot allow it to continue. Because of personal integrity, a knowledge of the world’s danger or the need to protect their loved ones, they pass the Stormwall and enter the Underworld.

CIVIL WAR

The first stage is civil war between the Spectres, as the servants of the Malfeans challenge those who are still loyal

to Grandmother, and Grandmother breeds more Spectres to oppose them, spewing them from the infinite birth canals of her body like slugs oozing from rotten fruit. Most of this takes place in the Underworld, out of the Crucible’s knowledge, though Banshees may have the odd prophetic vision that can only be fully understood later.

Naturally, those Spectres present among the living fight for their particular faction, and, in particular, fight for control of the hives. This means that the hives are nexuses for Spectre activity, which may incidentally help characters locate them.

The first moves in the war take place away from the hives, however, in the form of quick assassinations and kidnappings at sites where the Stormwall is weak, attempts by both sides to capture and control unaffiliated Spectres and ghosts, and investigation of any remaining sources of pigment on the street. (While government clampdowns and possible Crucible action — not to mention the removal of its suppliers — have drastically reduced the amount of pigment in general circulation, it would be unreasonable to assume that none is left at all. The price goes up, but the commodity is still for sale.) Certain Malfeans also take advantage of the general confusion to assault and weaken each other’s forces, though their actions are lost in the widespread fighting for the most part.

As the days go by without any immediate victory or clear superiority for either side, Grandmother breeds more species of Spectre, and the Malfeans and their supporters become more desperate. They may be insane, evil and vile, but they are capable of drawing logical conclusions, and they are quite simply incapable of reproducing as Grandmother can, or bringing reinforcements on that scale to the war in progress. Their best hope is in what they can recruit from the world of the living; the newly formed Spectres of the newly dead, pressed into service and dragged into the Underworld to battle Grandmother’s minions. Therefore, the hives become vitally important as the only stable passageways across the Stormwall.

Abruptly the action shifts from wide-scale inter-Spectre battles across the city in question to assaults on Grandmother’s hives. While Grandmother herself is not expecting this at first, resulting in temporary Malfean gains, she quickly adjusts to the situation and funnels her own minions to defend the hives. Spectral activity in the areas around the hives jumps dramatically, with a concomitant rise in general accident reports, violent crime, arson, unusual weather conditions, drug abuse and suicides.

WHERE DOES THE CRUCIBLE COME IN?

The characters could be drawn into the action in several ways, whether the city in question is where they are currently based or they come there for some reason to discover matters in progress.

The Crucible is proactively investigating Spectres. Possibly the easiest solution to involving the characters in



the plot. They're looking for Spectres — the Storyteller can provide Spectres by the bucket-load, fighting across town and paying less attention than usual to hiding themselves from the living world. In this case, the characters can probably manage to observe quite a lot of what is going on before the Spectres notice them or consider them more important than the Spectres on the other side. (Crucibles who have made themselves particularly obnoxious or dangerous to Spectres in the past may rate more highly as a threat, and may be in more danger.)

Proactive investigation may involve the characters already being present in the city where the action takes place, or it may involve them being elsewhere but choosing to come to the city as a known “hot spot” for Spectre activity. They may even be called in by acquaintances or colleagues who know that they are experts in the field — as expert as anyone can be, that is — and think that something here would interest them.

Spectre activity injures the characters or their dependents. This is, in a way, the reverse of the last idea. The characters are drawn in reactively rather than proactively, in response to Spectre activity that may not have been personally directed at them. (On the other hand, the Spectres may see the crucible as a potential threat, and decided to remove it before it could interfere in their internecine struggles; unfortunately, by doing this, they achieve the very result they feared, and attract the crucible's attention.)

Inter-Spectre fighting can cause any number of possible incidents for the living. Furniture goes flying out windows, houses collapse, walls bleed, car accidents make the streets even more dangerous, and the already unsettled slip over the edge into insanity. Skinriding incidents leave the police and the medical profession confused and disturbed by cases of death, rape, sadism, drug abuse and all the other amusing little tricks that Spectres can play while in human form. There's also the possibility of Spectres attempting some recruiting by causing human deaths under painful or horrific circumstances, hoping to collect a few new soldiers to the cause afterward. This is unlikely to occur on a large scale, as it would attract the attention of enemy Spectres who would seize the opportunity for an ambush or a kidnapping — though this idea in itself may provide fuel for the Storyteller and a potential encounter for the crucible.

The Spectres themselves approach the characters. Why shouldn't the Spectres see the crucible as a useful ally against their enemies? (Mr. Jigsaw shouldn't be the only Spectre emissary out there.) This is more likely to be a tactic for Malfean-led Spectres than Grandmother's troops. It's easy enough to provide evidence that the enemy Spectres are villains of the worst sort, thoroughly vile, utterly irredeemable and clearly the greater of two evils. (Grandmother's troops *are* irredeemable in a sense. As they were never human, they cannot become Orphan Grinders.)

Such an approach by the Spectres requires delicacy since the characters are probably known enemies to all of their kind, and most likely holds serious grudges. Once some sort of rapport has been established, or once the characters have been persuaded to listen, the Malfean-controlled Spectres can start passing them information about the location of Grandmother's troops, notes on their weak points and so on. (Of course, this may all be a deeply laid trap, as having two enemies wipe each other out, or weaken each other, is a known and respected military tactic.)

Characters may, in turn, attempt to set the Spectre sides against each other — even more so than they are already — or string the Spectres along for information. (Perhaps one of the characters is teetering on the edge of Spectrehood herself and finds it too interesting an association to break off. Or perhaps the characters hope to reclaim one of their own from the company of Spectres and see this as a convenient approach.)

COMPLICATING THE PLOT

Needless to say, the world does not halt merely because the characters wish to pause their work and lay their plans. Other people have their own ideas about how to deal with matters or simply manage to get themselves in trouble in ways that may involve the crucible. Here are a few possibilities that may complicate the characters' lives.

A friend of theirs is in the middle of a Spectre confrontation, and is now traumatized, seriously injured, dead or some combination of the above. While this is similar to the previous method of drawing them into the action, it can also be used to generally heighten tension and possibly force the characters to choose between telling their friends or family the truth about their current problems and powers, or leaving them in comfortable ignorance.

Example: *While the characters are in the city, they are staying with a friend who has a large house in the old, low-rent part of town. This house is unfortunately close to a graveyard that happens to be a "weak spot" in the Stormwall. While their friend is bringing home some groceries one evening, a Spectre battle spills out over the graveyard walls and engulfs him. He sees the walls bleeding and tombstones wrenched from the ground and flung around, and he suffers other manifestations. If the characters find out in time, do they use their own powers to rescue him, and are they then willing to explain the whole business to him? If they fail to explain, does he become psychologically unstable? Are they prepared to risk themselves — and him — by letting him know the truth about what's going on?*

A fundamentalist religious upswing confuses the issue. Spurred on by recent Spectre-induced events, a nearby church or religious movement bursts into action and starts holding on-the-street prayer meetings and mini-crusades, goes door-to-door looking for the faithful, holds jumble sales to raise money and generally becomes a potential nuisance. They can be representatives of any faith that has a strongly fundamentalist branch. Christianity, Judaism and Islam are all possibilities. While this does not necessarily inconvenience the characters in itself, if

they should have to use their Horrors in the presence of one of these enthusiasts, or should evidence — or even rumor — come to the ears of those organizing the movement, then they may find themselves in an awkward position.

This doesn't have to lead to people knocking down their doors or screaming that they should be burned as unbelievers and/or witches. (Well, not unless the Storyteller feels that this would be an interesting complication.) Much can be done, however, with heartfelt appeals by innocent bystanders to turn aside from wickedness and come to the true faith of choice, exorcism attempts in public locations, fervent prayer vigils outside their apartments, being followed around by would-be missionaries who just want to *talk* to them... Even if the characters somehow manage to be perceived as divine emissaries or virtuous and holy defenders of the innocents, having a group of committed believers hampering their actions and wanting to help in their service to God is not necessarily a good thing.

A child is born. In all the confusion, pain and terror of the Spectre civil war and its implications for the real world, the characters at some point find themselves responsible for a pregnant woman. She may have been caught up in a Spectre-caused disaster they foiled, or she may be a street person squatting in a disused warehouse. She may even be a friend. She is on the point of giving birth — possibly already in labor — and, as matters stand, if the characters don't do something about it, then she is left on her own without medical attention, and she and/or the child may die.

This is an unabashed tearjerker. Let the characters pity the poor helpless woman who is struggling to bring new life into this world. Toss a few obstacles into their path. Where is the nearest hospital, and do any of them know how to get to it? Will the woman trust them? (By now, the characters may have a somewhat dangerous air.) Can they evade possible environmental hazards, such as street gangs, the woman's pimp (if she's a prostitute), the woman's family (who might not want her to go to a hospital) or more Spectres? Do any of them have the medical knowledge to help? It'll be worth it, at the end, if the child is born safe and healthy; they've managed to snatch life from death.

ASSAULT ON THE HIVE

This is a single event, rather than the drawn-out battles of the previous section. It is a single event that may last for several days, though, depending on the strength of the opposing and defending forces, whether the crucible takes a hand and how long the Storyteller wants to draw out the agony before having Grandmother destroy the hive and breach the Stormwall.

BACKGROUND AND METAPHYSICS

While scattered battles continue across the city, most of the Spectres on both sides have gathered around

Grandmother's biggest hive. It is located inside a large office building near the center of town, which is owned by TermsCo, a major telecommunications corporation. TermsCo has no way of knowing the metaphysical struggle taking place around its home office. It has no idea of the catastrophe that is about to hit. The staff has scarcely noticed the rise in worker dissatisfaction, though one manager has suggested a "We Are A Team" campaign to raise morale.

TermsCo is a thriving firm, but its tactics include setting wages as low as possible, rapid turnover of staff, constant management harassment of the workers, long hours with minimal breaks, surveillance of all email, requiring that workers buy all food at company shops inside the building and other such practices which make the building a monument to low-grade misery, bitterness and despair. When Grandmother extruded a hive there, those workers who did notice paranormal manifestations mostly went to their doctors to ask for higher doses of antidepressants, mood stabilizers and similar drugs. The few who had the nerve to leave, or the sensitivity to realize that something genuine was going on and who snapped because of it, would probably have left or snapped soon in any case.

Important members of TermsCo include:

Caleb Brians, president of TermsCo, who views himself as a "hands on" manager and is therefore present at the building most days. He isn't aware of most of the misery that goes on, but he wouldn't care if he did know about it.



Kerry Stone, his devoted 50-year-old secretary, who views him as an industry genius. She can arrange meetings with him for anyone, even a crucible — or have a junior manager sacked simply by saying, "He isn't right for the company."



Harry Camson, Human Resources Manager, in practice responsible for keeping the place running, the staff working, the desks filled and the help-lines staffed. Brisk and cheerful; the staff hate him.



Sarah Fellows, unofficial leader of the harassed workers. Harry Camson would gladly sack her if only she'd give him an excuse, but she is very careful not to do anything that could be remotely interpreted as a sacking offence. Unofficial psychologist, tactician and queen bitch.



Hiram Jones, typical help-line worker and computer technician, desperate for a better-paying job but currently unable to find one. Has several children at home; his wife died last year in a car crash. On the point of snapping.



The two Spectre forces clash around the hive, ebbing and eddying around the mortal building on the same location, ratcheting up the tension every hour. Grandmother's forces mostly remain within the building,

going out only if they see a good opportunity for a sally. The Malfean Spectres attempt to infiltrate through skinriding workers or through the sewers and service tunnels below the building, or they simply launch deathly silent attacks by night. Unbeknownst to the characters, however, the war on this side of the Stormwall is a minor fracas compared to the major skirmish happening in the Underworld. The Spectres know that to control the hive and its valve gates, they must control both sides of hive.

The leader of Grandmother's forces in the living world is **Methaste**, a hound-headed being whose original gender and history are lost to it. It whispers constantly with the hive-minded circle of Spectres that surrounds it. It waits with doglike patience to lead its forces out of the hive, slaughter and capture all the Malfean Spectres within range, and then lead its troops beyond to take the city. Methaste may be interested in negotiating with the characters, but they'd be fools to trust it.

The leader of the Malfean forces is **Elspeth MacDonald**, who lived and died in Scotland, the bitter, mean-spirited matriarch of a large family. (Her youngest granddaughter smothered her with a pillow.) She supports the Malfeans without question and endeavors to recruit the crucible to her side, pointing out that the Malfeans are "just part of how things are," and that any current problems with the world are due to Grandmother waking up and trying to destroy everything.

WHERE DOES THE CRUCIBLE COME IN?

The characters may enter the action partway through the attack on the hive. Alternatively, they may have been following the events that led up to it, and be already expecting something of this sort. Truly prepared crucibles might even be attempting to locate major hives in the city and planning how to deal with such an assault, or looking for a good observation point in order to spy on their enemies.

Attempting to penetrate the Stormwall. Logical enough. Hives are the most stable ways to get through the Stormwall, if far from the safest. (Crucible Horrors, dangerous as they may be, at least keep the characters from having to walk through a nexus of Spectres.) This naturally requires finding a local hive — even the biggest local hive — that happens to be the center of the action. Closer observation, both on the physical and the metaphysical plane, would probably be a good idea before attempting any daring penetration of the interior.

By now the characters probably have at least some experience in fraud, illegal entry and convincing falsehoods. This should make it easy for them to find a way to get inside the TermsCo building and inspect the interior. Failing that, there's always metaphysical entry — but that runs the risk of alerting the Spectres who are currently defending their territory from Malfean assault, and who probably view the characters' entry as yet another form of attack.

Direct request for help from a Spectre or Orphan-Grinder. This may be a genuine plea for help from the other side. Perhaps the characters are acquainted with someone who went over to the Spectres? This may be that person's chance to become an Orphan-Grinder, and the characters' chance to locate an ally in the middle of the enemy, one who desperately needs their help, but can offer them a way into the hive or give them valuable information about the Underworld. Or possibly he's still a Spectre, but he sees the characters as allies (or pawns), and wants to cooperate with them on a mission of mutual vengeance.

For this entry-point to work, the Spectre or Orphan-Grinder must manage to contact the crucible without being killed on the spot — as the characters, by now, are likely to be somewhat trigger-happy — and then persuade them to listen to what he has to say. Of course, it isn't necessary for the plot that he should actually manage to *convince* the characters, as long as his interaction with them provides a reasonable lead-in for their attention to the hive and to the Spectre civil war going on around it.

Investigating Spectre activity. Possibly the simplest solution, but still a perfectly good course of action for the characters. At this point in the story, it's only natural for them to be proactive in trying to find the enemy's weak spots. The flashpoint of a civil war between two factions of the enemy is most definitely a weak spot. Some characters may consider this an ideal opportunity to sow division between the two sides of the Spectre civil war and to trick them into killing each other off — or, at least, severely weaken each other.

This is likely to involve a structured approach by the characters. They may wish to capture and interrogate Spectres from both sides, observe the normal people caught in the middle of it, analyze the hive itself and attempt to understand its nature and why the Spectres are taking so great an interest in it. On the other hand, the characters may simply note that it is a center for Spectre activity and charge right in. This could result in them having to fend off attacks from both sides, and it might even precipitate Grandmother's decision to destroy the hive and breach the Stormwall.

Rescuing innocents. Both sides are recruiting. While the Malfeans are doing so more urgently, Grandmother's Spectres are taking captured ghosts to the hive so that they can be conveniently dragged through to the Underworld. The characters must race against the clock as they try to rescue the innocent souls before they're taken too deeply into the hive. Perhaps they even have to penetrate into the middle of the hive and are caught between the opposing forces in mid-battle — with a group of ignorant, untrained, desperate ghosts to protect, some of whom may be on the verge of becoming Spectres in their fear and pain. How far are the characters prepared to risk themselves in what looks like a suicide mission?

COMPLICATING THE PLOT

At this point, the characters are likely to be so focused on their own doings and current events that they have little attention or interest to spare for the rest of the world around them. As such, the Storyteller may find it useful to tie complicating events closely into the ongoing plot. Otherwise, she risks having the crucible ignore “minor” plot points for major events. This may be practical, but it reduces the game's scope.

Prompted by the low morale, Caleb Brians orders widespread “workplace attrition.” In other words, the company starts finding excuses to sack particularly depressed or rebellious staff, they hire new ones. Any excuse will do, though “improper use of email” is the most common. As the workers don't have the finances or support to sue for unfair dismissal, 50-100 of them are filing off the premises in short order and complaining about it to anyone who will listen. A few of them may even be skinridden by Grandmother's Spectres who want to leave the building temporarily, and this could result in painful or lethal consequences once those individuals get home.

This may, incidentally, provide the characters with a convenient way to get inside the building and investigate it further. With all the new staff coming and going, it's far easier for an interloper to pass herself off as a new temp without running the risk of being recognized as an outsider. Particularly enthusiastic infiltrators may even get themselves genuinely hired, via local job agencies.

Panicked by the Spectre manifestations, one worker calls in an exorcist. While it would be difficult for a worker or a group of workers at TermsCo to smuggle an exorcist onto the premises, it's not impossible. The worker might bring in a medium, a Roman Catholic priest, a Shinto exorcist or even a voodoo practitioner. The question is, is the exorcist genuine or a fake? Will his attempts actually work on the Spectres or annoy them — or merely amuse them?

The exorcist or medium may even turn out to be someone else on the run from Orpheus (or affiliated with such a person). In that case, the Storyteller can reintroduce a character from earlier in the game — possibly someone whom the characters believed to be dead, or who vanished in the confusion of Orpheus' destruction. She may be a friend, or an enemy. She may know far less about the Spectres and be on the point of falling to their temptations, or she may be in collusion with them and working to bait the characters into their clutches. She may even know about hives and be investigating them on her own account.

Hiram Jones snaps. Hiram finds the gun that he bought five years ago for personal protection, comes into work and attempts to shoot Harry Camson. He then attempts to shoot anyone else who comes near him or does something that his temporary psychosis construes as dangerous or mocking. Unfortunately, Harry Camson will probably survive, as the firm provides high-grade medical

care. The Spectres in the area are utterly delighted, and they do their best to stop the crucible from intervening.

If they are in the vicinity, characters may notice something before it happens. Hiram Jones is clearly stressed, muttering to himself, and is carrying his gun (a .38 pistol) in his briefcase. Shortly after he goes in to see Harry Camson (at 10:00 AM), shots are heard from Camson's office. Hiram then walks out calmly, gun in hand, still carrying his briefcase, and starts shooting at any available targets. His spare ammunition is in the briefcase. Hiram's aim is bad, as he's only ever done basic target shooting when he was young, and he takes a while to reload. The general reaction is to panic, and the building's layout, while ergonomic in terms of office space, only has a couple of stairwells on each floor. Sarah Fellows tries to negotiate with him, and therefore is an early casualty. Supernatural activity around him only drives Hiram further into psychosis and homicidal mania.

BREACHING THE STORMWALL

Grandmother finally takes action. The Malfean forces on the other side of the Stormwall have fortified their hold on the hive and are ready to pour through to seize the TermsCo anchor to complete their invasion. Grandmother everts the hive into the living world, destroying the hive utterly and breaching the Stormwall in the process. Spectres in the vicinity at the moment of the breach are torn to pieces or at least severely injured. Spectres flee, desperate to save themselves, but many across the city (especially those with strong ties to the hive-mind through that ability of the same name) are paralyzed for up to 15 minutes by the psychic shock of so many Spectres meeting a quick, brutal demise. The Maelstrom comes flooding through the breach, filling the TermsCo building, then spilling out into the city. More Spectres come with it, blown through on the first rush of the winds of the Maelstrom like birds in a hurricane.

The characters may feel guilty or powerless because they were unable to prevent this. To compensate, the Storyteller may wish to emphasize how the characters *can* help in the current disastrous situation, and how what they do is a significant amelioration of events. There's a difference between characters showing their abilities and natures in reacting to an important plot event and having them feel railroaded. The first is acceptable to most players, but the second promotes bad feeling.

BACKGROUND AND METAPHYSICS

So what actually happens when Grandmother destroys the hive and a breach forms in the Stormwall?

The breach itself expands in steps, like water in a glass breaking the surface tension to spill over onto the table, then onto the floor, then throughout the house. At first it is contained inside a single building, and the Maelstrom

fills the building like muddy water, pressing against the glass windows just as it presses against the building's metaphysical existence. Spooks can look inside and see the storm whirling there, like mud in a fishbowl. When the tension grows too great, the Maelstrom spills out into the streets of the city, spreading across the city and suburbs. Many of the living cannot see it, but they feel its effects spiritually, physically and emotionally. A metaphysical tarnish and foulness spreads through the city, affecting both the living and the dead. (The implications of this are discussed further on p. 26.)

Various events can contribute to an increase in the Maelstrom's current boundaries. These include, but are not limited to destruction of a current physical boundary of part of the area in which the Maelstrom is currently contained, thus reducing the integrity of its metaphysical boundaries; increased pressure from the Underworld side (such as a horde of Spectres arriving); increased pressure from the physical side (such as a large group of living beings entering the Maelstrom-affected area); large numbers of deaths inside the contained area; multiple use of Horrors at the boundary of the Maelstrom-affected area, thus reducing the integrity of the metaphysical boundary; or anything else that the Storyteller feels makes a plausible reason.

WHERE DOES THE CRUCIBLE COME IN?

This is a comparatively short section, as Grandmother's destruction of the hive is a single event. Dealing with the results, with the Maelstrom affecting the living, is handled in the next section. Dramatic climaxes last far longer than they should in movies, however, and the same can be said of dramatic events in roleplaying games.

The crucible encounters fleeing Spectres. The besieging Malfean forces suddenly find it advisable to flee in all directions from the collapsing hive, and they encounter the characters in the process. If the characters haven't noticed that something's going on before, they do now. Encounters here can range from trying to stop the Spectres in order to question them to helping skinridden innocents who are being used as convenient vehicles by the Spectres to taking advantage of the situation to kill a few Spectres or to just staying well out of the way and coordinating angles of flight in order to locate the epicenter.

The crucible is at Ground Zero. The metaphysical shock of Grandmother everting the hive is audible throughout the building to anyone who is capable of perceiving ghosts, currently projecting or a spook. Seconds later, the building is full of the Maelstrom. Malfean Spectres are fleeing, but Grandmother's forces are swarming through the building. The characters may wish to leave and try to get the innocent civilians out of the building while they're at it.

The crucible gets a panicked phone call from a contact in the building. Most of the people in the building



VITALITY EMBLEMS

Emblems are new applications of Vitality, allowing spooks to create certain specific personal effects. The minute that the Maelstrom actually rips through the Stormwall, the first Emblem instantly manifests as hardened Vitality armor against the Maelstrom's shredding winds. They begin as self-defense measures against the Maelstrom, and they appear automatically when a catalyst presents itself. After that, the characters can discover other applications of Vitality Emblems. (Details on the mechanics of Vitality Emblems can be found on p. 87.) For the purpose of the current events, the breach in the Stormwall creates conditions that are close enough to the Underworld that they may catalyze the characters into creating Emblems for the first time.

are totally normal and can't perceive the Underworld, so they have no idea that the Stormwall has just been breached. Nonetheless, the building is full of the Maelstrom, and the Spectres roaming through the building are using their Horrors in exuberance at having just crossed through, and clearly *something* is very wrong. Whether because of the writing on the wall in blood in the bathrooms, or the sudden poltergeist effects, or the strange behavior of some of the skinridden, their contact in the building wants help.

COMPLICATING THE PLOT

Frankly, at this point the plot doesn't need much complication. The camera should be squarely on the characters and their reactions to the disaster. If the characters have made friends inside the building or allies — or enemies — among the Spectres on either side, then their actions and reactions can be brought into the plot. The characters will probably have enough problems of their own, however.

THE MAELSTROM, THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

The Maelstrom is currently eddying into this world, like water through a huge rip in a rubber sheet. The entire city is under threat. More Spectres are swarming through from the other side, and dragging back shrieking newly dead souls to increase their armies. This is, metaphysically, far worse than **Shadow Games**, with its single brief rip, Maelstrom effluvia and rapid sealing. This is a continuous stream of the Maelstrom pumping into the city.

BACKGROUND AND METAPHYSICS

The Maelstrom, when spilled into this world, has a definite effect on both living and dead within it. The living are bound to suffer from physical maladies and

psychological weaknesses, while spooks act and react as though they were actively in the Underworld.

This differs from the events in **Shadow Games**, when a single gust of Maelstrom effluvia swept around the disaster zone during the brief rip in the Stormwall. In that case, it was like having muddy water thrown in one's face while still being above water and breathing normally. The sensitive had their spirit sight blinded for a short while, but the rip was sealed shortly afterward, and the effects died down as the Maelstrom effluvia seeped away and wasn't replenished. In the current situation, the Maelstrom is gushing freely through a *huge* hole in the Stormwall. Sensitive characters within the Maelstrom zone are effectively "underwater," and as such, they can see underwater and aren't blinded. Those outside the zone, however, see the Maelstrom's current boundaries as a whirling mass of darkness.

Living people suffer both physical and psychological effects. Physically, the body's autoimmune system is weakened, though not to an extent that would cause illness in an otherwise very healthy person. Both red and white blood cells are simply stripped out of the blood, leaving the victim more vulnerable to infections. The iron count drops, leaving many victims anemic. At the same time, the body requires more oxygen and can't get it. This puts strain on the lungs, causing a range of lung disorders from simple chest infections to pneumonia, as well as worsening latent chronic lung disorders such as bronchitis and emphysema. People who would otherwise have been normally healthy are now coughing up blood, struggling for air, developing rashes and coming down with anything infectious that is making the rounds. The elderly and children are particularly susceptible.

The lack of any definitive diagnosis, short of "people are generally less healthy," leaves doctors struggling to work out what's going on. Blood and bone marrow transfusions increase the patient's ability to withstand the ambient infections and to keep any chronic disorders from worsening. Being removed from the Maelstrom-affected area is even better, as it allows the victim to return to his "normal" level of health. Reduced standards of hygiene (partly due to the psychological effects) and generally lower immunities mean that anything infectious — such as measles, pneumonia, cholera or enteritis with diarrhea — is currently spreading like wildfire.

Psychologically, the Maelstrom brings feelings of irritation and depression with it, as well as self-hatred, loneliness, despair and disgust at the whole notion of living. While the truly stable remain so, borderline personalities slip into depression or manic hysteria, and those who are already depressed either attempt suicide or lie down and wait to die. Religious activities of all stripes rise, as people desperately look for something to protect them or something that they can believe in. They feel unusually nervous and irritable, though they're unsure why. Self-control is tricky, and all

Willpower difficulties increase by two. People with the potential to become projectors feel nauseated, developing nasty migraine headaches (due to the distraction, increase difficulties to all actions by one).

Ghosts — those truly dead and living projectors who are currently out of body — react as though they were currently in the Underworld. (See Chapter Two for the physics and rules applications of the Underworld.)

The city itself suffers from the Maelstrom's presence. Metaphysically, the Maelstrom corrodes it like acid, eating away at the bonds of community and trust and tradition that give a city its identity. Statues in public places begin to crumble, worn down by time and weather erosion, and people who normally wouldn't have bothered paint graffiti on the walls of civic buildings. Gangs roam the streets like viruses, prejudice and rumor swell like infections, and once the metaphysical temperature has risen far enough, riots surge through the city like fevers.

USAMRIID AND THE CDC

The sudden rise in lung diseases and immune disorders is likely to have a national organization investigating. The two main probable candidates for this are the USAMRIID (the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases) and the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Either or both may establish a presence in the city and the surrounding area within a few days, and may accidentally complicate the crucible's work.

The USAMRIID is the Department of Defense's lead laboratory for medical aspects of biological warfare defense, and its main tasks include developing medical countermeasures and formulating strategies and procedures for medical defense against biological threats. Based at Fort Detrick, Maryland, it is the only DOD laboratory equipped to study highly hazardous viruses at Biosafety Level 4. It also operates a world-renowned reference laboratory for definitive identification of biological agents and diagnosis of the diseases they produce.

Standard USAMRIID precautions for handling airborne diseases include placing patients in private rooms with negative air pressures and air filtration, wearing respiratory protection, and limiting movement and transport of the patient — who will wear a mask and filter if being transported. Doctors wear gloves and gowns, as well as respiratory masks. If projectors' physical bodies are found and quarantined, then the characters can look forward to an awkward time getting out of medical custody, given that they will be in sealed rooms, separated and under military guard — after all, as patients who were in comas, they are particularly interesting cases.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) make up the lead federal agency for developing and applying disease prevention and control, environmental health and health education activities. While its main base is in Atlanta, Georgia, it has offices throughout the USA,

and is composed of several different departments. The ones called in to investigate in this case are the EPO (Epidemiology Program Office), the NCID (National Center for Infectious Diseases) and the NCEH (National Center for Environmental Health), given the uncertainty as to what's going on and whether it's an environmental disaster, an epidemic, bacteriological warfare or something else again. The EPO is collecting data and trying to find patterns, the NCEH looks for some sign of environmental hazard, gas release, asbestos exposure or anything that could feasibly affect health on this scale, and the NCID operates on the medical front, investigating sample patients and doing the actual direct lab work.

What the CDC—and, in particular, the NCID—has is the authority to impose quarantine on a particular area. This means that the Surgeon General is authorized to permit inspection, fumigation, disinfection, sanitation, destruction of animals or articles found to be sources of dangerous infection to human beings, the apprehension and examination of “any individual reasonably believed to be infected... or a probable source of infection,” and “other measures as in his judgment may be necessary.” As such, the CDC can detain people “for such time and in such manner as may be reasonably necessary.” The Surgeon General is also authorized to designate the boundaries of quarantine areas and the officers to be in charge of them, as well as the hours during which quarantine inspections can be undertaken. (The legal penalty for violating quarantine regulations, incidentally, is a fine of not more than \$1,000, imprisonment for not more than one year or both. Any characters caught breaking quarantine will probably not be waiting around for their eventual sentence.)

It is likely that both the CDC and the USAMRIID are called in to assess the situation. The CDC has the authority to impose quarantine, while the USAMRIID is particularly active looking for evidence of bacteriological warfare. It is also likely, given the state of emergency and the fact that one agency is federal while the other is military, that communication between the two agencies leaves much to be desired. Lapses of information and failure to check lists of names dogs the organizations' efforts, and the potential for confusion between the two is high. This may offer characters their biggest chance to escape unnoticed in the general confusion. It won't last, however. As the Maelstrom begins to recede, and the hole in the Stormwall closes, cooperation between the agencies solidifies (as their work lessens) and statistical anomalies such as the characters may become far more apparent.

If the Storyteller so wishes, he may also bring in Operation: Black Mercury if USAMRIID somehow realizes the event is supernatural in nature (or if SOCOM gets wind of the rip in the Stormwall). In this instance, however, Black Mercury's involvement has nothing to do with

DOCTORS AND SOLDIERS

The following is a quick set of traits for the average CDC or USAMRIID doctor, and for the average soldier enforcing quarantine, whom the characters may encounter while trying to move around the city.

Doctors

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Bureaucracy 3, Computer 3, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Investigation 3, Law 1, Leadership 1, Medicine 4, Melee 1, Politics 2, Science 3, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 2

Nature: Caregiver

Willpower: 7

Equipment: medical gear

Soldiers

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 1, Drive 3, Firearms 3, Intimidation 2, Investigation 1, Law 1, Leadership 1, Melee 3, Repair 2, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 2

Nature: Bravo

Willpower: 7

Equipment: assault rifle, flak jacket

the “outbreak” and everything to do with investigating the event in question. Regardless, Black Mercury disguises its operatives as members of USAMRIID.

Some safe areas do exist, however. As discussed in **The Orphan-Grinders**, Spectres simply cannot enter some parts of the living world. These places, be they churches, temples or other areas hallowed by the affection and belief of the living, have too high a “surface tension” for the Maelstrom to enter. Patriotic meetings in old public places, church services in beloved buildings and people gathering in parts of the city that have long been a watchword for civic pride and faith and hope, all feel *safer*. This, naturally, promotes more of the same behavior, so they keep going there in order to stay safe. Newspapers and television channels speak disparagingly of revivalist fervor, but in fact, the living who congregate at these places are quite literally saved from worse things.

WHERE DOES THE CRUCIBLE COME IN?

There's a huge perceptible breach in the Maelstrom and epidemic and chronic illness throughout the city. The city itself is under quarantine (within a couple of days), the whole place is metaphysically fouled by the omnipresent

Maelstrom, Spectres are roaming everywhere and taking advantage of the environment, and the Breed War hasn't stopped. Really, there's no way that the characters can avoid the situation, short of shutting themselves in a hermetically sealed bunker and not coming out for a month or two.

The Spectres on both sides of the Breed War are somewhat disoriented, but they are making the best of the situation. Grandmother's never done anything like this before, and many of those on the Malfean side didn't consider her capable of such an action. Also, the hole to the Underworld may be wide open, but no Spectre knows if it will remain so, or for how long. If it is permanent — and for all they know, it may be — then the site is a vital military beachhead that must be held at all costs. If it's temporary, then they don't want to waste time and forces on it.

Grandmother's Spectres have it easier. Still led by Methaste (assuming that it hasn't been destroyed), they're based around the open breach, and receiving plentiful reinforcements from the other side. Somewhat emboldened by the demonstration of Grandmother's power, they're occupying the area around the breach and hauling any captured ghosts through.

The Malfean forces, on the other hand, don't know what's going on, and even though Elspeth asserts that she's still in charge (if she's still extant), their Spectres have scattered to the outskirts of the city. There they capture ghosts — particularly any of the newly dead from disease or suicides from the Maelstrom's influence — and attempt to increase their forces, planning to stage an attack on the breach in order to force their way through. Of course, this is less of a guaranteed success than before. What might Grandmother be able to do *this* time? One possible tactic they might adopt would be to kidnap a member of the crucible, in order to blackmail the rest of the crucible into scouting for them or investigating the breach. Obviously, they do so without resorting to emissaries like Mr. Jigsaw first, potentially setting Mr. Jigsaw at odds with the Spectres for using his "assets" without his permission.

In addition to ghostly problems — and let us not forget all the new ghosts, caused by disease and Maelstrom-exacerbated psychiatric problems or Spectral interference — the characters must cope with the living world around them. Do they help people nearby who are suffering from such mundane unpleasantness as pneumonia, diarrhea or chickenpox, or do they avoid them for fear of infection? Crime's on the increase, gangs are wandering the streets as the Maelstrom spreads through the city, and the characters themselves probably don't look like a "normal" group of people these days.

If the Storyteller finds it reasonable, then either the military or federal agents (or both) may recognize the characters as projectors and blame them for the situation, or at least suspect that they know something about it. (This

is more likely if the characters act in standard projector manner, wake up babbling about the Stormwall, talk about their "crucible" or similar matters or otherwise fail to act like innocents caught in a city-wide disaster.) Perhaps the projectors — and any other crucible members caught stealing in trying to "rescue" them — are held in secure accommodation while the military decide what to do with them. It may depend how much information about the crucible was left in the records when the crucible fled the remains of Orpheus, what those records said and if the characters were ever exonerated.

If the characters are actively blamed for what's going on, then they have a much harder time escaping, and they can look forward to being hunted through the city for the rest of this part of the story. Their names and photos go on lists of "known contaminated individuals," and criminal records will be supplied to motivate law enforcement into hunting for them. Heading through to the Underworld to investigate may seem an even better idea than before, if the government and army is trying to hunt them down.

At the moment, in film terms, the characters are the heroes who know what's going on and know what needs to be done, but can't persuade the authorities to help in time (or even to believe them). Or, alternatively, the heroes who have been falsely accused and just need this one chance to clear matters up — but the authorities won't let them have it. Even if the feds or military are sympathetic, the crucible needs to strike out and act on its own.

CLOSING THE BREACH

The crucible's main priority is probably be to close the breach in the Stormwall, hoping that with that done, the Maelstrom effluvia will die away and the city will return to normal. As players don't react well to being frustrated and to being told that nothing they do can affect matters, Storytellers should consider offering them possible courses of action. Alternatively, if the crucible comes up with something that isn't considered here, but which has a reasonable justification for working, the Storyteller may want to let it work for the sake of player satisfaction and smooth flow of story.

If the characters are trying to think of ways to repair the Stormwall, a number of Horrors will probably come to mind. Perhaps by using Escher's Corkscrew to alter the physics of the TermsCo building, the crucible can accelerate the breach's closure. Maybe an Orphan-Grinder can use Vector to force Spectres into the edges of the breach and cause them to become part of the new fabric of the Stormwall.

The possibility also exists that at this point that the characters develop Fourth-Tier Horrors, driven by necessity and urgency. Screaming Nothing allows a Banshee to open a nihil and reach the Underworld, so a Banshee,

working with her crucible, could perhaps use it to create a “natural” hole in the Stormwall, which — when it seals — will help seal the breach too. Possibly a variation on Nightmarish Gestalt would let a Marrow physically close the breach. Could a Phantasm’s Terrible Madness actually produce an illusion of the closed Stormwall that could become solid? Maybe a Poltergeist’s Rend and Rake could drag the edges of the breach together and force it shut. A Wisp’s Consume might even be able to nibble away the edges of the breach, like the way a doctor cuts away contaminated flesh from a wound, so that the raw edges can be forced together again and made to heal.

Of course, trying to seal the breach isn’t without risk. The Spectres attack anyone they perceive as trying to close it, since the breach is far too useful. (A diversion to draw away the Spectres might be a good idea, as might an alliance with the Malfeans based on a few lies about assaulting Grandmother’s forces or the help of other ex-Orpheus, federal or independent spooks and projectors.) The possibility of a metaphysical backlash also lurks. Grandmother may be able to breach the Stormwall (a difficult act, making her decision to retract a hive all the more painful), but the characters are mere fleas next to her. They are trying to remake the fundamental fabric of reality, so they shouldn’t expect it to be easy.

Mechanics are as the Storyteller wishes, but they should offer the crucible a significant challenge without being totally impossible. If nobody intervenes, the Stormwall closes naturally in a few weeks. If the crucible comes up with a plausible method for accelerating its closure — whether this requires several applications or simply increases the Stormwall’s natural healing — then the Storyteller should be asking for $21 - N$ successes at a difficulty of 8 (where N is the number of days the breach has existed). He should also expect a plausible method for avoiding local Spectres and significant effort from at least a couple of the characters. If the crucible can come up with a method for sealing the breach totally, then the Storyteller should be looking at the same number of successes with a difficulty of 9. The characters should also cooperate (at least in terms of sharing Vitality, if not more) and come up with an intelligent way to stop every single Spectre in the vicinity from trying to kill them. (Escaping through the closing breach into the Underworld is always a possibility, but that carries its own set of problems.)

As for the aforementioned backlash, the Storyteller may rule that for every 1 rolled in the attempt to strengthen or heal the Stormwall (regardless of whether the 1 is mitigated by a success), the characters involved in the attempt suffer accordingly. This might mean that for every 1 rolled, the characters suffer one level of lethal damage, gain one active temporary Stain for a week, lose one point

from their starting Vitality cap for a week or lose one dot in one Attribute for a week. The loss should indicate some metaphysical backlash for tampering with the unearthly physics of another dimension.

AFTERMATH

The aftermath comes once the rupture in the Stormwall is sealed and the signs of illness begin to fade. Infectious diseases are finally dealt with and stop spreading, chronic diseases return to a latent state, anemia and immune disorders are treated and *stay* treated. So, what then?

The characters should be left asking many questions. How far does the Spectre Breed War reach, is it likely to affect the mortal world again, and can they do anything about it or turn it to their own ends? Is this state of affairs likely to recur in other major cities? They should also be pondering the Fourth-Tier Horrors that they have hopefully discovered while trying to close the breach. And, of course, the biggest question — what lies beyond the Stormwall? Do they want to investigate? Do they have a choice?

Thus far, they are aware that there is some sort of factional strife going on between the Spectres, and they may have some idea of who the sides are (and possibly even what the stakes are). They may by now realize what the hives are, and be trying to think of some way to subvert or seal them. They are aware that there is something on the other side of the Stormwall — something inimical to the living and not much kinder to the dead — and that there may even be a chance of saving some Spectres from that world, or finding other allies there.

The mortal world is busy with its own problems. The strange diseases and epidemics that swept the city over the last few weeks haven’t gone unnoticed. Conspiracy theorists label it an attack from unspecified terrorist factions with manufactured plague viruses. A couple of the more obtuse known terrorist factions claim it as their own work. Public opinion, loosely backed by the vague data released by the CDC, fixates on some sort of environmental disaster. Sales in facemasks, canned goods and plastic sheeting rise. The CDC itself is unable to identify the source of the problem, even if it manages to plot the vectors of many victims of the infectious diseases, and is reluctantly forced to admit to having no answers.

Certain highly placed individuals in the federal government and the military are aware that spooks were involved in what went down, that it was related to the Orpheus Group, and that it’s not over yet. They set Operation: Black Mercury to investigate. (This provides a perfectly good reason for the Storyteller to harry the characters with pursuers, should they need a bit of added persuasion to get them investigating beyond the Stormwall.)

CHAPTER TWO: DEAD COSMOLOGIES



D. J.: Look, if what Doctor Weir tells us is true, this ship has been beyond the boundaries of our universe, of known scientific reality. Who knows where it's been, what it's seen? Or what it's brought back with it.

—Event Horizon

Blink, remember when you first looked on the Wasteland and said, "Hell, at least Dante's Inferno was interesting"? Next time, how about being a little more careful what you fucking wish for?

—Annie Harper

The previous supplements for **Orpheus** contain a great deal of material for players as well as for Storytellers. This is Storyteller-only stuff: Not just “secrets” but secrets that can handicap the progress of a game, much as one blabbermouth reviewer can do serious damage to your viewing of *Citizen Kane* or *The Sixth Sense* by revealing details of the ending. If you’re a player, don’t read this: Your character is going to live it.

For you Storytellers, here’s the straight dope about where ghosts come from and where they go, what they do and why they do it. Big stuff’s going down post-mortem, and the Underworld today is just fragments and tatters of what it was at its height.

Orpheus characters enter the Underworld in a state of ignorance. Learning the history and structure of what was once there is probably not a key priority to them, unless it helps them survive or fight off Spectres. What you get here is, therefore, an overview — mostly broad strokes, few fine details.

HISTORY

The history of the Underworld is the history of human life itself. Fortunately, an account limited to the relevant elements is far more manageable than the entire interminable epic.

For ease of comprehension, the history is presented outside of chronological order. It starts with the earliest *human* records (or, the earliest stories from dead humans, at any rate).

After that, the pre-history of the Underworld is described. This is deliberately vague on some central points, specifically the origin and nature of the creature called “Grandmother.” This is not an omission that gets filled in later, it’s a Storyteller option. There is no “canon” explanation for Grandmother’s existence. Individual Storytellers must decide for themselves what truth applies to their game, if any, and if one “truth” is needed or even desirable.

The third section covers a shorter span in greater detail, as it explains the events of the last century and the current one. Starting between the World Wars, it extends to the present day.

IN THE BEGINNING

Every culture agrees; not everyone who dies goes on to eternal rest. Thousands of years ago, some got stuck in an Underworld that (though they might leave it briefly or even for extended periods to interact with mortals) was inescapably their home until they either finished their business with the living and transcended to a different place, or until they gave up in despair and sank

down into Oblivion, the ever-hungry embodiment of entropy and the supposed final destination of all spooks.

The Underworld of antiquity (or Shadowland as it was known then) was not a safe place, but one ghost made it safer. His deeds were so great that even in the wreckage that exists of his Underworld today, one can find out about him without epic efforts. This great leader organized the ranks of the dead, built a refuge from the dangers of the afterlife, founded an entire Underworld society and gave that society his protection and guidance.

Time passed, and the city of the dead was assaulted again and again. It suffered attacks by Spectres (which agents of Orpheus know all too well) and Maelstroms (vast storms throughout the entire Underworld). Each time, it either withstood the assault or rebuilt itself afterward.

The city had its factions, with infighting and corruption, and its political groups with their scapegoating and scandals. Traces of these things remain, but in their heyday they shaped the toil and effort of the uneasy dead into forms and structures that endured thousands of years.

At all times, the power of the great leader was acknowledged, even if that acknowledgement came in the form of treason or attempted coup. Whether one embraced his power or resisted it, his authority was acknowledged as primary in the city, in the Underworld and anywhere the Spectres did not rule.

That was the way for centuries.

BEFORE THE BEGINNING: GRANDMOTHER

Beneath the city and the leader and the human past, however, is a second layer of history. Before there were human dead or even death, there was... something.

Before, there was Grandmother.

She’s been called the Infinite Maw and the All-Devourer and countless other honorifics. “Grandmother” is nicely understated for most purposes. Discussing her origins or nature is difficult without getting entangled with theology or, at the very least, cosmology. In a larger sense, it doesn’t matter. The characters are never going to learn the truth. They’re not equipped to handle the truth, in the way that ants aren’t equipped to handle reading Yeats.

If the characters really delve into it, you might toss some fragments of the truth out to them. These aren’t the whole story, but they aren’t wholly false either. (In fact, as it’s your game and this background

doesn't really impact events directly, you should feel free to choose whatever you think fits your story best.)

- **Grandmother is Oblivion Itself.** You can't have existence without void, just like you can't have a top without a bottom or a front without a back. That necessary non-existence is Oblivion, and Grandmother All-Consumer is its embodiment (or, perhaps, just one facet). The boundaries between Being and Nothingness have eroded, and the leak is perceived as an entity because the human mind tends to anthropomorphize factors too big to comprehend. Maybe she's the chaos from which order emerged, or maybe she's the entropy into which it decays. Or maybe both.

- **Grandmother is God's Evil Twin.** Attributing "evil" to an entity so far off the human scale is probably as iffy as applying that judgment to a collapsar, but "evil twin" is a convenient shorthand for the idea of an equal yet inverse reflection of the universal creative urge. In this model, Grandmother is equal and opposite to God, or to whatever you want to call the force that produced the palpable universe. If "order" and "entropy," or "creation" and "destruction," are more palatable, that's fine too.

- **Grandmother is the Skeleton in the Closet.** It's possible that Grandmother is the shells and shards of a previous universe — one that died but won't stay buried. Like a zombie in a movie, it's come shambling from its grave to threaten the living. Only this time, it's happening on a cosmic level.

Regardless of which idea (or ideas) you pick, and how you spin and combine them, certain events involved Grandmother, whichever value of "Grandmother" turns out to be true.

Grandmother predated the current universe. Furthermore, in some kind of mind-bending cosmic irony, the embodiment of annihilation... created.

The things Grandmother created were entities whose defining factors were that they were new ways to *not* exist. In her shudders and night-sweats, she threw off reflections, distortions, *offspring* whose creation only makes sense if there is as much complexity and variance to Not as there is to Is...

Most of her malformed and impossible young collapsed. Most, but not all.

Once the universe came to be (be it through Big Bang or Fiat Lux or a quantum irregularity leading to the anthropic principle — whatever) it shoved her and her brood aside, pushing her down deep and developing on top of her flattened immensity.

At first, existence was a fine thing for Grandmother and her progeny. It gave them something to devour. But the wounds their hunger inflicted on the cosmos scabbed over, building layer upon layer until the starving brood were locked away from the light and the world and the creatures that would one day call themselves men.

The initial layer of obstruction was the Labyrinth, and her most eager children chewed holes and tunnels into it, making it their place (as much as it could be anyone's).

After that was the Tempest, a marriage of active energy and entropic destruction that Grandmother could scarcely reach, and in which her offspring could find no purchase. But in time they harnessed its negative flux for themselves and learned to tolerate, if not control, its energies.

A next level was a decoy of reality, the Shadowlands, showing twisted and hollow reflections of the actual. Neither Grandmother nor her children could reach it through the Tempest. But her children — who had collectively taken the name "Malfeans" by that point — were more cunning, and more adaptable, and much closer to the scale on which the new race called "humans" operated. Some humans seemed to enter the shadow realm, and from there they could be lured to the Tempest, and then sucked down into the Labyrinth. Once there they could be remade in the Malfeans' image and sent forth, now Spectral, to learn and seek and tear down more.

Spectres probed the Shadowlands and ran up against the Shroud. A few even penetrated it, reaching the living lands beyond, where they could gorge themselves on the very stuff of reasoned reality.

But these trickles, these crumbs that fell from the lips of Spectre servants — it wasn't enough for the Malfeans' hunger. They gnawed on the Labyrinth in which they lay, but it had long since become too corrupt to be further ruined. They bit at themselves, and at each other, and eked out enough sustenance to keep the rage of famine sharp, but eventually they turned to the one source that could feed them all.

They turned teeth on Oblivion itself, Grandmother, the Magna Maw.

If one hesitates to ascribe "evil" to Grandmother, one would hesitate even further before using the word "love." Yet if tolerance and self-sacrifice are the signs of love... arguably, Grandmother showed love for the Malfeans. Could she have consumed them?

Hers is a hunger that threatens all the world, so, yes. But she didn't. She let them slake their thirst on her blood, and when they were done with her, she burrowed down deep, beneath the Labyrinth, where she slept and waited for a less cruel time. The Malfeans watched with their closest approximation of delight as the human race multiplied and built and conquered and destroyed. Each generation brought a new and larger crop of dead, and some of those dead had souls dreary enough to sink down into the Malfeans' waiting gullets. Others who perished could not quite let go, but neither were they so hopeless that they became Malfean meals. These spirits grew in numbers until they built their city and colonized the Tempest, all the while, keeping one eye on the Labyrinth below them.

These wraiths feared the Malfeans, never knowing that beneath them was something older and hungrier still.

THE MIDDLE, THE END AND THE NEW BEGINNING

After World War II, a Maelstrom struck the Shadowlands, climaxing with the emergence of an entity so vast that the great leader of the dead had to reveal himself and go battle it. This thing was so horrific that no one would fight by his side. The fight ended with both the leader and his foe sinking down into the Labyrinth.

When he failed to return, all hell broke loose, figuratively (literally came later). His assistants and administrators and rivals all lunged toward the power vacuum, hoping to take over entirely or to hold the place open for the leader's anticipated return. The government he'd built became more reactionary, oligarchic and tyrannical, prompting greater resistance and discontent in return.

Then, Grandmother awakened.

What cracked the chains that bound the Great Maw shut? There are many, many theories. Strange whispers in the hive-mind speak of a relic weapon unleashed as the penultimate maneuver of a war between ghost factions, or that it was used on a city of entirely alien dead. Some claim that invaders from the living realm, armed with strange powers and foolish courage, defied the Labyrinth itself and somehow disturbed it in a way that even the Malfeans could not (or, at least, had not). Others say that it is simply the end of time, that even the devils God

flung from Heaven have returned to the mortal realm — and with their escape from Hell, she upon whom Hell was the strongest shackle can once more wake and hunger.

Any who witnessed these events directly are gone, and those who remain are Spectres (and therefore not exactly reliable). In any event, the Shadowlands and the Tempest erupted in a vast and phantasmagoric storm that tore apart everything human spirits had been building since the beginning.

Many ghosts were blasted clean through the Shroud and trapped in the material world. They were the lucky ones. It got worse.

Those who remained were stuck on the receiving end of a severe Spectral invasion. Since many ghosts who were defeated turned Spectral themselves, the forces of the Malfeans eventually passed a tipping point where the superior brains, verve and vitality of the defenders was no match for sheer numbers. Did any free wraith bastions hold out? If any did, they're few and far between, and the characters aren't likely to just stumble across them.

It was a massacre, a holocaust, the final triumph of the Labyrinth.

It got worse.

Just about the time the forces of the Malfeans vanquished all meaningful resistance — just as one of them started to seriously exploit a rift it had made through the Shroud and into the actual world — the entire topography of the Underworld changed.

The Labyrinth split apart, sundering into fragments in which startled Malfeans cloistered their forces. The Tempest was shrugged aside, the islands within it raised up and pushed into continents, or else ground apart into featureless dust. The shadow reflections of cities and pasts warped, all the buildings and memories and remnants within them splintering, disintegrating, scattering through a new Underworld.

The Great Devourer is free, and she is moving toward the light.

THE UNDERWORLD NOW

Where once a series of layers separated the warm world of the living from the icy abyss of Oblivion, now only one thin layer remains. Fragments of the Labyrinth jut out of the Underworld scenery every thousand miles or so, like black claws trying to scythe their way into the living realm. The floor is a dry, barren desert of sand and ash and the wreckage of everything that has ever been ruined. Here and



there one might find buildings, or parts of them, torn apart and flung together by the Maelstrom before finally being dropped — perhaps hundreds or thousands of miles from where they once stood. Bizarre sargassos of relics and dead matter clustered in the tempest like hair in a shower drain; now those massive junk-clots dry out beneath the sunless sky. Pieces of history, pieces of the great city, pieces of afterlives — all can be found lying on the grit or buried miles underneath it.

The listless horizon stretches in every direction with only the ripples of dunes and the distant shapes of ruins to relieve it. The ground is dirt brown and the sky is ash gray.

Those with the misfortune to dwell there call it the Wasteland.

THE STORMWALL

The barrier between the Wasteland and the mortal realm is still in place. In fact, if anything, it's thicker than ever. Previously, the barrier between the spaces was a passive one — like a rubbery plastic sheet stretched between two rooms. Spooks could vaguely see through it, and there was no hard stopping point, but the more it was probed, the more resistance it gave.

The pressure of the rest of the Underworld crashing into it (or, in Grandmother's case, directing the Everstorm) has piled up much of the energy and fury of the Maelstrom *inside* this barrier. The resulting barricade is far more active, malignant and damaging than the veil was in previous ages. Instead of a sheet, it is now a dense palisade made of howling wind and wrecking force. It's a wall made of storms. Hence, it is no longer or merely "the Shroud;" it's called "the Stormwall." Unfortunately, while the Stormwall's density has made it more difficult for spooks to cross over, it has facilitated Grandmother's goals. The Shroud was what previously inhibited her passage into the living world, not the Maelstrom, but the Stormwall is less a Shroud now than it was before. Grandmother can contend with the Stormwall, but not its former incarnation.

The density of the Stormwall, and the fierceness of the destructive winds within it, depends largely on the terrain of the living world on the other side. Places that are warmest, most alive, most filled with the vibrant feelings of nature are the places where the bleak rage of Oblivion tries hardest to penetrate, and they are therefore where the Stormwall is thickest. Areas that more closely resemble the Wasteland — graveyards, desolate places, battlefields so poisoned by

STORMWALL RATINGS

Situation	Rating	Storm Force
Halloween, midnight, in a cemetery, in Haiti	4	1
The site of H. H. Holmes' notorious "Murder Castle"	5	1
An office building, at night, with no one around	6	2
The average police station	7	2
Sunset at a suburban barbecue	8	3
On location with "MTV Beach Blanket Bingo"	9	3
The nursery of a well-loved newborn	10	4

munitions that only the heartiest weeds grow there — draw destruction less, and there the Stormwall is thinnest.

Passing through the Stormwall is never exactly simple, but trying to breach it at a thin place is simpler than crossing over from some well-defended area.

To model the varying thickness of the Stormwall, various areas have "Stormwall ratings." The higher the rating, the more difficult it is to perceive through the wall, the harder it is to use Horrors across it (if the Horror in question can cross over at all), and the more dangerous it is to go through.

An area's Storm Force rating indicates how badly mangled a spook is likely to become when passing through the Stormwall there. This rating system should not be confused with the Force ratings of Storm-Gloom (which is purely directed and caustic Maelstrom blasts, not the cornucopia of punishing effects contained within the Stormwall).

Storm Force One inflicts about four dice of lethal damage when a spook passes through. It's like walking through a 60 mph sandstorm, only some of this sand is actually whirling bone-shards. Most damage is bruising and abrasion.

Storm Force Two means winds at least 80 mph, gusting higher. The rain is dirty water mixed with torrents of any unpleasant thing imaginable — everything from worms to turpentine. Debris is more frequent, heavier and more likely to leave a mark. It causes six dice of lethal damage per crossing.

Storm Force Three means 100+ mph winds, rains of just about anything (dead, pulverized frogs are far more common than water), zero visibility, the possibility of serious injury and an inability to hear anything but the mightiest shouts. Going through a Force Three Stormwall results in three dice of lethal damage and three dice of aggravated damage.

Storm Force Four is the worst. Battling through a Stormwall of that thickness, even if the struggle lasts less

than a minute, inflicts four levels (not dice) of lethal damage and four dice of aggravated damage. The winds in these areas are so intense and chaotic that, after a few seconds, travelers lose track of which way is "down" — the winds have far more control of their movements than gravity does. The rain is as likely to be sulfuric acid or ground-up glass as it is to be sour milk or rancid fish blood. In any event, those who get through are rarely eager to repeat the experience.

CROSSING OVER

Five Horrors can bring a spook through the Stormwall. They are: Dream-Walker, Inhabit (though these two Horrors work only one way), Rend and Rake, Screaming Nothing and Storm-Wending. Their individual effects are discussed under the heading "Horrors and Innate Abilities in the Wasteland," on p. 51. It

AGGRAVATED DAMAGE

For those familiar with other World of Darkness products, aggravated damage is normally that damage from weapons and devices considered anathema to the various supernatural races (sunlight to vampires, silver to werewolves, etc.). In *Orpheus*, however, spooks hadn't encountered anything they considered anathema... until now. In the Underworld, Oblivion holds strong sway, and it is Oblivion that renders certain damage types as aggravated (by giving weapons and effects an entropic edge).

Spooks cannot use Stamina to soak aggravated damage, nor can projecting skimmers convert it to bashing. In fact, when aggravated damage affects flesh, it is marked as an automatic "X" in the relevant health level box (with healing times equal to that for lethal damage). Otherwise, each potential level of aggravated damage shreds three Vitality points (whereas bashing robs characters of one point and lethal of two).

should be noted that none of these Horrors allow a character to avoid the storm's damage when crossing through.

Dream-Walker can take characters through the Stormwall unhurt, as described on p. 53. The drawback is that it can only be used to *exit* the Wasteland, and then only when the Phantasm is overlapping a slumbering mortal and the Phantasm is *aware* of the dreamer.

It's a mistake to picture the Stormwall as a literal wall with a top and a bottom and sides stretching out in either direction. It's a barrier, certainly — a barrier that can tear ghosts into pieces. But it has the odd trait of being imperceptible to those who don't know about it.

An immaterial spook with no idea that the Wasteland exists is unable to get there. Because said spook isn't trying to breach the gulf between the vital world and the dead one, there's no interference. It's only when he tries to bridge those two realms, which are so metaphysically distinct, that he runs into trouble.

To a spook, crossing over is something like trying to tune in a station on a radio, only the radio is the spook herself. If there was no Stormwall, there would be no difference between being immaterial (see p. 82 of *Orpheus*) and being in the Wasteland. All the Wasteland buildings, relics and population would be visible to immaterial entities, and Wasteland inhabitants would (similarly) be able to clearly perceive living folks going about their business in the mortal world.

Instead, the more someone is present in the Wasteland, the more hazy and indistinct his form is from the life lands. Once someone's aware of the Wasteland and how to potentially reach it, impressions from it start to flit (vaguely) before him, like something you catch out of the corner of your eye or a word you hear between notes at a concert. As he concentrates on it harder, imprecise intimations loom more ominous without being any clearer. If he's near a building, he might get a sense of its looming bulk, and if he's inside it, he might feel enclosed and surrounded.

It is when the ghost tries to grasp firm details that the Stormwall makes its presence felt. Unless he actually uses a Horror to push through or into it, he experiences it solely as a chill and sourceless wind, a low sound like distant thunder, a feeling of being pushed and shaken — or, sometimes, a feeling that everything around one is starting to groan and shudder, gripped in a force both tremendous and malign.

These impressions of a storm, absent but somehow enveloping, are like a warning. When using a Horror to cross over, all hell breaks loose until the spook passes safely (or not) to the other side. Unfortunately, having the proper Horrors to cross over doesn't mean spooks

know how to do so properly (unless the ability is innate to a Horror, like that of the Fourth-Tier power Screaming Nothing). The characters must learn how to accomplish this through a mentor like Mr. Jigsaw or Mary Fern (see Chapter Four for more details), though Storytellers may allow enterprising characters to solve this puzzle on their own. The key, however, is knowing that you can cross over using specific abilities and recognizing the dangers inherent in such actions (the Storm Force rating in particular). For those Storytellers looking for reasons that their characters couldn't do so sooner in the metaplot, it's because Grandmother's network of hives is beginning to erode the Stormwall's integrity, creating gaps through which spooks may now slip.

In addition to Dream-Walker (which can only exit, remember), another way exists to pass through the Stormwall without taking damage from the local Storm Force rating, but it's a bad idea. Taking your chances with the Stormwall and the howling winds and the rains of dirty syringes is safer. But, since characters often tend toward the path of greatest resistance...

Hives cut *through* the Stormwall and provide a direct bridge between the lands of life and death. Spooks can walk into a hive as a living mortal, pass through its halls, and leave through another exit into the Underworld.

But it's nowhere near that simple.

Hives are a part of Grandmother. They're not something she *built*, or something she's *using*, they are *part of her*. Using them as a shortcut to the Underworld is about as clever as deciding that, since you don't want your clothes to get wet in the ocean, you're going to feed yourself to a giant shark instead.

For more on the hives (because *of course* the characters have to go there eventually, if they haven't already) see their description in *Shades of Gray*.

THE WASTELAND

The Wasteland is a desert, but it's not completely featureless. Some sites of the old Underworld have been dropped, embedded or pushed up from beneath it. Some of the remembered reflections shed by the living world still overlap their onetime sites. Other such memorials have been flung far from their initial resting places.

Other sights one might see while wandering through the Wasteland include:

- A dead Spectre about the size of a cement mixer that looks like it was sculpted from a great variety of squids of various sizes. It apparently died by having its skull completely crushed by what turns out to be (on closer inspection) a relic biplane, circa 1915.

- A stream of blood. It's about three to five feet wide and one foot deep. If followed upstream, it narrows until it comes to a point, where a scythe is buried, point-down, in the ground. If the scythe is removed, the blood flow stops. Downstream, one can find five Spectres building a crude dam.

- Three mounds in the ashy sand, each with a crude cross at the front made of scavenged wood from relic buildings. Digging in the graves reveals nothing.

- A small pond of burning kerosene. A spirit in the middle of it ignores the flames and seems to be looking for something. Any overtures are met with rude gestures and impatience.

- An area, about fifty feet on a side, enclosed with string. The string goes between four poles, each about two feet high, sagging down to the ground after about ten feet. Inside the enclosure are over a thousand jars and bottles. The largest hold maybe a gallon, the smallest, only ten ounces. In each is a lumpy wad, appropriately sized for its container. Some are bubble-gum pink, others brown or milky white or a purplish blue. Anyone with appropriate medical experience recognizes them as tumors.

- A building, split in half. Though it's tilted precariously toward one side, entry is possible. It's a library. But every letter on every page has been scratched out, by hand, with an engraving tool.

THE MAELSTROM

While most of the Maelstrom's fury has been pushed into the Stormwall, some spillage still rampages through the Wasteland, like tornadoes through Texas in springtime. Accompanied by dark clouds, crimson lightning and rains of just about anything, these mini-Maelstroms drop visibility to about six inches and cause damage at Storm Force One or Two (see p. 35), depending on their intensity. Characters can usually see them coming at least half an hour before they arrive, and hear them half an hour before that. Usually the Wastelands are tomb-quiet, but when a storm is coming, the hiss and howl carries far across the sand, and the cold winds can already be felt beforehand.

The storms themselves aren't too dangerous, but they're almost always accompanied by Malfean Spectres. Usually the Spectres are just along for the ride, but sometimes they can actually *steer* the storm like a bus, using it to run down anything they spot. The Spectres themselves stay in the eye of the storm, waiting to ambush confused and wounded ghosts who get sucked in. Driven storms of this type can cover ground at a rate of 50-60 mph (though the circular winds are often much faster).

That said, spooks familiar with the Underworld speak of some places where the Maelstrom remains unfettered, scouring the Wastelands as it did before Grandmother appropriated its fury. These pockets of Maelstrom shift and dance across the Underworld, lacerating the Stormwall with the occasional relic building or bauble when they pass.

SINKHOLES AND ERUPTIONS

Since the shape and composition of the Underworld changed so quickly and so drastically, it has not yet had time to settle. Consequently, travelers are likely to encounter sinkholes and/or eruptions.

A sinkhole forms when something shifts under the surface of the sand and a sudden void pulls material down to fill it. It's like a cave-in seen from the top instead of underneath.

Large sinkholes usually groan and shift slowly before they give way completely, but smaller ones happen more suddenly. The ground just opens up and swallows whatever rests on top. Given the ashy dust typical of the Wasteland, sinkholes usually form with a lot of loose material raining down the sides.

Some holes aren't really dangerous at all. If a hole's diameter is greater than its depth, it can open right underneath someone without serious danger of burying her. If it's a deep hole (say, 30 feet deep and 40 across), she's at risk from the fall, but since it's not a completely dead drop, and the impact surface has some give, it's handled as if the fall was 10 feet less. Thus, a 30-foot deep hole inflicts damage as if she'd fallen only 20 feet.

A small and steep hole (10 feet deep or so, and less than 10 feet across) won't cause damage from the fall, but it is likely to fill in completely, and in just a few seconds. It's sort of like going down a steep slide and landing in quicksand. People who don't get out within one turn [by making a Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 7)] start "drowning" as described on p. 241 of **Orpheus**. (The effect isn't actually drowning with water filling one's lungs in a spook's case, but his gauze dispersing and atomizing through the Oblivion-tainted quicksand. Essentially each level of lethal damage disperses two Vitality through the caustic environment.) Being packed in sand also immobilizes anyone unfortunate enough to get sucked in. Such trapped unfortunates can activate Horrors, but unless they think of something really clever, they're stuck. People outside the sinkhole can excavate a buried person within five rounds. Every success on a Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 6) reduces the dig-out time by one round.

Bigger holes, if they're still steep enough to bury someone, fill in slower but are far harder to dig through. For each additional 10 feet of depth, anyone caught in the collapse has an extra turn to get out before being buried — but every turn, the difficulty rises by one, up to a maximum of 9. It takes *two* successful rolls to get all the way free by the time the sand (or whatever) settles. One successful roll can save a character from suffocating — his head's above ground, or he's found a loose spot or pocket of air that will hold out for a while — but the rest of his body is immersed. He can breathe, but struggling free requires at least an hour's effort.

Rescuing someone from a bigger hole is harder too. Every 10 feet of depth raises the difficulty of the Athletics roll (to a maximum of 9) and adds a turn to how long the rescue takes.

Example: *Chet and two friends are wandering in a Wasteland junk heap, looking for parts to build some kind of relic-mobile. Stepping on the wrong chunk of debris, Chet sets off a chain reaction and falls into a pit 20 feet across and 40 feet deep. With barely time to scream "Help!" Chet slides down into the wreckage. He has four turns to try to clamber to the top before the rain of junk falling on him encloses him beyond his ability to escape.*

On his first turn, the difficulty of his player's Athletics roll is 7, and it fails. On the second round, it's risen to 8, and the player decides to spend a point of Willpower to ensure a success. By this time, Chet's two companions show up and start digging for him. Chet has found a solid-looking car frame with a hollow under it, and he gets his head and one arm inside.

The next round, Chet's buddies start trying to help him. Their players roll against a difficulty of 9, and if they succeed it could still take the characters up to eight turns to free Chet. One player gets no successes, but the other manages three. Chet can emerge in five turns. That's good news, because Chet's difficulty to escape is now 9, and his player fails another roll. On the last round, Chet fails again — he's trapped in there, breathing but stuck, until his buddies pull the crap off him.

Sinkholes aren't just random hazards, of course. They happen, not just because the Storyteller may need to perk up a boring Wasteland journey (though that's a factor), but because there's something under there. Just what that something was is up to the Storyteller. It could be a collapse onto a group of unlucky (and now angry) Spectres, it could open a passage to some dead king's relic-littered tomb, or it could just be a chamber as empty as Al Capone's vault.

Eruptions are similar. A subterranean shift causes a big chunk of something — building, Labyrinth, giant vehicle or whatever — to be pushed up and expelled through the floor of the Wasteland. Eruptions are universally heralded by a rumbling noise and a tremor from below.

Small eruptions, like a 30-foot sunken motorboat getting vomited up out of the ash, don't inflict damage. A Dexterity + Alertness roll (difficulty 6) is required to stay upright, but those who fail simply get knocked prone. Even someone standing right on top of the emergence point is safe. There's enough noise and ground rise that even someone in a wheelchair could lunge out and crawl to safety. Small eruptions also produce a choking cloud of dust that radiates out for about 40 feet and raises all the difficulties of sight-based Perception rolls by two. The air takes about 10 minutes to clear.

Bigger eruptions are more dangerous. Something house-sized that emerges displaces enough debris and shakes the earth around so much that the difficulty of the Alertness roll to stay up rises to 7. Everyone nearby suffers a level of bashing damage (it can be soaked), and the dust cloud goes out 80 feet and takes 20 minutes to settle.

How about a huge eruption, like a battleship? That Alertness roll is difficulty 8, the quake inflicts three levels of bashing damage, and it produces a half-mile dust cloud for 40 minutes. An *aircraft carrier* or *huge building* being pushed up increases the Alertness roll's difficulty to 8 and causes three initial levels of bashing damage for those who fail, five levels for everyone nearby regardless of their rolls, and a dust cloud that extends a mile in every direction, lasting for a whole hour.

Once more, eruptions take place for a reason. These things come up because something underneath is rising. It could be Grandmother shifting two miles down, or it could be an extrusion of the Labyrinth right beneath the ejected object.

TRAVEL

Traveling through the Underworld is no treat. It's possible to travel overland on foot. This may even be the safest way, since the dangers of storms, sinkholes and eruptions aren't consciously malevolent. But it's the slowest way, and when the dangers of the landscape do close in, pedestrians almost certainly lack the speed to outrun trouble.

One great way to travel is by using the Horror Hell on Wheels, described on p. 74. A Haunter turns into a jeep or an APC, and the crucible goes on its merry way. But not everyone has access to that Horror.

Familiar, another Horror, might be used to call forth ghostly steeds, but certain problems and difficulties are involved (as discussed on p. 66). Screaming Nothing, the Horror that lets a Banshee bore through Underworld space by creating a nihil (see p. 72), is possibly the quickest route through the Wasteland. The most effective application of the Horror involves two uses of it.

First, the Banshee creates a nihil from the Wasteland into the Labyrinth, and enters. Then she creates a nihil from the Labyrinth back up into the Wasteland — only this second hole can emerge far, far away from where the first one originated. The problem with this (in addition to the hazards of entering a Wasteland nihil at any time) is the imprecise targeting. Characters can mitigate this issue with Vitality, of course, but then the problem becomes Vitality conservation.

Finding a relic vehicle is another option. They're out there, and diligent searching can find them. Instead of relic gas, characters can fuel them with Vitality. A point of Vitality is enough to fill the tank on a car, two Vitality can gas up a semi or bus, three can fill the tanks on a small plane — all the way up to eight Vitality to put a relic DC-10 in the air.

The problem with relic transport is that it's unreliable (it breaks down whenever a player botches a Drive or Pilot roll). Given that the vehicles are a random cross section of all transport through human history, characters are much more likely to find a different relic intact than to find spare parts.

The other problem with relics is that they're in demand. Spectres from all sides have already cherry-picked the best of the crashed tanks and Bermuda-Triangled planes, and characters who find transport can expect Spectral hijacking or brigandage. (What goes around comes around, of course. Jacking a Spectre airfield can be a fine way to score some transport.)

It's not inconceivable that the characters may (with sufficient Craft rolls and ingenuity) manage to jury-rig some *Junkyard Wars*-style vehicle out of ambient wreckage. Just between us Storytellers, this is cool and should be encouraged. Your aspiring MacGyvers are sure to come up with their own innovative designs, but some basic rules apply, no matter what's getting built. First off, all rolls to build these are Intelligence + Crafts or Intelligence + Technology. Secondly, all fueled devices need Vitality, and they cannot be refueled while they're running. It may gas up off a character, but it still needs to stop to refuel.

Some examples follow. If your characters do something different (which is more than likely) just use these as guidelines.

- A wind-powered land yacht is capable of carrying four people across the Wasteland at speeds that can reach 50 mph, when the wind is strong. (Of course, the only times the winds are that strong are when a storm is coming.) Normally, they move at about 20-30 mph. The Intelligence + Crafts/Technology roll to build this is at difficulty 6. Land-yachts take 10 hours to build, working at a back-breaking pace. Steering one is a Dexterity +

Drive roll (difficulty 4), but the difficulty goes up by one for every 10 mph of speed. (So it's difficulty 6 at 20 mph and 9 at the top speed of 50 mph.) Land yachts can't carry armor, and if the Drive roll fails, the vehicle crashes, inflicting two levels of bashing damage to everyone on board for every 10 mph of speed. The vehicle has five "health levels," no soak, and its top speed drops by 10 mph for every level of damage taken. Once it runs out of health levels, it stops and can't run again until someone takes two hours of repair time to fix it, which requires an Intelligence + Crafts roll (difficulty 6).

- Building a mega-dunebuggy takes a minimum of eight hours, and the difficulty of the Intelligence + Crafts/Technology roll is 7. Such a vehicle can carry up to six people at up to 60 mph. It can support up to three points of armor, but each point adds an hour to the build time. Gassing it up costs a point of Vitality, just like a relic car, and once fueled, it can run for about 200 miles (each point of armor knocks 20 miles off its range, so a car with three points of armor needs gas every 140 miles). Steering is a standard Drive roll as described on p. 218 in *Orpheus*. If it crashes, the riders suffer a die of lethal damage for every 10 mph of speed. (The car's armor reduces the number of dice.) The buggy has eight "health levels" no soak except its armor, and every health level of damage taken increases the difficulty on all Drive rolls by one. Once it runs out of health levels, at least five hours and an Intelligence + Crafts roll (difficulty 7) are necessary before it runs again.

- A light prop plane can carry up to eight people at up to 90 mph. It takes 20 hours to build and costs two points of Vitality to gas up. The difficulty on the Intelligence + Crafts/Technology roll is 9. It can travel about 300 miles before it needs to land and refuel. It can't carry armor, and if it crashes, everyone inside suffers two dice of aggravated damage and a die of lethal damage for every 20 mph of speed. It has nine health levels, three soak, and the Dexterity + Drive rolls to control it are at difficulty 7. Every health level of damage drops its top speed by 10 mph and takes 10 miles off the distance to its next mandatory refueling stop. (That is, if it's flown 100 miles, has 200 miles to go before it has to stop and takes five health levels of damage, it can now travel 150 miles before it needs to land.) Repairing a damaged plane takes two hours per health level of damage and requires a Wits + Crafts roll (difficulty 8).

The difficulties listed assume the characters have found a good trove, like a junkyard or airstrip or one of the aforementioned sargasso tangles of Maelstrom flot-sam. Working with limited resources can knock those difficulties up a notch or two.

As a general rule, though, this is a good time to let the players get away with doing something pretty cool, even if it seems implausible to you. The reason is, letting them brilliantly build a vehicle (1) fits the **Orpheus** movie paradigm, (2) gives them a sense of accomplishment with little risk to your plans and (3) actually *helps* you because the problem of needing to get around, while legitimate, is *boring* (as opposed to problems like bad-ass Spectre attacks, which are exciting).

REFUGES

A good defense against storms (and against other spooks) is to find a refuge — some place where the Stormwall is thin.

Why are these places so useful? Because even as the energies of morbidity and death leak out, the positive charges of life and light soak their way in. So, while the area in the physical world is a lonesome crossroads where teens dare each other to spend a night in the abandoned farmhouse, in the Wasteland there may be a *reflection* of the farmhouse. It's still abandoned and disused, but somehow a little more inviting and less sterile than the flat and featureless sands that surround it. These structures, shored up by vital energy, provide complete protection against the loose whirlwinds of the Wasteland, and their walls provide cover against the attacks of marauding Spectres or other Underworld entities.

Given the current disarray of Underworld geography, a refuge structure may be many miles from the site of its real-world analogue, but as the Maelstrom lost strength bleeding into the barrier between life and death, it tended to deposit refuge sites in areas that were already appropriate. It's a little bit like the way that a draining tub leaves most of its sediment at its top level, only on a vast and metaphysical scale.

NECROPOLI

At one time, Necropoli (the singular form is "Necropolis") were neighborhood-sized refuges, but with a less intense tie to the vital realm. When a great building in Athens or Rome or London crumbled or was

razed or knocked over by Nazi bombers, the strength of its memory — its shape in so many lives, its *meaning* — crossed over and ensured such historical touchstones' existence in the Underworld. The restless dead dwelt in these lost monuments, carrying out a civilized existence that was a reflection of the lives lived on the other side.

All the Necropoli have fallen. The Spectres invaded, and not one withstood. Whether the defenders despaired one by one or were pulled into the Labyrinth in the hundreds by crushing mass attacks, the ghosts in the Necropoli have been consumed.

After *that*, the awakening of the Mother of All Malfeans and the resultant shifts in the Underworld's topography have buried, mangled and toppled much of what remained.

And yet, Necropoli still exist. The memories remain, though now half buried in the silt of the shattered afterlife. From sunlit Rome, characters can cross the Stormwall and take shelter in that part of the Coliseum that is lost to the living. The shadow of Chicago holds the World Fair's "White City." In Necropolis Cleveland, the Cuyahoga River blazes with blue-white flame, and the Maelstrom only feeds its fire.

The Necropoli remain, and they are thick with Spectres. Every defender who held out to the last, and those few desperate spirits that entered the Wasteland since Spectral victory, have been turned inside-out, spiritually inverted into their own worst enemies. Now they walk the same dead streets, perhaps performing ghastly parodies of their lives or the duties they held afterward.

The Spectres are rebuilding the Necropoli in their own images, cities as conducive to corruption and consumption as Chicago is to meat-packing or London is to publishing or Seattle is to maritime trade and software.

They defend as well, for the Necropoli are the primary fronts for the battles between Grandmother's minions and those Spectres still ruled by the Malfeans.

THE LABYRINTH

And underneath everything lies the Labyrinth.

How to describe it?

The Labyrinth is not just a dark place, it is *the* Dark Place. Which means that somewhere in it is *everybody's* Dark Place.

The regions under Malfean influence are black stone — flat black, a light-sucking featureless darkness that makes it hard to tell if a viewer is looking at a wall that's about to smack him in the face or out over a pit hundreds of feet deep. The walls are irregular, like a cave, often with uneven floors, ceilings and walls. Pits, chimneys and vast caverns abound, and linear topography doesn't seem to apply. Mapmaking is generally a futile exercise.

HAUNTS AND REFUGES

Anyone who has the Haunt Background (detailed in *Shades of Gray*) will no doubt be delighted to learn that their haunt works as a refuge. A haunt's owner can tap the investment of Vitality needed to turn a location into a haunt (as can her crucible) for the same sort of protection a naturally occurring refuge offers. As with a haunt's other effects, the person who attuned it must be present for it to confer Benefits.



The black stone Labyrinth isn't completely monotonous, of course. Some Malfeans decorate their areas in fashions that fit their particular aesthetic — torches made of burning people, grand towers of muttering filth, miles of chambers lined with rotting fish scales and filled with clouds of buzzing flies. Other times veins of glowing rock, burning liquid or screaming mud can be found. Fluids (or “plasm”) abound — burning, corrosive, sticky, malodorous or simply slippery ooze.

At least two thirds of the Labyrinth, however, belongs to Grandmother. And there, it's different. Every person who enters Grandmother's domain perceives it differently. The general outlines are the same — a tunnel is a tunnel to each observer, a chamber is a chamber and an outcropping is at the same height to all. But the dressing and texture and nature of a given passage, hole or feature depends on where the viewer came closest to annihilation during their life.

An example can illuminate.

Three uninvited guests enter Grandmother's Labyrinth. At the front stands Blink Carruthers, with Annie Harper to his left and Chet Mason at his right.

They're walking down a gradually descending corridor, about 15 feet wide, opening into a room with a high ceiling and a low outcropping in the middle. Scattered

on the outcropping are a few worthless relics — dolls and cassette tapes and once-burned love letters that have somehow drifted this far down. The walls, outcropping and junk items are the *objective* elements of the room.

To Blink, it's a hospital corridor, one of the blank and icy ones he saw so many times during his cancer treatments. Going down a ramp suitable for wheelchairs and gurneys, he sees an operating theater. In the center is an operating table, complete with leather restraints, spattered with blood and with a tray of cruel surgical instruments next to it.

Annie, on the other hand, finds herself in the mazelike warrens of a Middle East marketplace. It's a sleazy, dingy one, the place where locals go to buy their heroin, all back streets and no front streets. To her, the ceiling is layers of dirty cloth meant to screen out the sun, the floor beneath her feet is hard-packed dirt, and the chamber they enter is a broad spot between buildings. She sees the table of a black marketer, sprinkled with stolen goods.

For Chet, it's the tight-packed jungles of 'Nam, leading down to a muddy gap in a dirt hillside. He sees the room as the antechamber of a “spider hole,” with a crude table in the middle holding spoiled food, empty brass cartridges and scraps of worthless paper.

If two passages branch off the chamber, they're more hospital corridors for Blink, more alleyways for Annie, more dirt tunnels for Chet. If some of Grandmother's Spectres attack, Blink sees them as masked nurses and doctors wielding scalpels, Chet identifies them as enemy soldiers, while Annie perceives thugs in sandals and turbans.

These perceptive delusions have limits, of course. Just because Blink sees some of the detritus as a syringe, that doesn't mean he could use it to inject himself with medicine. Similarly, when Chet sees the Spectres leveling guns at him, it doesn't mean that their attacks inflict damage like a firearm. Disguised Spectres still fight like Spectres (for better or worse).

In fact, it is possible for characters to see the objective reality (if one uses that term *very* loosely) of disguised items and people (for Chet sees Blink in army fatigues, while Annie sees him in the rugged khaki of a field anthropologist). Doing so requires a moment of squinting from the spook and a Willpower roll from the player. The difficulty of the roll depends on just how deep into the Labyrinth the characters have come. (Meaning that clever types can use it as a gauge: The more their illusions blur into reality, the less weight their reality carries and the closer they are to Grandmother, the End of All Reality.) On the outskirts of Grandmother's territory, the difficulty is 6. Inside one of her Memory Towers, it's difficulty 9.

No amount of squinting and Willpower can penetrate the appearance of the walls, floor and other background setting elements, however. They don't *have* any real appearance. To really see through them, one would have to look upon annihilation itself, which means (of course) to be annihilated.

NIHILS

Nihils are tunnels between levels of reality. They can go between the material realm and the Wasteland, or between the Wasteland and the Labyrinth. They can't quite bridge the gap between the Labyrinth and the breathing world, something for which every living person should be glad.

To the naked eye, a nihil looks like a black whirlpool that appears on the nearby ground, vertically on a wall, or sometimes even on a ceiling. At first, as it swirls out and grows, it's glossy and inky slick, like a wet plastic garbage bag. But after it reaches its full diameter (which can be anywhere from three feet to the size of a city block) any reflective qualities are sucked away downward, leaving the nihil featureless, black, drinking in every iota of light.

The nihils created by the Screaming Nothing Horror have uses as described on p. 72. They can suck up

your enemies, spit out Spectres and serve as a fast (if not completely secure) means of transport. The nihils that some Spectres create, and those that occur spontaneously, can do the same things for the most part. The crucial difference is who the effects are going to harm and help.

Battling Spectres is pretty well established, so it's the other nihil possibility that needs exploration. What happens when characters go through one? What does it feel like?

It feels sad.

First comes a jerking feeling of acceleration and hissing speed, but it quickly reaches maximum acceleration and, in the darkness and silence and absence of cues, it suddenly feels like utter immobility. It's black and numb and silent and still. But more than that, it feels sad.

It doesn't rend with fangs of blackness or tear gauze with sharp-nailed, molesting hands. It just makes the traveler feel... bleak. Like when he got the flu and spit up on his favorite stuffed animal and it had to be thrown out because it couldn't be cleaned. Like when her eighth-grade best friend didn't like her anymore. Like when his first grown-up style lover in college said "I think we should see other people."

It's nothing physical. It's just that blue Monday depression people get when dreams die.

In game terms, going through a nihil sucks out a point of Vitality (for Banshees using Screaming Nothing, this loss is on top of the normal costs).

This can be resisted, of course. The player can roll Willpower (difficulty 10) and, if the roll succeeds, the character retains the Vitality. Or she can roll Willpower against a lower difficulty by telling the Storyteller specifically what memory the character is drawing upon to retain her sense of self and connection. If it's a half-baked, trite little anecdote full of hems and haws ("Er, when I was... uh... a little kid, I really wanted this... mm... Easy-Bake Oven? Um, and my grandmother got it for me for Christmas. And I was happy.") the difficulty drops to 9. On the other hand, if it's something intense that feels real ("I remember my dad's funeral, and how I knew he was a good man but didn't feel I really *knew* him, and how I mostly cried for myself because I'd lost the chance") it can drop as far as 6. If you actually bring tears to your Storyteller's eyes, it's a difficulty 4.

GRANDMOTHER

Let's state up front that it does not matter what Grandmother is.

The characters may wonder, but they do not need to know in order to have a successful, thrilling and altogether

satisfying game of **Orpheus**. In fact, they're more likely to be satisfied if they wonder but do *not* know.

Is Grandmother the gaping gullet of entropy? The inevitable counterpart of the divine demiurge, locked away since the beginning of time? A betrayer angel, a monster from the universe next door or an utterly unconscious consuming force?

Yes, no, maybe. Speculation is good. Hints, insinuations and bizarre clues are good. Ambiguity is better. Flicking on the light switch, saying "Okay, here's Grandmother with her clothes off, posed on a big heap of answers" is not good. No mere words can encompass the inchoate sub-cranial images the players will think up themselves, *if* you do a good job as Storyteller.

As a force of the universe, the characters can't just up and kill her, any more than they can kill gravity or atomic decay. Therefore, like gravity or atomic decay, Grandmother is best presented indirectly. The characters never see a giant sludgy *thing* floating in the void. Instead, they feel her influence, just as we feel gravity pulling us without ever seeing the force itself.

Instead of showing her as a mere object, show Grandmother as an influence. In the mortal realm, her power is weak. Sure, she knocked down some buildings and blew up a bunch of stuff, but it's still weak in comparison to her power in the Underworld. In the mortal realm, she's an outsider. In the Wasteland, she's a force of nature. In the Labyrinth, she practically is nature.

Individual Storytellers should come up with their own "tells" for Grandmother's presence. Rather than present some one-size-fits-all canon effect that would, within days, be spread across the Internet, we're happily abdicating that decision to individual Storytellers. Suggestions follow, but you'll know what's best for your group.

The idea is, think up a phenomenon (or phenomena), which we'll term X. Whenever Grandmother's influence is at work in the Underworld, X is apparent. As her power grows, X becomes more prominent.

It starts out as a background element, perhaps one that requires a Perception + Alertness (or Awareness, depending on the nature of your X) roll. (The difficulty, again, depends on just exactly what element you use, and how blatant or subtle you want it to be.) As they get closer to a hive, it becomes noticeable without a roll. When they enter the hive, it's so common that it gives a slight penalty to relevant Alertness rolls. And when the characters enter a Memory Tower, it's so cloying that the players have to make Willpower rolls every hour to avoid distraction. If they fail the Willpower roll, the difficulty of every task rises by one for an hour.

META-GAME TRICKS

If you want to meta-game your players, ask for Perception + Alertness rolls when they've first been in the Wasteland for an hour or two. But no matter how well they succeed, don't describe anything they've noticed. (Someone who rolls really well might merit a flip answer like, "You notice your shoe's untied.")

Later on, when they're closer to Grandmother, have them make Alertness rolls and, if/when one of them makes it, describe your element X and say, "You realize it's been present ever since you crossed over. The only difference is, now it's strong enough to consciously notice."

Another possibility is this: When they enter the Underworld, give each player a single black die. "Whenever you roll," you say, "Please include this die in your pool." When they enter the Labyrinth, give them a second black die. "Whenever you roll two or more dice, please include both black ones in your pool." A memory tower merits a third black die. Watch the black dice closely. When one comes up a 10, either smile or shake your head ruefully. When they yield 1s, give a different reaction.

What do the black dice mean? Not a damn thing. But watch your players get spooked and paranoid when they roll! What better way to communicate something that the *characters* feel but can't sense, than by sending a message to the *players* that they sense but can't understand?

Just make sure to never, *ever* tell your players that the black dice meant nothing. If they really press you, just look innocent and ask, "Who said they meant anything?"

The question, of course, is what do you pick as your Element X? Some possibilities include...

- A low, insectile hum or buzz that gets louder and louder until it's all but maddening. (If you can get a sound sample, put it on continuous repeat and gradually turn up the volume.)
- The scent of ozone (or crushed juniper berries, or whatever else). If you want to go with some sort of perfume and intensify it throughout, that can work too, though that's a lot harder to turn off after the characters leave the Underworld.
- A sense that everything they look at is...seething. It's not moving in the sense of changing position, it's just...writhing. Or maybe spinning slightly. Just this feverish sense that everything they look at is unsettled.

• Alternatively, you can go the opposite route and say how still and static everything seems. Even when an object (or creature) is *moving*, it's hard to watch because the observer's internal sense of equilibrium insists that *everything* in view is perfectly motionless. (For this one, flick on a strobe light at the climax, provided you have no epileptic players.)

• High-contrast appearance could also work. At first, it's a simple matter of every shadow, from the small ones cast by creases in clothing to the vague pale one that a nose casts on your face, becoming marginally darker. In the general dimness of the Underworld, the characters may not even notice until they're in the Labyrinth, when *every single shadow* is completely pitch black and impenetrable.

• You could also use a leitmotif color. (A leitmotif is a recurring theme used to identify a particular character.) As they get closer to their perilous goal, everything might take on a sickly greenish cast, or it might seem ever more gray and washed-out. If (when) the characters are wounded in the Labyrinth, healing their gauze might leave scars in your chosen color — scars that could even remain on their physical bodies when they return.

Every group is different, so every group deserves a custom element X. If your group has little patience for the abstruse and phantasmagoric, choose something concrete and clear. If they demand more abstract horrors, give them a sign that's subtle and that can only be noticed when they think about it.

Don't assume you have to explain that X = Grandmother, either. If they figure it out, great. Figuring stuff out is half the thrill. But if they *don't* figure it out, it's a hell of a lot creepier. Either way, you win.

When portraying Grandmother and the actions of her minions, it's important to remember that "evil" is not really an accurate word for her. You wouldn't say a bolt of lightning was "evil" for killing your brother, or that the streptococcus infection that wiped out a friend had "malicious intent." To be malevolent, an entity has to understand right and wrong. Grandmother exists way beyond such distinctions. She has drives, the most prominent of which is to feed her Malfean children. (They, on the other hand, *are* evil, *do* understand humanity and *do* know right from wrong, in a way.) Grandmother's protective urge has led her to a source of food for her brood, and she hesitates to open it about as much as you'd hesitate to open a pudding cup for a hungry toddler.

This makes it particularly ironic that her opponents are the Malfeans themselves.

One might wonder why the Malfeans are opposing an attempt by their "parent" to feed them on the full fat

of humankind. They have a number of reasons, any of which the characters may learn, intuit, or see evidenced.

• **Can't Share.** The Malfeans know Grandmother spawned them (much as they may deny it with the sobriquet "Neverborn") and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to think that, if she fattens herself on the world, she may birth more Malfeans. Since the Neverborn all hate each other, the last thing they want to see is more siblings.

• **Stepchildren.** Not *all* Malfeans were created. Some are self-made. Once-human Spectres who became so powerful (and corrupt) that they alienated themselves from even the memory of life, the "Onceborn" have no reason to think Grandmother will spare them. Even if she ignores them, her well-fed Neverborn children would assuredly be interested in some sweet, juicy payback.

• **Rebellion.** Grandmother is, quite simply, stealing their *power*. Since awakening, she's seized control of their Spectres, leaving the Malfeans — previously lords of all they surveyed — stuck as diminished husks of their onetime glory. Each Malfean privately thinks he can dominate and destroy or enslave his peers, if given enough time. But if Grandmother takes over, it's an odious eternity of equality for all. Screw that!

• **Forethought.** Suppose Grandmother devours the world. Then what? It's back to the chill silence of oblivion, without even the shreds of life that drift down now. A few Malfeans might just think that they will get more out of the world overall if they snack on it subtly for a while, let it heal, then eat a little more, as opposed to consuming the whole damn thing at once. It's something like a farmer who'd love to grill up some steaks, but who's waiting until the cow stops giving milk before slaughtering it.

Despite the Malfeans' resistance, however, Grandmother is proceeding with her plan. (If she's even conscious enough for "plan" to be the right word. Does an acorn plan to become a tree?) For the record, she is growing hives that bridge the Labyrinth and the Wasteland, and when they're big enough, she pushes them through the Stormwall (where they become the hives that the characters have seen in the living world). When she pushes enough of these hives through, or when the hives she's already pushed through grow to sufficient size, they will flood the world with her Spectres who, like digestive enzymes, can corrode everything until it slips through the Stormwall. When enough of the world is destroyed, the Stormwall itself will fall, all becomes Grandmother, and her offspring feast for a thousand years.

Why now? Why not when the Black Plague was literally killing entire cities and spawning Maelstroms from way back when? Why not get the jump on the planet when

the crust was still cooling, or before multi-celled animals evolved into creatures capable of conscious resistance?

She does it now because she couldn't before.

Maybe the world is *just now* crossing some threshold in the blind cosmic battle between order and entropy. Maybe some population tipping point got hit, where enough people started believing in the supernatural that she could surge up and attack. Maybe all those insane stories about spirit nukes and black cities were true and they woke her up.

Maybe the cosmos just passed its expiration date. Maybe the Bible-thumpers were just a little bit off on who (or what) is supposed to blow the final trumpet and break the seven seals.

Maybe this was planned from the beginning — humankind's final exam, one question, pass/fail. Stop Grandmother and you graduate into a world you saved. Fail and be forever consumed.

No one knows.

THE HIVES

The hives are part of Grandmother, in the same way that a person's hair or fingernails are part of him. They grew from his flesh, yes, but no one's going to kill (or seriously injure) him by trimming them off.

The function of the hives is to penetrate the Stormwall — something one enterprising Onceborn called Zyras managed not long after all the bad craziness that woke Grandmother up in the first place. If Grandmother can get enough of them poking through, she can infect the living world with enough of her corruption that it will fall apart — right down into her waiting gullet. (It's rather like spiders that inject digestive juices into the bodies of their prey so that all the internal organs liquefy. In this case, the spider is Grandmother, the prey is the world, and the skin she punctures is the Stormwall.)

That's the big-picture function of the hives. More particularly, they serve as rally points, staging areas and hospital zones for her Spectres. Spectres can get out of a hive and into the world, as the characters learned in **The Orphan-Grinders**. Now that they have access to the Wasteland, it's their chance to take the fight to the Spectres.

This isn't easy, of course.

From a strictly tactile perspective, hives have a dry, rattling feel — like an empty beehive or the nest of a paper-wasp. The surfaces of the walls can easily be clawed up or peeled, sort of like many layers of thin, cheap wallpaper with bad glue underneath. The walls get denser toward their core, until they have the texture of mahogany or some other very hard wood. The difference, is,

they won't burn. Even temperatures sufficient to melt steel won't affect the wall of a hive, except to turn it a little bit brown.

Visually, the walls vary between mottled gray-white and a sort of rusty decay-brown. Stains abound, and often one finds peeled areas where Spectres have sharpened their claws. Hives are disorderly and organic, with gradual curves instead of crisp right turns, ramps and coils instead of stairs, and no sense of cogent layout. The air is dry and seems to have a fine, foul-tasting dust suspended in it. A scent of ozone and hot iron permeates the air, and a sourceless rustling sound is always audible. From a living perspective, it's laid out with all the care and precision of a half-eaten spaghetti dinner.

Of course, it's not made to be navigable by humans. Spectres who are tied into the hive-mind always know exactly where they're going, and usually know exactly where anyone nearby is, also. (The one way around this, "Obscurantism," is described in Chapter Five, but it's a pretty rare case.)

A hive is an army base for Spectres, which means that everything inside is designed to help Spectres fight. They're all laid out differently, but some common elements of every hive are:

- **Spite and gauze pools.** These are pretty much what they sound like: big holes in the floor filled with a nasty, pus-yellow fluid with gray chunks and froth on it. Any Spectre or spook who climbs in regains one point of Spite per turn, to the normal maximum. The pool empties out after providing 20-50 points of Spite.

- **Stain zones.** These dark chambers bud off the hallways and, unlike the rest of the hive, they're moist. Anyone who enters feels the walls come alive and clamp down — it's a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 7) to get out before the entryway squeezes shut. Then the bone spurs start to grind, stripping away "unwanted" gauze and... replacing it. Anyone who gets caught in a Stain zone suffers three levels of aggravated damage and receives a new Stain of the Storyteller's choice (active until the characters heal the aggravated damage). Furthermore, a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) is required to avoid suffering a derangement for the same duration.

- **Feasting halls.** Any captured ghosts are brought to the feasting halls. Every Spectre is entitled to one bite on each, until the captive spirit gives in and becomes a Spectre itself... or until it's destroyed altogether. Most Spectre bites inflict a single die of bashing damage in this circumstance, though since some Spectres have mouths like the backs of garbage trucks, the damage rating can be much higher. But generally speaking, the Spectres like to play with their food. Sometimes they even throw weakened captives into a Spite and gauze



pool for “refreshment” before the feast continues. Therefore, even if a comrade falls and is dragged off to the feast, a rescue can be mounted.

- **Memory Towers.** These are special cases (found in the Labyrinth as well as in the hives), so they have their own description on p. 46.

THE MALFEANS

Malfeans come in two flavors, the Onceborn and the Neverborn (who were, it turns out, born after all).

The Neverborn are the progeny of Grandmother, slumbering hulks in the darkness whose dreams infect the hive-mind and stir legions of Spectres to act without ever receiving anything that could be called a “command.” Having spent most of human history asleep (though not unaware of humankind, in the same way that a human sleeper might dream of snow when the temperature drops in her bedroom) they are alien and ill-equipped to predict human action — even now that they, like their suppurating dam, have been roused from their long rest.

The Onceborn are human beings who have transformed themselves into something resembling the Neverborn through continued, deliberate exposure to annihilation. They are human souls who have struck the finest balance between being and nothingness. As such, they are the finest conduit for bringing nothingness to human beings. Before Grandmother’s awakening, they were the most active and overtly dominant lords of the Labyrinth. Now, however, they are stuck in the position of being the cheap knockoffs as the original Malfeans become active.

The Neverborn don’t really have identities, though some of their servants (the ones who have traveled the least on the long road to annihilation) still need names or titles by which to think of their masters. Before Grandmother, they indirectly influenced *all* the Spectres and the Onceborn too. Now that they’ve awakened, they are taking direct control... as much as they’re able. But while their power over Oblivion energies (if that’s not a contradiction) is great, their understanding of things human is weak indeed. A few of the Neverborn have stumbled on the idea of using a particularly intelligent Spectre as an “advisor” on human matters (using emissaries like Mr. Jigsaw to negotiate on their behalf). These Neverborn are the most successful in the new war of the Underworld.

The Onceborn, lacking the direct power of the Neverborn, are nevertheless far more experienced at Spectre-on-Spectre violence. They understand the Underworld and (to a lesser extent) the lands of life as well. While they control the smallest group of Spectres, they are the most

able to anticipate human reactions and the most likely to trick humans into doing their dirty work. Furthermore, unlike the Neverborn, Onceborn understand the concept of temporary alliance to achieve common tactical goals. So they're sticking together while the Neverborn each try to go it alone.

Which is more dangerous? That's a little bit like asking which kills you more, drowning or beheading. Fortunately, all Malfeans dwell down deep in the Labyrinth, and it doesn't take too much in the way of brains to steer clear of them. Their armies are everywhere, but those forces are collectives that can be divided and, if not conquered, at least stalemated.

The Malfeans all want Grandmother gone, surprisingly enough. They're ungrateful bastards, each of whom thinks it could make hash of the others without Grandmother's interference. (See p. 114 for more reasons for their ingratitude.) They want to destroy each other, too, but they recognize that Grandmother is, right now, the one to beat. Therefore, even though the Neverborn aren't exactly working together, they're all attacking her at about the same time. But since she controls such a huge proportion of the Spectres, it's not having the desired effect.

THE HIVE-MIND AND THE MEMORY TOWERS

At the risk of sounding like bad knock-off cyberpunk, here's an extended computer metaphor for the hive-mind.

The hive-mind parallels the operating system. Grandmother is the network server. Her goals and commands are a hardwired root program. The Malfeans are all networked CPUs, and the Spectres are peripherals. With us so far?

The problem is, since the Malfeans, Spectres and Grandmother are all on the same network, it's not terribly difficult for them to spy on each other. It's not quite to the point that they can hack each others' consciousness — the metaphor only extends so far before breaking down — but one Malfean (say, Zyras the All-Consuming) can easily tell when another Neverborn activates a legion of Spectres. Not only can Zyras perceive that something's being done, it can (with some effort) figure out what the orders are.

This adds some interesting spin to the struggles between the Malfeans. The struggle between them and Grandmother is similarly warped. It's like being in a war where each side has excellent signal intelligence on the other. No sooner is an order issued than it's in serious danger of being intercepted.

One might wonder how conflict can happen at all. If a given Malfean has 10 Spectres and knows that 50 enemy Spectres are coming to nail him, he retreats, right? Only they know he's retreating. And he knows they know. And so on.

This sort of mutual spying does produce a lot of one-sided conflicts where the winner is never in doubt. The Malfean with superior force surrounds the inferior troops and mows them down, using hive-mind intelligence to find stragglers.

As it happens, some conflicts aren't so cut and dried. Sometimes two Malfeans with exactly equal knowledge of the tactical realities read them in different ways. One may think his numerically few but highly powerful Spectres are better than a multitude of weak ones. The lord of the weak mob thinks just the opposite — so they agree to bang heads. Other times, a Malfean can keep its orders secret inside its inviolate consciousness, releasing them only minutes before they're to be carried out. But this makes it quite difficult to try elaborate maneuvers.

Enter the Memory Towers.

Like a human being who suppresses a memory that's too painful to consciously acknowledge, Malfeans (and Grandmother) can wall up plans, concepts and knowledge in structures called "Memory Towers." They're made of solid thought, but then again, that's arguably true of everything in the Underworld. Such a fortress isolates some essential concept from the hive-mind, though not necessarily from the Malfean who created it. Specifically, the Malfean can enter the tower and consult the memory to temporarily remember what it is. Then, when it leaves the tower, the memory is buried again. (Otherwise, the idea would enter the hive-mind and be accessible to its rivals.)

From the outside, Malfean Memory Towers look like spires of black Labyrinth stone. Depending on the Malfean, they may be craggy or smooth or oily or festooned with 10,000 rotting mice, but the basic shape is the same: a tall, narrow spire.

Size matters... somewhat. Bigger towers have the capacity to hold more Spectral defenders, but that doesn't mean they're always filled to capacity. A very complicated memory needs a bigger tower too, but it's certainly possible to "overbuild" — constructing a huge tower for some insignificant concept. Malfeans have been known to do just that in order to trick their opponents into assaulting entrenched fortresses which, when they finally triumph, contain *nothing*.

Some towers are no taller than 10 feet, five feet wide, small enough on the inside to fit a single Spectre, a memory and one visitor. That's not somewhere that a



Malfean can keep a big memory, though. A Memory Guardpost like that is good enough to store maybe a single page's worth of concept — the orders of the day, for example, or which *other* Memory Guardpost (out of hundreds in a chamber) contains a password for entering the next sector.

Naturally, as the treasure houses of the Neverborn, Memory Towers have unique defenses, the most important of which is Harrowing.

A Harrowing happens when a spook touches one of the load-bearing pillars of a Memory Tower. These pillars look like black crystal and are usually quite large... but not always. It's certainly possible to expose dime-sized sections under an otherwise unremarkable floor. But any character touching them falls into a Harrowing, just the same.

What's a Harrowing, then? It's an assault that takes place inside the target's head. More specifically, inside her *memories*.

At one time, Harrowing was used on the restless dead as a test to get them to really re-examine their priorities. Ghosts are, after all, transgressing the natural order in pursuit of some passion or other, so a Harrowing once served as a tough-love prod to get spirits to act on their obsessions or give them up. At some point though, they were corrupted into sadistic games whose sole purpose was to push ghosts closer to Oblivion. Now that all of the ghosts from before Grandmother's rise *are* obliterated (or are Spectres), the Harrowing infrastructure has been perverted again — this time to protect the Malfeans' secrets from one another.

So nowadays, it's mostly Spectres who get Harrowed. For them, it's a chance to get their noses rubbed in their previous humanity — maybe hard enough to snap them out of their Spectral status.

Why would the Malfeans want to do that?

Because an ex-Spectre who's been Harrowed back to ghosthood can't broadcast the secret of a Memory Tower all across the hive-mind, that's why. An ex-Spectre is unlikely to give a damn about helping its old master — it just wants to get the hell out of the Labyrinth and retain its recently restored humanity.

The really brutal thing is that most of these redeemed Spectres usually wind up being corrupted again. They try to run, and the Malfean they were working against catches them, drags them off to some other Memory Tower and Harrows them again. If it fails again, it's once more a Spectre, but now under the control of its captor. If it succeeds... well, plenty more Harrowing where that came from.

This means that characters may meet Orphan-Grinders in the middle of the Labyrinth who have just

recently broken loose because of contact with a strut in a Memory Tower. These former Spectres are often fairly tough — no one's dumb enough to send weaklings against a Tower — and may be able to help the characters, at least until they get turned again. Such Orphan-Grinders are likely to be very confused and probably beat up some, but they may have the secret of a Memory Tower to share.

All this, of course, pertains to Spectres and Spectres only. What happens when a non-Spectre — a character, for instance — falls into a Harrowing?

Something from his past comes back to haunt him.

A Harrowing is a twisted, surreal, hall-of-mirrors take on some event that was key in the character's life. All Harrowings are faced *alone*, though characters may not know that when they fall into them. Here's how you handle them.

1) Ask the Harrowed character's player to briefly leave the room.

2) Have a brief powwow with the other players about how to Harrow that character. Naturally, if you know the characters are likely to go into the Labyrinth or a Tower, it's a good idea to brainstorm some ideas before the session starts.

The Harrowing should play off the character's Nature and Demeanor, ideally pitting them against each other. Think of it as an externalization of internal conflicts. The character should be faced with a tough decision that challenges him to think outside his normal boundaries. Since ghosts don't have a "Demeanor" normally, the Storyteller can assign the character one to reflect the way the player has roleplayed that persona under different circumstances. Otherwise, the Storyteller can assign an antithesis Nature to the character's to represent that dynamic conflict.

3) Get the other players into character, if they want. (If they're not comfortable with the idea and want to sit out or take a bathroom break, that's cool too.) Solid roleplayers can be trusted to run primary adversaries. If you think a player might be a little soft on his buddy (or, alternately, might come down a little too hard), give them control of a supporting character or fellow victim.

The *really* mean way to handle things, of course, is to pick a situation that involves the other characters and have the players control the Spectral versions of themselves. For a while, the Harrowed character thinks they're on his side. Until suddenly, they aren't.

4) Bring the player back and go to town. Once everyone's in character, get the poor guy who's the specimen under the microscope and tear his personality to shreds.

Example: *Ben Cotton has an Autocrat Demeanor and a Bravo Nature. When Ben falls into a Harrowing, the Storyteller exiles Ben's player and dialogues with the others. She needs a situation where his lust for power and his need to smack people around come into conflict. One possibility is that, as a burgeoning criminal, Ben was sent to infiltrate a rival gang. As a newcomer, he was constantly mistreated, until he eventually blew his top and lashed out. This got him booted from that gang, and his old gang gave him the heave-ho as well because he loused up his mission.*

For the Harrowing, the Storyteller decides to put Ben back into the gang initiation, where he has to remain absolutely silent during a humiliating beating. Only this time, instead of their fists and belts, the gang-bangers have chains. If he fights, his old gang shows up to help their rivals cream Ben. If he stays still, he gets whipped to ribbons. The obvious answer is to run, which is contrary to both his Nature and Demeanor. If he runs, he escapes. Alternately, Ben's player might come up with some genius alternative. That's good too.

Harrowings aren't just psycho-surreal shootouts. They're *about* something — some important aspect of the character. If he usually shoots first and asks questions later, maybe he's faced with marauding visions of some innocent bystanders. They attack him with their greasy fingernails, and if he fights them, they split in two and then spring up, doubled and full-sized. Like the Hydra or the broom of the Sorcerer's Apprentice, his struggles only make the situation worse. The solution might be to surrender and apologize or run away or take some other course that represents a more mature attitude. Similarly, someone who is self-centered and sleazy might be put into a situation where he can only escape by divesting himself of all that he owns. An Autocrat may be put in a hopeless situation, one where there's no right choice, until he admits that he just doesn't know what to do.

Harrowings don't last forever. (They may seem to last a long time when you're in one, but they only take three turns of "real time.") If the character doesn't try the right response within a reasonable amount of time, and if everyone's getting bored or frustrated, then kick him out of the Harrowing with one fewer Willpower and one additional Spite.

If he does make the right choice (or comes up with something entirely different that, nonetheless, *feels* right) then he emerges from the Harrowing with one *less* Spite and one *additional* Willpower.

If combat occurs in the Harrowing, all damage is bashing, but it's still there when he breaks free.

If several people touch a strut at the same time, they all enter separate Harrowings. There's no way to enter a Harrowing alongside your buddies.

METAPHYSICS, GAME RULES AND MISCELLANEOUS

While there's no way to predict everything that's going to come up in your game, it's a fair bet that you're going to use a lot of the Horrors, items and abilities from previous books. To help you use these old rules in the new Wasteland setting, we've gone through them and adapted them to the Underworld. If there are any omissions, the changes we did include should guide your own modifications.

PERFECT STEEL (ALSO KNOWN AS BLACK STEEL)

Lucky characters might just find this stuff.

What is it? The secret of its making is lost. Apparently it wasn't easy to churn out, because no one finds anything cheap made of it. Anything constructed of perfect steel is of excellent craftsmanship and is made for serious purpose. Jewelry wasn't made from this mystery metal, nor were toys or chess pieces or decorations. Perfect steel was used to forge swords that seem to groan a little when drawn, it was used for helmets and breastplates and sturdy chains.

It survived the Maelstrom when relics of iron and stone were pulverized, corroded and scattered to the winds.

Whatever the characters find, they can't change its shape. Perfect steel is resistant both to Horrors and to manipulation. It can't be brought through the Stormwall, either. If taken it out of the Underworld, it ceases to exist.

Weapons of perfect steel inflict aggravated damage. Armor provides an extra level of protection (when compared to armor of the same type made of more typical materials). It does not break, rust, corrode or distort, and Spectres seem to covet the stuff for those very reasons.

Perfect steel items can be a nice quickie payoff for characters. They go through something tough, they find a perfect steel helmet as a reward. It can contribute to memorable clues, since it's one of the few elements of the old Underworld that has real durability. Finally, it can be used as an enigma. Everyone can figure out what the swords and chains are for, but if (as is obvious to anyone who observes long enough and who bothers to make a decent Investigation roll) this stuff is hard to make and rare... What's the point, then, of building a huge ring of it, 10 feet thick and fifty yards across?

BACKGROUNDS IN THE WASTELAND

Many Backgrounds aren't really germane to exploration of the Underworld. A character's fat bank account means nothing beyond the Stormwall, and neither does her detective license. But some Backgrounds are more personal or metaphysical in nature, and those may show a different side in the Wasteland.

ANCHOR

A character with an Anchor can draw on it for Vitality, even in the Wasteland. But there is a catch: Anchors cannot be brought into the Wasteland, so using one for strength means the character has to be overlapping the Anchor where it sits in the material world. Furthermore, any time an Anchor is drawn upon, it costs one extra point of Vitality (like a toll) to pierce the Stormwall. A character who gains three Vitality from an Anchor has decreased it by *four*, with the additional point swept away into the Stormwall. Clearly, smart characters draw in as much as they can with each use.

ARTIFACT

Artifacts operate in the Wasteland just as they do to affect immaterial spirits in the material world. Artifacts that are primarily destructive, however, or that are remembered with fear, hatred or infamy, can cause problems when used on Spectres, or even on other spooks. In the Wasteland, these weapons may (at the Storyteller's discretion) give their targets a point of extra Spite, in addition to whatever damage they inflict.

HAUNT

Haunts serve as refuges (described on p. 40). There's a box of text on the same page that goes into greater detail.

MEMORIAL

Good will goes a long way, but by many practical measures, the Wasteland is a long way. Consequently, Vitality provided by Memorials decreases by one if it has to pass through the Stormwall. A five-point Memorial only gives four Vitality to a ghost in the Wasteland, while a one-point Memorial is too weak to provide a Benefit.

REINCARNATE

As one moves away from the world of life and deeper into the world of death, links with those dead become clearer. In the Wasteland, in addition to calling on the Reincarnate pool as Ability dice, a character can also call on them as Vitality. Mixing the batch is permissible as well — take three dice to add to a Skill, then later gain two Vitality.

But gaining Vitality this way isn't as simple as drawing on a past life's memories. It means the character is actually draining and consuming the remnants of that

deceased soul. Just as Thievery can be used to steal life from foreign spirits, the Reincarnate tie lets ghosts steal domestically. Doing so earns a Spite point for each point of Vitality taken, and every five points of Vitality stolen in this fashion completely burns up the soul-remains of a previous incarnation. In game terms, the Reincarnate Background drops by one. If it drops to 0, you've completely devoured your ancestors. Congratulations.

VITALITY IN THE WASTELAND

Vitality is out of place in the Underworld, as alien as a diver from the surface trying to pierce the depths of an ocean trench. Divers need tanks, lights and special training because the rules are different down below. Characters exploring the lands of death need to understand that they're out of their element as well. The following rules model those changes.

(Spite is quite natural in the Underworld and doesn't change a bit. Just so you know.)

VITALITY LEVELS

High Vitality spirits in the Wasteland are no longer camouflaged from spectral notice. When on the other side of the Stormwall, a highly vital spirit can easily be overlooked or mistaken for human, unless it does something to distinguish itself (like revealing that it can see an unmanifested Spectre at all). Outside the living realms, with no other humans about to hide among, the "protective coloration" is as useful as that of a black moth on a white wall.

SPENDING VITALITY

The Maelstrom, which rattles through the Wasteland, tending to shred anything that it encounters, is largely a pain in the ass. But it does provide one slim silver lining: It so muddies the waters and confuses the situation, that spending lots of Vitality on Horrors no longer automatically catches the attention of nearby Spectres. Some Spectres may still pick up on high Vitality discharges, but they must use extraordinary means to do so (such as Track or a new ability that allows Spectres to home in on Vitality expenditures).

REGAINING VITALITY

All the normal means of regaining Vitality are available to characters in the Wasteland, except when the Stormwall stands between them and their Vitality source. Specifically, spooks in the Wasteland cannot gain Vitality donated by allies on the other side of the Stormwall, they cannot gain Vitality by resolving tethered spirits who are on the other side, and they cannot use Thievery to steal across the Stormwall. In fact, Thievery doesn't work at all in the Wasteland. (The Anchor Background is an exception to this.)

HORRORS AND DEFAULT ABILITIES IN THE WASTELAND

Many of the peculiar powers available to spooks operate differently in a land so sodden and corrupted with deadly energies. Some work better, some don't work as well, some carry unanticipated dangers and some have unexpected Benefits. Specific rules for all of them follow.

Be aware of your characters' ignorance. They have no way of knowing that their powers work differently in this new region, though surely they will find out soon enough. If you want to give them a break, provide some minor problem or challenge early on in their explorations of the Wasteland. Choose something that works differently, but where the change won't be disastrous. Consume is a good one, or some minor use of Incorporeal. Once they get the idea that the rules are different, they may well start exploring the specific differences of their powers. (If they don't, well, they can be surprised later.)

An issue that's addressed for each power and Benefit is the question of whether it can cross the Stormwall and, if so, how. This is a germane issue because spooks in the Wasteland may be aware of activity in connected areas of the physical world. Similarly, spooks in the living world may see events through the Stormwall, if they're watching for them. Some powers can cross over. Some can't. Be aware.

The default difficulty for any Horror or other power to pierce the Stormwall is the local Stormwall rating. If no difficulty is stated in the descriptions later in this chapter, but the character is required to pierce the Stormwall, then the Stormwall rating is the difficulty on the roll.

No Horror or Benefit can cross between the Wasteland into the Labyrinth, unless the character can see the target from where he is. Crossing between those spaces isn't like crossing from the Wasteland to the living world. The Wasteland and the physical realm are coterminous, overlapping — maybe like the way water is coterminous with a drowned ruin. The Wasteland and the Labyrinth are contiguous. They aren't spread through one another, they exist side by side. Some places in the Wasteland are nearer or farther from the Labyrinth, while everywhere in the world is just a last breath away from the Wasteland.

ANATHEMA

Shades of Gray, p. 103

Unlike Helter Skelter, Anathema gets no particular bonus when used in the Underworld. There's no particular

penalty, either. It cannot, however, cross the Stormwall in either direction.

The Stormwall blocks the Benefit as well, but using it in the Wasteland works just like using it anywhere else. Spooks in the Wasteland just can't aid spooks in the living realm, nor vice versa.

BECKON RELIC

Shades of Gray, p. 106

When used in the living world, Beckon Relic is already calling something across the Stormwall. When used in the Underworld, where that barrier isn't a problem, it becomes much easier. The Vitality costs of all Beckon Relic uses drop by one when used on targets in the Underworld. If used in the Wasteland to conjure an artifact from the material world (if the Storyteller allows), the costs are the same as when calling something from the Wasteland to the physical world.

The Benefit is more problematic in the Wasteland. It still allows the beneficiary to improve his own Horrors, but getting plastered with a chunk of Stormwall is more painful outside the vital world. Any character who receives this Benefit takes a level of lethal damage. When used across the Stormwall, the receiver takes the damage regardless of which side he's on.

ARTIFACT VERSUS RELIC

In the history and cosmology of ghosts, the definition of relic and artifact have changed. In *Orpheus*, artifacts are those items on the living side of the Stormwall that seem to possess an expiration date (unless the artifact is summoned through the Background of the same name). Relics, however, are those items found in the Underworld, which don't seem to fade over time. Regardless, both share a commonality, and that's their place of origin. Somewhere in history, both relics and artifacts were made by the living and, upon their destruction, found their way into the hereafter.

The two concepts of note in this matter, however, are as follows: 1.) Artifacts are generally newer than relics since many appeared among the living because of the Stormwall's emergence (which prevented most things from crossing over). Therefore, relics are older, with some pieces dating back decades and even centuries. 2.) Some artifacts are solid to the living because the item in question doesn't need to be destroyed to have a spiritual presence (though usually only spooks know how to tap them, but must manifest to use or carry them).

BEDLAM

Shades of Gray, p. 94

Bedlam works the same in the Wasteland as it does in the living lands. Players whose characters wish to push their will across the Stormwall have to make a Willpower roll, regardless of which direction they're crossing.

The Benefit works normally in the Wasteland, but it cannot cross the Stormwall in either direction.

BROADBAND GHOST

Shades of Gray, p. 99

This Horror gets much less use in the Wasteland because the objects and phenomena there are not real in the same way items in the physical world are. Therefore, a computer in the Wasteland is not a "real" computer. If it runs, it's powered by Vitality or gauze, not electricity. Relic computers, power systems and the like are, therefore, immune to Broadband Ghost. Similarly, Wasteland fires aren't really "fire" in the traditional sense. They can't be inhabited with Broadband Ghost.

When used to simply transform into fire or electricity, this Horror works the same in the Wasteland as it does elsewhere.

Since Broadband Ghost involves a physical overlap and possession of a bonfire or TV or whatever, using it through the Stormwall isn't really feasible. One unusual side benefit to Broadband Ghost in the Underworld, however, is that characters can use it to "ride" the Stormwall, allowing it to function like half-strength Storm-Wending. (The character must spend twice as much Vitality to elicit the same effects of Storm-Wending, but he cannot transport himself through the Stormwall.) The drawback is that the character suffers damage from the Storm Force rating.

As for the Benefit, it works normally in the Wasteland. Players who wish to aid characters on the other side of the Stormwall, however, have to make Willpower rolls to get the juice through it.

CLAY JARS

P. 70

Since there are no bodies in the Wasteland, Clay Jars can't whip up zombies in the Wasteland. It can work cross the Stormwall, but doing so causes the Vitality costs to *double*.

CONGEAL

Orpheus, p. 108

Congeval works normally in the Wasteland, except that one's gauze is less forgiving in the Underworld. If the player spends three or more points of Vitality to create an item, the character suffers one level of bashing damage. This damage cannot be soaked.

Congéal's powers cannot cross the Stormwall in either direction.

The Congéal Benefit cannot cross the Stormwall either. Furthermore, using it in the Wasteland is hard on the gauze: Each use causes the donor a level of bashing damage.

CONTAMINATE

Shades of Gray, p. 105

Contaminate works the same on spirits in the Wasteland as it does against disembodied targets in physical reality. It can reach across the Stormwall from either direction, but to do so, the player must make a Stamina + Medicine roll.

The Benefit operates normally, unless either of the characters using it is (for some reason) tied into the hive-mind. If that's the case, the other character participating gets hooked in as well, for a period ranging from a scene to a full day. Furthermore, since the characters using the Benefit must touch, this can't be used across the Stormwall unless a character is actually *crossing* the Stormwall.

CONSUME

P. 84

When used in the Wasteland to harm a Wasteland target, Consume inflicts an extra two dice of damage. Using Consume to strengthen in the land of destruction and decay is not quite so simple: The energies used are themselves so wild and unpredictable that harnessing them causes the Wisp's gauze to shake and shudder. For every two points of Vitality spent, the Wisp suffers a level of bashing damage. (This damage can be soaked, however.)

It's possible to use Consume across the Stormwall. Passing in either direction requires a successful Dexterity + Crafts roll to penetrate the local Stormwall rating. If the Horror originates in the living lands, it works normally and causes no extra damage (either to the target or the originator). If used across the Stormwall from the Wasteland, it has the problems (or Benefits) described above.

The Benefit from Consume works normally in the Wasteland. Crossing through the Stormwall with it requires a successful Dexterity + Crafts roll, but carries no other Benefits or penalties.

DEAD-EYES

Orpheus, p. 82

This power does not cross the Stormwall in either direction. In the physical realm, a spook can see spirits around him — but only as long as they're *in* the physical realm. Once they cross over into the Wasteland, they're obscured. Similarly, while spooks in the Wasteland can

look into the life lands, that perception is imperfect and vague. Dead-Eyes doesn't help. If something (or someone) in the physical world is not visible there, it (or he, or she) isn't visible from the Wasteland either.

It can still be used to gauge the Vitality of other spooks in the Wasteland but only (of course) by viewers who are in the Wasteland themselves. The mechanics for this work normally.

DETECT NATURE GROUP

Orpheus, p. 148

This power cannot cross the Stormwall. It works normally between entities on the same side of the Stormwall.

DOPPELGÄNGER

P. 82

Doppelganger only works on flesh. In the Wasteland, there is none. Therefore, Doppelganger cannot work in the Wasteland.

The Benefit, on the other hand, works just like whatever *other* Benefit it's duplicating.

DRAW FORTH

P. 78

Draw Forth can cross the Stormwall in either way, but only if the Phantasm succeeds at a Manipulation + Intimidation roll.

Using it on Spectres in the Wasteland is not a terribly safe prospect, however. It pulls out their deep fears and actualizes them, true, but something that can scare a Spectre isn't going to just evaporate when its time's up. If a Spectre's drawn forth nemesis survives the fight, it turns its attention on anyone else in the vicinity.

The Benefit of Draw Forth works normally when a Wasteland spook boosts a Wasteland friend, but to cross the Stormwall requires a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll.

DREAM-WALKER

Shades of Gray, p. 101

Dream-Walker does not work in the Wasteland, except in a very specific capacity. No roll is required to reach through the Stormwall to enter the dreams of a sleeper in the physical world — just the normal effort. If used to travel, the Dream-Walker (and any guests) emerge in the physical world. So, this Horror works as a great shortcut out of the Wasteland, but it's a one-way trip).

The Benefit, once established, works without problems in the Wasteland or across the Stormwall. Establishing the Benefit's link, however, has to be done by touch, so everyone involved must be on the same side of the Stormwall.

ECSTATIC CRUSADE

The Orphan-Grinders, p. 44

Works as well in the Underworld as it does in the realms of life, with the caveat that it may have lower yields. Blips and drones tend to get shredded by Spectres, storms or other misfortunes pretty quick in the Wasteland, so it's probably slim pickings.

The call can be pitched to go through the Stormwall loud and clear (if the caller is even aware that the Stormwall and the Wasteland exist). The summoned spirits will blindly follow the beckon through the Stormwall, which means that they take damage appropriate to the local rating.

ESCHER'S CORKSCREW

The Orphan-Grinders, p. 37

As with Inhabit, it's easier to do (all Vitality costs drop by one) but can't cross the Stormwall at all.

FAMILIAR

P. 66

Since this Horror broadcasts a call, it's dangerous to use in the Wasteland. One never knows what's going to show up. It's possible to get animals that have been extinct for centuries, or strange spirits that clearly don't belong anywhere in the natural world. Worst of all, this power *can* be detected by Spectres if three or more Vitality points are spent on it — and some Spectres may choose to show up in the shape of the summoned animal ghost.

The risk of getting something weird or spectral can be offset by calling ghosts through the Stormwall, but this requires a Manipulation + Animal Ken roll.

The Benefit may have problems in the Wasteland or it may not, depending on circumstances. When linking two other Benefits, the spook using the Familiar Benefit has to cope with a problem associated with either (1) one of the two Benefits he's linking or (2) the problem the Horror being aided has. If none of the powers involved have problems in the Wasteland, this Benefit doesn't either. If more than one element has problems, the person using the Familiar Benefit gets to pick which problem (of any relevant problems) he "borrows."

Example: *Leila is using Witch's Nimbus to destroy a Spectre. Amy is using the Benefit from Helter Skelter to add two Vitality to Leila's attack. Stew is using the Congeal Benefit to add four levels of damage, and Lance is using the Familiar Benefit to allow Stew and Amy to both tag along.*

If they're all on the same side of the Stormwall, Witch's Nimbus has no particular penalty, Helter Skelter's Benefit adds one Vitality instead of two, and Congeal's Benefit causes its donor to take a level of bashing damage. The only problem that really seems to apply is the Congeal problem, so Lance takes a level of bashing damage, just like Stew.

Now, suppose Leila was in the physical world. Stew would have to be there too, since Congeal's Benefit can't cross the Stormwall. If Lance and Amy are both in the Wasteland, Lance can help without penalty. Her Benefit's penalty doesn't really work for Familiar, so Lance gets a free ride in that situation.

FLESH FLUX

P. 64

Since Flesh Flux alters only the individual using it, the Stormwall does not interfere with it. It works in the Wasteland just as it does elsewhere.

The Benefit can be extended through the Stormwall, in either direction, but doing so requires the expenditure of an *extra* Vitality point (raising the total cost to two points) and a successful Willpower roll. If the roll to penetrate the Stormwall fails, only one of the two Vitality points is lost.

FOREBODE

Orpheus, p. 101

Making predictions in the Wasteland works the same as making them in the real world. But when one tries to look into the past there, the power can become dangerous. The difficulty of past-sensing rises to 7, and if the Banshee fails her roll, she sees... something else. It could be a vision from any point of the past, from any location in human history. But it's definitely something that made a deep impact on someone. She could see a murder, a child's birth, a refused marriage proposal or the moment someone realized he was in love with his best friend's wife. It could be beautiful or awful, but it won't be boring... and it won't be germane to the question she asked.

The Benefit for Forebode cannot cross the Stormwall, and when used in the Wasteland it is less effective. Instead of lowering a difficulty by two, it only lowers it by one.

HELLION

The Orphan-Grinders, p. 84

Summoning a Hellion is easier in the Wasteland, so all Vitality costs drop by one. But the local Spectres definitely get a fix on the caller's location, and since they're probably Hellion-mounted, they are likely to get there just as quickly as the mount does.

It's impossible to get around this by "summoning a Hellion across the Stormwall from the living lands" because there are no untended Hellions there. Summoning one from the Wasteland to the living world is the default of this ability, so that's all normal.

HELL ON WHEELS

P. 74

This works just fine in the Wasteland, but the extra material used to form a huge engine-body is tainted by its

proximity to the Maelstrom. For every three Vitality points spent on Hell on Wheels in the Wasteland, the Haunter gains a point of Spite if the player fails to roll any successes using a number of dice equal to the character's Spite Rating (difficulty 6).

The Hell on Wheels Benefit cannot cross the Stormwall, but otherwise works the same in the material world and the Wasteland.

HELTER SKELTER

Orpheus, p. 106

Objects in the Wasteland are really just reflections or memories of once-real items. Therefore, they are easier to manipulate by those who bring Vitality to bear. When Helter Skelter is used on a Wasteland object by a Wasteland spook, the object gains two automatic (free) points of Dexterity, instead of just one.

Reaching across the Stormwall into the Wasteland mitigates this advantage. Spooks who wish to manipulate relic objects in the Wasteland from the material world must make a Strength + Athletics roll to get across. Going the other direction — trying to move real objects from the Wasteland — requires the same roll. Furthermore, physical items seized from the Wasteland do not get the free (or automatic) point of Strength, so at least one Vitality point must be spent to make them move at all.

The Helter Skelter Benefit gets drained by the Wasteland's ambient malaise. Instead of spending one Vitality point to increase someone's Horror by two, the exchange is one for one when it's activated in the Wasteland. This poorer exchange rate persists whether one is helping someone else in the Wasteland, or helping someone in the living world. When spooks in the living world try to use the Benefit to help those in the Wasteland, it works normally — they pay one Vitality and the spook receiving it gets a bonus of two.

INCORPOREAL AND INVISIBLE

Orpheus, p. 82

Spirits in the Wasteland are completely unseen by people (living, dead or other) in the physical world. Furthermore, they are (barring the use of Horrors or other paranormal abilities) unable to physically act on or be acted upon by physical reality.

To other Wasteland entities, spooks look and feel real. A projector in the Wasteland can't go incorporeal to pass through a barrier, as that barrier is, in one sense, less real than she is. Similarly, she can't turn invisible to other spooks who are, like her, on the Stormwall's dead side.

INHABIT

Orpheus, p. 103

Possessing items and objects on the other side of the Stormwall is an interesting prospect, because those items have no physical existence to influence. While one might think that this would make inhabitation impossible, it actually makes it *easier* — controlling a memory with the pure force of living Vitality turns out to be easier than controlling an actual object. Therefore, when a spook in the Wasteland spends Vitality to control a Wasteland relic, the cost is one less than it would be to control a real object of that type in the material world. Therefore, small objects that would normally cost one Vitality to control can be inhabited for free, while a huge Wasteland mansion would cost only four.

While Inhabit is easier for Wasteland spooks controlling Wasteland objects, it cannot cross the Stormwall to affect objects in the material world. Spooks on the physical side of the divide can attempt to inhabit Wasteland objects, but the Stormwall offsets the usual advantage. Normal costs must be paid, exactly as if one is trying to use the Horror on a real object. Furthermore, the player must make a Willpower roll. If the roll succeeds, the character crosses into the Wastelands via the object. When he leaves it, he's still in the Wasteland.

The Benefit from Inhabit can be applied normally to Horrors worked on the same side of the Stormwall. It cannot be applied to Horrors that cross the Stormwall, in either direction, nor can it be applied across the Stormwall to Horrors being operated on the other side.

JUGGERNAUT

Orpheus, p. 111

Juggernaut is difficult to use in the Wasteland. The costs for all Juggernaut effects increase by one.

The Benefit works normally when both donor and receiver are in the Wasteland. To cross the Stormwall in either direction requires a Stamina + Empathy roll.

LEGION-BORN

P. 68

Just like Flesh Flux, this Horror does not use different rules in the Wasteland.

The Benefit of Legion-Born works just like the Benefit for Familiar, only instead of combining two Benefits, it combines four. The Legion-Born donor chooses which one of the applicable problems afflicts her.

MANIFEST

Orpheus, p. 82

The ability to manifest fully is a powerful advantage in the Wasteland. Any character who has four or more base Vitality, and who spends two Vitality to manifest, seems more solid and real than other Wasteland entities. This means she gains four extra soak dice against bashing damage, and two extra soak dice against lethal.

MISERY LOVES COMPANY

Orpheus, p. 149

This power does not work at all in the Wasteland. If someone in the physical world can somehow perceive a Wasteland spirit, he can attempt to use this power, but only if the player first makes a Willpower roll. (Of course, a successful penetration won't do him much good unless the spirit he's harmonizing with can hear or sense *him*, too.)

MOB RULE

The Orphan-Grinders, p. 42

Only works on living people, and therefore has no application in the Wasteland. Mob Rule can function across the Stormwall, but the messages are garbled by the Maelstrom winds. Players of anyone involved in creating the Mob Rule must roll Charisma + Leadership to pierce the Stormwall, and any "puppets" with Willpower scores less than the Stormwall gain a derangement from the experience.

NIGHTMARISH GESTALT

P. 75

Nightmarish Gestalt cannot cross the Stormwall in any way. It can be used to suck up the gauze of nearby Wasteland entities, but inhaling a Spectre is not a healthy option. Each Spectre added to the gestalt adds a point of Spite to the absorbing Marrow.

The Benefit works normally between individuals on the same side of the Stormwall. To loan a power *through* the Stormwall requires a Willpower roll.

OBIVION'S HUSH

The Orphan-Grinders, p. 82

Watch out. The Spectral hive-mind is much stronger and clearer in the Wasteland, so using Oblivion's Husk is far more dangerous. It is impossible to use it to mask one's presence from Spectres when in the Wasteland (or worse, the Labyrinth). Manifesting Spectral arms and armor works as it does elsewhere, while attempting to learn about regional Spectres is actually *easier*. When attempting to use the spy function, the Vitality costs decrease by one. The down side is that when spying, the Orphan Grinder's player must make a Willpower roll to avoid having the character's every

thought and feeling broadcast into the hive-mind. The difficulty of this roll is 6 in the Wasteland, 8 in the Labyrinth and 9 inside a Memory Tower or in the presence of a Malfean.

If the Orphan-Grinder does mess up and broadcast, he or she instantly knows it by immediately feeling the reaction to minds in the hive. It's almost never a positive reaction.

PANDEMONIUM

Shades of Gray, p. 98

This works normally in the Wasteland, but to cross the Stormwall in either direction the Banshee requires a Perception + Intuition roll.

The Benefit works normally in the Wasteland, but it cannot cross the Stormwall either.

PUPPETRY

Orpheus, p. 109

Puppetry cannot be used in or from the Wasteland. Its only function is to take over bodies, and in the Wasteland, there are none. To take over a body in the Skinlands, the user must be in the Skinlands.

The Benefit of Puppetry, however, works just the same in the Wasteland—as long as the target is also in the Wasteland. The Benefit can be projected across the Stormwall, but to do so, the player must either succeed in a Wits + Alertness roll or spend an additional Vitality point.

PUPPET STORM

The Orphan-Grinders, p. 40

When used on incorporeal targets in the Wasteland, Puppet Storm works just as it does when targeting spooks in the physical world. It cannot cross the Stormwall in either direction, however.

REND AND RAKE

P. 80

Rend and Rake works normally when used on objects or individuals who are on the same side of the Stormwall as the Horror's originator. It cannot cross the Stormwall, but it can be used to *breach* it. If the player rolls Strength + Athletics (difficulty 6) and gets more successes than the Stormwall's local rating, the barrier is breached. This may be done in an extended roll, but the Poltergeist suffers damage appropriate to the Storm Force each turn he tears into the Stormwall. The Poltergeist and anyone around him can climb through the hole, crossing between living lands and Wasteland. The hole is a temporary one, of course, lasting only the duration of the scene. (Note that characters who go through the hole still take damage from the Stormwall.)

The Rend and Rake Benefit cannot cross the Stormwall either. When used in the Wasteland to



enhance an attack, the Poltergeist has a choice. He can either use his power to resist the ambient turmoil and destruction (in which case it adds only six dice to a damage pool) or he can infuse his Benefit with the roiling energy of the Maelstrom itself. Doing so raises the damage bonus to 10 dice, but at the cost of gaining two points of Spite.

SALVATION

P. 77

Salvation works normally in the Wasteland, though its effects cannot cross the Stormwall in either direction. Similarly, the Benefit works normally on either side of the Stormwall, but not across it.

SANDMAN

Shades of Gray, p. 95

Since this only works on sleeping people, and ghosts never sleep, it gets limited use in the Wasteland. Spectres in the Wasteland can be put to sleep with Sandman, but the loud-and-clear local hive-mind broadcasts wake them after a single turn. It works normally on spooks.

It cannot be used across the Stormwall.

The Benefit works normally in the Wasteland but cannot cross the Stormwall.

SCREAMING NOTHING

P. 72

This powerful Horror can be used without penalty to penetrate the Stormwall. Therefore, a Wasteland Banshee can use it normally to create its effects in the Wasteland or to create effects in the material world, while a Banshee in the physical realm can use it to create effects in the Wasteland without any particular trouble.

The Benefit of Screaming Nothing ignores the Stormwall as well. It works equally well on either side of and across the Stormwall.

SENSE LIFELINE

Orpheus, p. 150

A spook in the Wasteland can use this normally on other Wasteland spooks. Using it across the Stormwall requires a Perception + Empathy roll. This works in either direction: If a spook in the living world wants to dope out the tethers of a spirit in the Wasteland, he has to pierce the Stormwall.

SEVER THE STRAND

Orpheus, p. 150

This works normally between two Wasteland entities, just as it does for two spooks in the physical world. It cannot be used across the Stormwall: If a spook wants to help someone go to his final resting place, he has to be with him when he goes.

SONG OF THE HIVE

The Orphan-Grinders, p. 121

This power functions as intended, given the fact that it's the Horror closest to the Spectres in nature.

STAINS

Orpheus, p. 195 & Shadow Games, p. 116

Stains behave differently on the other side of the Stormwall. When manifested, they remain active until "turned off" — and sometimes not even then. Once Spite is voluntarily tapped to use a Stain, that Stain remains until a successful Willpower roll (difficulty of the character's Spite rating) turns it off. While spooks in the Wasteland tend to have strong stomachs for dealing with very weird-looking individuals, the appearance of an active Stain still elicits a difficulty penalty to all Social rolls by one for each active Stain when dealing with individuals whose Vitality is greater than their Spite. (High-Spite individuals are likely to respond favorably to the heavily Stained.)

STORM-GLOAM

The Orphan-Grinders, p. 35

This works the same on both sides of the Stormwall. It can be used across the Stormwall from either side, but doing so means that *both* sides are subjected to similar effects. Which may, of course, be exactly what you want.

STORM-WENDING

Orpheus, p. 114

Storm-Wending works similarly in the Wasteland, but it takes a lot more effort because of the Maelstrom. All Vitality costs rise by one for Storm-Wenders in the Wasteland.

Storm-Wending can be used to enter and exit the Wasteland, but doing so requires a Perception + Intuition roll. Crossing over in this fashion costs two Vitality to enter the Wasteland and four to leave it. Furthermore, every success on a Stamina + Athletics roll (difficulty 6) decreases the damage from the Stormwall by one stage. The difficulty of this roll rises by one for every other character brought along, to a maximum of 9.

The Storm-Wending Benefit, however, is radically different outside the material world. Instead of providing insight, it infuses a Horror with the destructive power of chaos and Oblivion. When a point of Vitality is sent through Storm-Wending in the Wasteland, the target of the enhanced Horror takes damage — even if the Horror isn't an attack. Specifically, it adds two dice of lethal damage.

If one uses it to enhance Unearthly Repose (for example) the player who's spook is trying to beckon rolls

two dice of lethal damage. On the other hand, if used to enhance Witch's Nimbus, anyone who gets hit by the nimbus suffers two additional lethal damage dice.

Storm-Wending's Benefit can be sent across the Stormwall, in either direction, but it requires a successful Perception + Alertness roll.

TERRIBLE MADNESS

The Orphan-Grinders, p. 38

Terrible Madness works the same on both sides of the Stormwall. It can penetrate the Stormwall, but only if the players make a Stamina + Intimidation roll. To make this roll, use the highest single Stamina score and the highest single Intimidation rating possessed by any of the participants.

THIEVERY

Orpheus, p. 151

Thievery cannot be used on targets in the Wasteland. Nor can it be used by attackers in the Wasteland. It works only in the Skinlands.

UNEARTHLY REPOSE

Orpheus, p. 113

The normal uses of Unearthly Repose — beckoning or charisma increase — work normally on Wasteland targets if the Wisp is in the Wasteland. But a Wisp in the living realm cannot affect anyone on the other side of the Stormwall, and vice versa.

The Benefit can cross the Stormwall both ways, but if it's going to do so, (1) the Wisp must be aware of the person he's going to boost (of course), and (2) the player must roll Charisma + Empathy to pierce the Stormwall.

VECTOR

The Orphan-Grinders, p. 85

Vector works in the Wasteland as it does elsewhere. Its powers cannot cross the Stormwall, however, no matter how tightly linked the two characters are.

WAIL

Orpheus, p. 100

Using Wail in the material world affects targets only in the material world.

A spook using Wail in the Wasteland cannot use its higher-Vitality effects on real world objects and people. Wail's emotion-altering effects *can* be used through the Stormwall to affect people in the physical world, but it's not easy. When attempting to influence emotions through the Stormwall, a Banshee operates as if the player had spent *two fewer Vitality*. That is, if she spends two Vitality, the character can soothe targets, but that's all. If she spends four Vitality from the Wasteland, it

works like spending two Vitality to use the power in the living world.

A Banshee in the Wasteland can use Wail against other Wasteland targets. In this case, the Horror works as usual.

The Wail Benefit works normally when used on someone who's on the same side of the Stormwall. The Benefit can be applied by a Wasteland Banshee to a compatriot in the living lands, but to do so, the player must roll Manipulation + Empathy. A Banshee in the material world cannot use the Wail Benefit to help a friend in the Wasteland.

WITCH'S NIMBUS

Orpheus, p. 104

Wasteland entities can use this power only on others in the Wasteland. Spooks in the living lands can use it only to harm those in the Skinlands. Witch's Nimbus cannot cross the Stormwall.

The Benefit operates normally between individuals on the same side of the Stormwall. Spooks in the physical world cannot use the Benefit to aid people on the other side of the Stormwall. Wasteland spooks can use the Witch's Nimbus Benefit to extend the duration of spooks operating in the living world, but to do so the player must roll Dexterity + Athletics.



CHAPTER THREE: THE UNEARTHED PLAYERS GUIDE



Eva: I will take you places you've never been.
I will show you things that you have never seen,
and I will see the life run out of you.

—Ghost Story

It's a good thing I don't believe in God,
cause this place would just fuck me up good!

—Ben Cotton



Welcome, intrepid reader, to the Circus of Horrors that is Chapter Three. Herein, you will find an unholy host of new and engaging mental toys to make your foray into the uncertain world of **Orpheus** a little more delicious, twisted and empowering. Revel now in the morbid mysteries contained in...The Unearthed Players Guide!

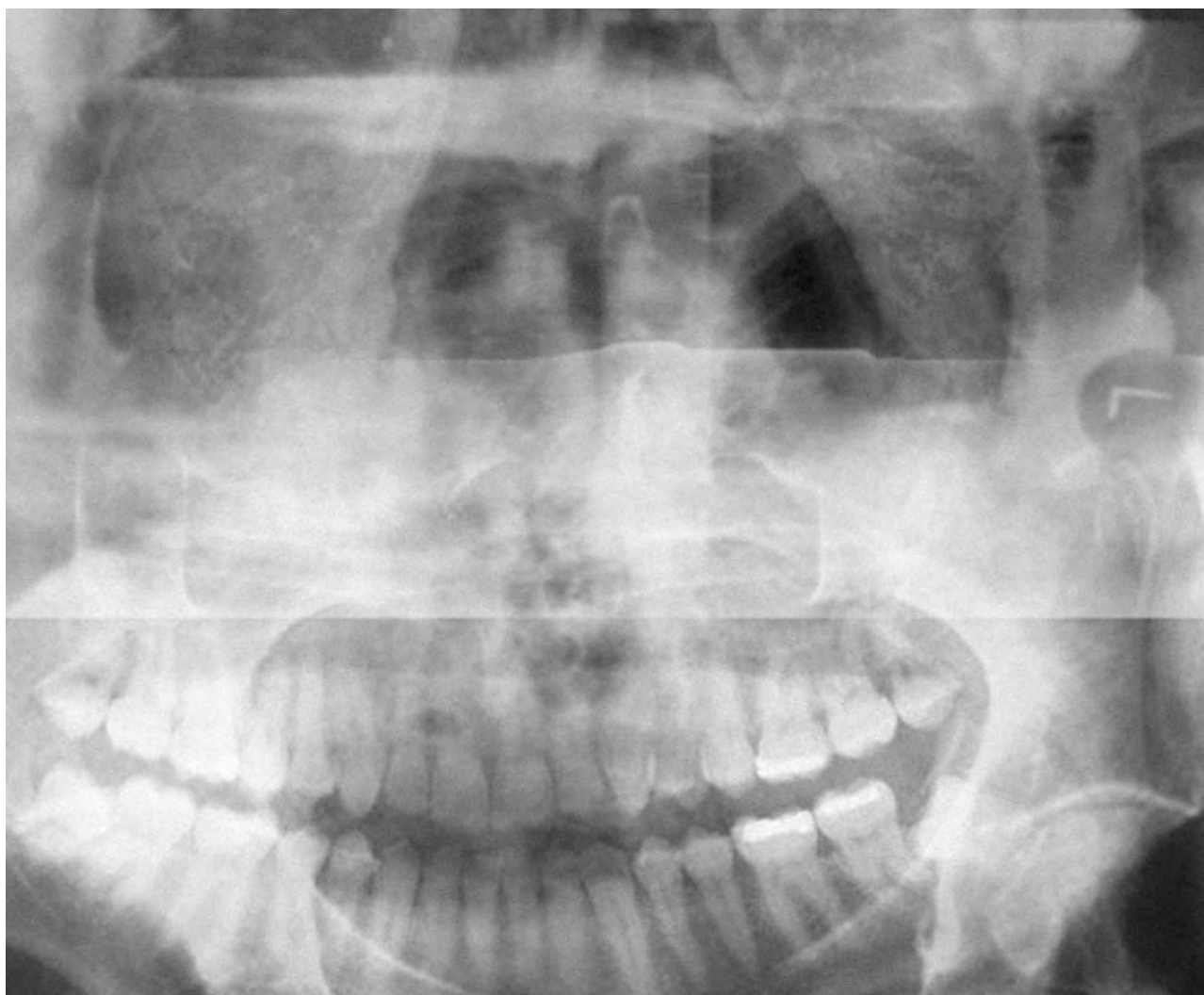
To begin our demented delve, we begin by presenting the last of the Shades, the mysterious Marrow. The Marrow is a shifty and sometimes feral Shade, capable of taking on entirely new shapes, including those of dangerous beasts. More frighteningly, under the right circumstances the Marrows' mastery of flesh also allows them to control (re-animate, technically speaking) the flesh of the dead and raise packs of twisted zombies to do their bidding, whatever it may be.

But wait, intrepid reader, there's more! With **End Game**, **Orpheus** reaches its tenebrous culmination and opens up an entirely new corner of the world for players to brave (see Chapter Two for the details). This new

world contains deadly new threats, and to combat these new threats, the characters will need new, improved abilities. Luckily for you, this chapter contains new Horrors aplenty. Included herein you will find the pinnacle of ghostly power, those highly sought-after and remarkably potent Fourth-Tier Horrors.

And finally, intrepid reader, if the Fourth-Tier Horrors alone aren't worth the price of admission, we have one last delectable revelation with which to hold you enrapt. Introduced in this book for the first time ever, you will discover the raw power of Vitality Emblems — physical manifestations of Vitality available only to those with Vitality ratings of six or more! Be warned, however, intrepid reader, that characters cannot learn the secrets of Vitality Emblems without risking the dangers of the Underworld. So, lest the other players beat you to the goodies, we leave you to your research.

Without further ado, we present the newest Shade, the protean (and slightly bestial) Marrow.



MARROW

Do I look different from last time? Get used to it. I'll look different the next time I come for you, and the time after that, and, if necessary, the time after that, and, eventually, you'll have a brief moment of inattention, and I will slip through and take you down. Congratulations, paranoia is now your new best friend.

Most people have something about themselves they want to change; it is only a small but fortunate minority that can adapt and mingle comfortably in an array of social settings. Many Marrows come from the ranks of those fortunate few. They are social chameleons in life, adopting and dropping mannerisms and styles they find interesting (even though others might call them affected for doing so). At one end of the Marrow spectrum are those who seek a personal identity by experimenting with whatever fad is popular. They're mortal chimeras, constantly changing hair colors, styles and attitudes to fit whatever new idea inspires them. They may not like who they are *under* their skin, but they can modify their outward appearance with surprising ease.

At the other end of the spectrum of those who become Marrows are those who simply revel in the seemingly infinite range of human diversity and want to take advantage of as much of it as possible. They associate with people from a wide range of backgrounds, they're the first to sample the new foreign restaurant and they are always on the hunt for something new and interesting that they haven't seen before.

The key phrase for the Marrow is "*I change.*" Change is the *raison d'être* of most of those who become Marrows, just as boredom is their bane. In fact, Marrows often define themselves in terms of their ability to change and adapt to new situations, new attitudes and new shapes. They can take one perspective on an issue and firmly espouse it — then change their minds entirely five minutes later. Those around them may find them cute, or they may find the Marrow's inability (or refusal) to take one position and stick with it to be maddening. Some people think of them as childlike; others accuse them of being unable to commit. Still others praise them for their ability to see both sides of an issue, to adapt to new situations (and new technology) quickly, and to assume any role necessary to attain their goals.

In less enlightened individuals, the Marrow's vicissitude can manifest as an insanely short attention span or a frustrating inability to focus on a single subject. Some Marrows, those lacking in self-control, may come across as flighty, easily distracted or as possessing multiple personalities. Other Marrows are simply very quick on the uptake and master topics

quickly, finding themselves ready to move on to the next challenge while others are still trying to master the last.

Those who become Marrows often have a strong connection to animals and may feel that only beasts can really understand them. In truth, animals may well be the only ones who can adjust to the Marrow's eternal love affair with change and variety without getting frustrated or developing expectations of the individual only to have them dashed by a sudden change of plans.

By themselves, Marrows tend to be actors, con artists, thrill-seekers, world-travelers or televangelists. They are charming, curious and unusually energetic. Communication skills are often accented in such individuals. In a crucible Marrows frequently wind up as diplomats, idea people or in leadership positions.

In death, Marrows find a fluidity in their form that they could only aspire to in the flesh. Flesh can only bend and change so much, while gauze can be made to flow with a remarkable ease after a little practice. It may not even require all that much practice. The gauze of a Marrow may have a slight tendency to flow just a little if the Marrow is agitated: an eyebrow might wander across the forehead, a finger may

float to the back of its hand, for example. Alternatively, if the Marrow has recently manifested as an animal, one of her features (an eye, an ear, an unusual tuft of fur) might momentarily become that of the creature she just imitated. This is minor (if it happens at all), and the moment the Marrow notices it or focuses her attention on something again, the shifting bits return immediately to their regular position and appearance.

Marrow Horrors reflect their highly flexible nature. Many who become Marrows in death think of their extreme variability as a powerful technique for dealing with the world — death just makes it that much easier.

It is due to their great ability at adapting that Marrows were only recently identified as a separate Shade.

The vitality and variability of the Marrow shines through clearly in their manifesting forms. Even without expending any Vitality, Marrows can manifest solidly in the physical world, albeit in the shape of a small animal. With experience, Marrows can manifest as anyone and take on a vast array of other, less human forms.



Horrors: *Flesh-Flux*, Familiar, Legion Born, Nightmarish Gestalt

Manifestation Forms: For zero Vitality points a Marrow can manifest in the physical world as a small animal. The Marrow may not take the form of any creature larger than a large rat. Crows, cats, rats, large spiders, dragonflies, bats and the like are all possible shapes the Marrow can assume. A character trying to talk in this form is in for a challenge, because other animals (parrots, for example) talk via a very different process. For every word the character wants to speak when manifested in this form, her player must roll Intelligence + Expression (difficulty 8). A botch indicates that the word comes out horribly wrong, with, for example, “love” coming out as “loathe,” or otherwise resulting in a communications mishap.

For one Vitality point the character has the option of appearing as a larger animal or as a swarm of smaller animals (as per Legion Born’s swarm rules for a one-Vitality expenditure). If the character chooses to appear as a larger animal, she can appear physically as any animal up to roughly the size of a moose, therefore the character could be a deer, a large dog, a dolphin or other similar animal. Manifesting as a swarm of creatures, on the other hand, lets the character appear as a swarm of rats, a cloud of wasps, a school of fish or other similar phenomenon. All creatures in the swarm need to be doing roughly the same thing: flying, digging, attacking, et cetera.

For two Vitality points the Marrow manifests as fully human with her normal stats. Those looking at the Marrow closely [Perception + Alertness (difficulty 8)] may notice that her skin doesn’t do a very good job of staying in place. It seems to shift and, if the Marrow is agitated, the viewer may even notice a roiling or swirling pattern beneath the skin.

Base Vitality: 6 **Base Spite:** 2 **Base Willpower:** 4

Recommended Natures: Conformist, Curmudgeon, Fanatic, Follower, Scientist, Survivor (though, Avante-Garde, Explorer & Thrill-Seeker are equally viable).

ANNIE HARPER

Since the fall of Orpheus, Annie has been at the forefront of the events taking place on the other side. Her flight from the NSA and the subsequent encounters with Spectres have kept her occupied, though she has also found her personal life unusually full as well as she has begun making acquaintances among the spooks she meets. Ironically, it took dying to get Annie to focus on who she really is, and she has found, much to her surprise, that she rather enjoys her new existence. Although she has little time for introspection, Annie has come to realize a great deal about herself that she never knew in her breathing days — not the least of which is that she is quite attracted to women. Sexuality is an odd thing among spooks, and she has had only one affair, but Annie found that she values her connections with women more than she ever valued those she had with men. And in the chaos that reigns in the Underworld, no one seems to care one way or the other.

Regrettably, Annie’s one romance was put on hold when she and her crucible ventured into the Underworld through the wound left in the Stormwall by a disappearing hive. The anthropologist and scholarly sides of Annie have aggressively come to the fore since entering the Underworld, and her curiosity is almost palpable. Annie has only recently met another spook named Paul Portman with Horrors similar to hers; he referred to their type as “Marrows,” a term Annie has since adopted. As one of the more powerful Marrows around, Annie has learned all four Horrors native to her Shade. Furthermore, as a spook with unusually high Vitality, Annie has already mastered three of the four Vitality Emblems just in the short time since entering the Underworld.

Annie has now spent a number of weeks in or near the Underworld watching the Spectre wars unfold in front of her, and she’s now ready to return to the relative safety of the Shadowlands, although there are still questions that plague her about the nature of Spectral culture.



MARROW HORRORS

Dealing primarily with the Marrow's manipulation of her own substance and shape, Marrow Horrors span the gamut from simple and useful to complex and horrifying. With experience and learning, the Marrow can use her Horrors to become truly terrifying.

FLESH-FLUX

The Jason saw Annie and smiled. Fate was kind, providing him with a free kill that he didn't need to find on his own. With a hushed click, the Jason's switchblade snapped out, sharp and eager.

"I don't know who you think I am," said Annie, "but I'm not Shelly." She took the form of the young nurse he'd killed a week before. "And I'm not Amanda." She became the cosmetologist he'd killed two weeks ago. "And I'm definitely not Simon." She took the form of the twelve-year old that the killer had murdered the night before.

"Good," said the psychopath, smiling. "I hate repeating myself."

And as Annie took a larger and more bestial form, she growled through bared and dripping fangs. "At the moment, creep, that's the least of your worries."

Most ghosts appear (and manifest to the living) according to how they appeared in life, occasionally with some minor alterations caused by inaccurate self-image or sense of identity. Marrows, however, can alter their appearances to an extreme degree, either complementing their ability to manifest, or through use of this Horror alone. This ability allows the Marrow to assume a near-unlimited range of shapes, starting out with relatively simple changes, such as changing gender, size, age and even race. The more Vitality the Marrow invests in this Horror, the greater the variety of shapes she can take. With enough Vitality, the character can mimic the natural weapons of animals or take on additional Stains to help her in combat. Taking on a new form feels slightly invigorating, as if the character were stretching after a long period of quiescence.

Flesh-Flux is among the few abilities that allow Stains to manifest as well. Therefore, when a spook uses Flesh-Flux while manifesting, he can affect the living through whichever Stains are active. Furthermore, the effects of this Horror remain active for one scene, at which point the changes vanish.

Skinriders cannot take this Horror.

System: Gauze is not flesh, so it is more permeable than most spooks allow. Those who learn Flesh-Flux understand the nuances of their ghostly plasm, enough to affect it accordingly. At the base expenditure of zero

Vitality, the Marrow can implement any minor cosmetic change necessary, such as altering eye and hair color, nose and mouth shape, et cetera. The alterations are minor enough that people may still recognize the character with a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 7). Otherwise, the character can change enough to look slightly different, though he can't alter body mass or height. Thereafter, any Vitality spent to alter one's form and shape elicits a potentially wide range of protean-like abilities. In effect, this Horror is a grab bag of potential uses. The changes and their costs are as follows (with the character capable of manifesting with all effects):

Altering Attributes: It's only logical that some modifications may elicit specific trait augmentations, like improved Alertness or Appearance. By spending two Vitality, the character can increase one Ability or Attribute by one dot (pending Storyteller approval). The character may not improve any single trait by more than two dots, however, and the improvement must make sense in relation to the change. Adding more Strength because the character adds mass to his body is fine. Trying to improve one's Occult Knowledge with the rationale "Owls are smart and mythological figures, so I change into an owl" is too dumb for words. Finally, the character must possess a trait to improve it.

Alter Others: At a cost of five Vitality, the character can alter a *willing* target's shape (contact is necessary), with each additional expenditure of Vitality eliciting the same effects mentioned here. Therefore, five Vitality enables the character to make minor cosmetic changes to an ally (which is a zero-Vitality effect), but major cosmetic changes cost five Vitality to affect the ally + one Vitality for altering the ally's gender/ethnic group/etc., for example.

Cosmetic Changes: This change strictly affects physical appearance as long as the character still appears to be human. For one Vitality, the character can alter form within the same weight and height class, to appear like a completely different person. This includes changing ethnic groups, age brackets and even genders. To look like a toddler, the character must couple this with the height and weight modifiers mentioned later.

Existing Stains: For every Vitality point expended, the character can bring forth an existing Stain and use it (though the negative qualifiers, including changes to appearance still apply). These Stains come in addition to any Stains the character may have due to Spite imbalance, and the character chooses them in accordance with whatever shape she's assuming. Most combat forms, for example, are likely to include long claws, fangs and some sort of carapace or armor.

MIMICRY

Even without spending much Vitality, the Marrow can use Flesh-Flux to imitate other humanoid characters. While this can be a devastating ability, exact mimicry of another is difficult. To see if the Marrow succeeds in imitating a target, her player rolls Stamina + Expression (difficulty 6).

One success lets the character get somewhat close to the form she was trying to assume: the new form has the same general hair color, the same basic facial structure and about the same build, but the mimicry is far from exact. The character might be able to pass herself off as the mimicked target with those who have never met the target, but not with those who know the imitated individual. Computers comparing bone structure or looking at retina patterns won't be fooled at all. Anyone who has spent time with the individual whose likeness has been assumed will know the difference [Perception + Alertness (difficulty 5)], although strangers or those who have only seen (bad) pictures might be fooled [Perception + Alertness (difficulty 7)]. Only one success is needed on these rolls to see through the ruse.

Two successes allow the character to mimic the target with a fair degree of accuracy. Computer security systems are still able to tell the difference, but those who know the target are unlikely to see through the similarity, although it's possible (Perception + Alertness, difficulty 8). Those who don't know the real person won't have any chance of sensing the deception.

With three successes, the Marrow captures the likeness of the target so well that people are unlikely to see through the ruse without some kind of help, regardless of how well they know the target (even spouses and parents can be fooled with this degree of success). Physical appearance will not give the character away, although mannerisms might if the character is in contact with people who know the imitated target well, so witnesses can still try to pierce the illusion by rolling Perception + Alertness against a difficulty of 9. Computer systems get three dice (at a difficulty of 8) to detect variations in finger prints, retina scans or other biometric standards.

With four successes, computer systems get a single die (difficulty 9) for detecting the character.

At five successes, the character's mimicry is so exact that she resembles her target even to the minutest detail, including retina patterns and fingerprints. Not even computers can pierce the illusion.

Extensive Modifications: For two Vitality, the character can completely alter his form to look inhuman, whether monstrous or animal-like. Conversely, if the character wants to change a facet of his appearance (like having a cat-like head or satyr-like legs) the cost is one Vitality, but for that one change only.

Height: For every point of Vitality spent, the character can alter his height by one foot. Characters cannot expend more than five Vitality on this effect (thus limiting their maximum growth/shrinkage to five feet).

New Stains: For every two Vitality points expended, the character can bring forth a new Stain that he doesn't possess and use its effects. (The negative qualifiers, including changes to appearance, still apply, though.)

Submerge Drawbacks: By spending one additional point of Vitality above the cost for drawing on various Stains (thus two Vitality for existing Stains and three for completely new Stains), the character can submerge the Stain's drawback and draw on only its advantage. This also means camouflaging the appearance of the Stain so that it doesn't penalize Social rolls or hamper disguises.

Weight: For every point of Vitality spent, the character can alter his weight by plus or minus 100 lbs. Characters cannot expend more than five Vitality on this effect (thus limiting the maximum increase/decrease to 500 pounds).

While maintaining the altered form doesn't take a great deal of concentration, it does require some. Consequently, if a character using Flesh-Flux is somehow rendered unconscious, he reverts back to his usual shape. This Horror's effects lasts for one scene.

Benefit: Certain Horrors generally require the spook to manifest before she can use them on those in the world of the living (Congeal and Witch's Nimbus are two good examples of this kind of Horror). This Benefit allows the target Horror to affect the living and the material world without requiring the character to manifest.

Spite-Fueled: With two exceptions, Flesh-Flux is not much different when fueled with Spite than it is when it's fueled with Vitality. The first difference is in appearance. Any form the character takes when fueling this Horror with Spite is more menacing than its Vitality-fueled equivalent. There may be a feral gleam to the eyes, his nails may be a little longer and more bestial, and the character's general countenance is slightly more malevolent. The other key difference is that any natural weapons — fists, claws, fangs and the like — inflict lethal damage and add one additional die of damage per point of Spite tapped. For example, if a punch normally causes Strength dice worth of bashing damage, tapping two Spite to take on the new form might put barbs on the characters knuckles allowing him to inflict Strength + 2 lethal.

FAMILIAR

"I see you," said the Lost Boy, "and what I see is mine." The twisted child Spectre closed on Annie, the mouths in both its palms gnashing their small, pointed teeth.

"You can stop yourself from doing this," Annie said.

"I see things differently."

"I'm trying to help you."

"I see your weaknesses," said the Spectre, "and I will devour you through them."

The threat was what she was waiting for. Seemingly out of nowhere came three small falcons. They tore at the Lost Boy's face — and palms — for a brief moment and flew off moments later, leaving the shrieking Spectre eyeless and with gashes across its ugly face.

"We'll see about that," said Annie.

Human beings are not the only creatures possessing souls that linger on after their bodies are gone. Animals too have ghosts, and those ghosts have their own business to attend to in the afterlife. A Marrow with knowledge of this Horror can extend his Will and summon animal ghosts to do his bidding. If the spook is manifested when he uses this Horror, he may even be able to summon real animals to help him.

Marrows, being more vital and primitive in some respects, have a connection to the ghosts of animals that allows them to develop this Horror more easily than spooks of other Shades. Using this Horror requires the spook to rest quietly for one turn while mentally calling the familiar. The eyes of a Marrow using this Horror briefly take on a feral or animalistic appearance when the spook is making his call, but this sign is quick and easy to miss. From the character's perspective, using Familiar is like sending out a psychic beacon to the surrounding area.

Once summoned, the animal ghost will serve the spook that summoned it to the best of its ability, although such creatures rarely put their continued existence in danger to serve spooks who summon them. The size and strength of the animal depends on how much Vitality the spook invests. The greater the Vitality investment is, the larger and more ferocious the animal is.

Skinriders cannot take this Horror.

System: Calling the familiar requires the player to make a Charisma + Empathy or Animal Ken roll (difficulty 6). The call has no range limitation, though the Storyteller may rule that large or more exotic animals (at least to the region) arrive after a number of turns equal to the Vitality points expended. Common animals such

as cats, birds, dogs and rats are more ubiquitous and show up almost immediately. Once the animals arrive, they remain for one scene. The player can also spend one Vitality per three animals to coax them into staying for one additional scene.

Once summoned, the animal follows the character's verbal instructions, understanding the intention behind those orders as long as the concept is within the critter's capabilities. Asking an animal to attack a foe is permissible, but telling it which keys to punch on a keyboard isn't. The familiar understands within the limitations of its experience and ability.

The feral flicker that crosses the eyes of a character using this Horror is easy to miss. Even those perfectly positioned to see it must make a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) to do so.

The amount of Vitality expended determines the type of animal summoned while the player's successes on the Charisma roll determine how many of that creature type shows up.

Vitality Result

- 0 Small, harmless creatures: mice, sparrows, minnows
- 1 Small animals: rats, kestrels, piranha
- 2 Small- to medium-sized animals: cats, ravens, octopuses
- 3 Medium-sized animals: dogs, falcons, barracudas
- 4 Medium to large animals: wolves, vultures, sharks
- 5 Large, powerful animals: tigers, eagles, orcas

Successes Result

- 1 One animal
- 2 Two to three animals
- 3 Five to eight animals
- 4 Eight to ten animals
- 5 Twenty animals

Note: This table is based on averages. At the Storyteller's discretion, it can be changed to increase the number of small animals (three rats is hardly a decent swarm, after all) and decrease the number of large animals (even in the Underworld, 20 ghostly tigers appearing in one place exceeds the boundaries of belief).

If the character is manifesting, then the creatures summoned will be physical ones. In that case, the Storyteller has to give consideration to just what kinds of creature might appear. If the character is in a blighted urban area, for example, it's entirely possible that she might spend five Vitality points and have nothing more than a swarm of rats answer his call.

The character also has an option of calling on one animal (ghost or living) and only one animal that he's met

before. If the player first succeeds in a Manipulation + Animal Ken roll (difficulty 7) when the character meets the critter, he can later spend one Vitality to summon that animal alone. For each point of Vitality invested in the “familiar,” the character can increase one of its Attributes or Abilities by one dot to reflect the strengthening bond between the two. The character can only do so once per Trait, and to no more than three Traits. This boost and the lure of the summons lasts for 24 hours. An animal thus affected during this time is more intelligent or perceptive than the average member of its species.

If the character acts humanely to the animal (not causing it direct pain as well as feeding it and healing it from injury) and summons it five times under these conditions, he may then bond the animal to himself by burning a permanent Willpower point and 10 Vitality. This means that the three improved traits are now permanent and the animal remains with the character as a loyal companion. Ghost animals can receive and impart Vitality from the crucible as though they were members, while living animals can act as the character’s extended senses. In the case of the latter, the character can invest one Vitality per sense, and see/feel/hear/taste/smell through the animal. This effect lasts a scene, but the range is unlimited as long as the character can touch the animal to invest it with the necessary Vitality.

BEASTS

While Familiar can call any kind of animal, the following are among those more likely to help the spook. In the Underworld, this Horror can summon nearly any kind of creature, and if the animals summoned are a bit exotic, the Storyteller will need to write out stats for the creatures using the following as guidelines.

Animals do not reason; they respond purely to emotion. This Horror causes the animal ghost to fight for the character the way it would fight for its offspring. Rats and cats are small enough that their attacks inflict bashing damage, while larger animals cause lethal damage, unless the Storyteller sees legitimate reasons for dropping the animal’s damage to bashing.

RAT

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3
Health Levels (if living): OK, -1, -5
Vitality/Willpower/Spite: 1/3/1
Attack: Bite for one die bashing
Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 4

BIRD

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
Health Levels (if living): OK, -1, -1, -2, -5
Vitality/Willpower/Spite: 1/2/1

Attack: Claw for two dice lethal; peck for one die bashing

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Stealth 3

Note: This template reflects the Traits of large predatory birds: hawks, crows, ravens, owls, vultures and similar species. A few of the larger birds of prey (eagles or great horned owls for examples) might even be a bit more robust. Depending on its size, a bird can typically fly at 25 to 50 mph.

CAT

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Health Levels (if living): OK, -1, -2, -5

Vitality/Willpower/Spite: 2/4/1

Attack: Claw or bite for two dice lethal

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Stealth 3

DOG

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Health Levels (if living): OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5

Vitality/Willpower/Spite: 3/5/2

Attack: Bite for five dice lethal; claw for three dice lethal

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 2

Note: These Traits are for large hounds like mastiffs or hunting dogs; the average domestic dog is not as formidable.

WOLF

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Health Levels (if living): OK, -1, -1, -3, -5

Vitality/Willpower/Spite: 3/4/2

Attack: Bite and claw for four dice lethal

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Intimidation 4, Stealth 2

RHINOCEROS

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6

Health Levels (if living): OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -1, -3, -3, -3, -5

Vitality/Willpower/Spite: 3/6/1

Attack: Gore for six dice lethal; trample for six dice bashing

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Intimidation 5

Benefit: A marrow applying Familiar’s Benefit to another Horror allows it to be affected simultaneously by two *other* Benefits. (Technically speaking, the target Horror is affected by three Benefits — Familiar and two others — but the net result is that the target Horror is enhanced by two Benefits.)

Spite-Fueled: When the Marrow fuels Familiar with Spite, he temporarily afflicts the summoned animal ghosts with one Stain for each point of Spite tapped. The Storyteller chooses which Stain(s) the animal ghost(s) manifest, but it should be appropriate to the type of creature summoned. While animal ghosts summoned with Spite will serve normally, as per the Vitality-fueled Horror, such ghosts experience the Stains forced upon them as a violation, and will not serve the spook again under any circumstances.

LEGION BORN

Its black robes rippling in the Maelstrom winds, the Reaper cornered Annie on the building's roof. The Spectre moved far too quickly for her; running would get her no further. The sidewalk was thirty-five stories below, and jumping didn't carry much appeal. She fancied she felt a sense of malignant satisfaction coming from the Spectre as it raised its scythe. When the blade came down, however, her body dissolved into a buzzing swarm, and the ten thousand flies that had been Annie parted to let the scythe's blade pass harmlessly through. In seconds the swarm had wafted down to the ground, where Annie coalesced and made her escape.

An extension of Flesh-Flux, this Horror allows the character to become not just another creature, but to become an entire swarm of smaller creatures. The Marrow can dissolve into a swarm of spiders, a cluster of snakes or a plague of rats. In this form, the character gains remarkable powers of attack, transportation and evasion. Furthermore, an entire swarm is extremely difficult to kill, and an opponent must destroy every one of the creatures if it hopes to kill the character. Furthermore, clever Marrows have used the side effects of this Horror to blind targets (covering a Spectre's head with a swarm of flies is very effective), or to cover up other sounds (with the droning of a swarm of hornets, for example).

System: The ghost transforms his body into a swarm or pack of creatures, the number and size of which is determined by Vitality expenditure. Unless otherwise stated, the swarm occupies an approximate radius of five feet, with the Horror's effects lasting for the duration of the scene.

From the Marrow's perspective, Legion Born is somewhat disorienting. Switching from a single perspective to two or more takes considerable concentration. (Bear in mind that the character perceives through each swarm rather than each individual member of the swarm; this means the swarm acts as a cohesive whole.) Simple actions taken by all members of the swarm (fleeing,



attacking, staying still) are not a problem, but directing portions of the swarm to perform different acts is complex and requires the player to make a Wits + Athletics roll against a difficulty of (5 + number of different units the swarm is broken into).

Example: *If Annie, who is in swarm form, wants half of her swarm to attack a Spectre and half to fly away, the difficulty of her Wits + Athletics roll is 7. If she fails it, the individuals in one part of the swarm buzz around and do nothing for that turn as Annie wasn't focused enough to manage all the different parts of herself.*

Each creature in the swarm contains all of the spook's memories and identity. The only way to truly destroy a Marrow in this form is to obliterate every single creature the character comprises. If even one survives, the character survives, although gaining back "mass" (Vitality, actually) could be problematic. Projectors can simply return to their bodies, but ghosts need to revitalize themselves. Different swarms and packs require different expenditures of Vitality, as indicated in the next table. Swarms vary by type on the amount of damage they can inflict as well as by reaction speed.

For each point of additional Vitality invested in this Horror, the swarm can engulf and attack one extra target for full damage. In this case, the swarm is larger than before, enough so to surround several targets. The targets, however, must be standing within five feet of one another. If they aren't, the player may spend additional Vitality, with each extra point spent increasing the swarm's surface area by five feet. (Therefore, attacking a second target 10 feet away requires the player spend two additional points of Vitality on her character's behalf.) The only caveat is that while the swarm suffers no dice pool penalties for engaging multiple targets, it must be performing the same actions throughout (attacking, blinding, escaping, etc.). Otherwise, the swarm must split into smaller units to perform multiple actions (as mentioned previously) or, if it remains one mass, the player must split her dice pool according to the Multiple Actions rule (**Orpheus** core rulebook, p. 211).

The health of the swarm depends on the number of units created. If there's a single swarm, it possesses the character's value in Vitality. If there are multiple swarms, the character can split his Vitality between the swarms, and even switch Vitality between those swarms that are in danger and those that are healthy (as a reflexive action). The player is well advised to spend Willpower to keep the swarms relatively healthy once created, since the swarms can each possess a Vitality rating equal to the character's maximum cap.

Vitality Requirement	Creature Type
0	Crawling insects
1	Spiders, carnivorous beetles or flying insects
2	Flying insects (stinging), mice
3	Rats or snakes
4	Birds or bats (essentially flying creatures)
5	Enormous rats, feral cats

The following table provides stats for various types of swarms that the character might become when using this Horror.

Animal	Damage Dice	Initiative Modifier
Crawling insects	2	+2
Spiders/ Carnivorous Beetles	3	+2
Flying Insects (stinging)	3	+5
Flying insects (non-stinging)	0	+10
Birds	4	+5
Bats	0	+8
Mice	2	+9
Rats	6	+4
Snakes	4*	+5
Enormous rats (one foot+)	7	+3

*To make the swarm poisonous requires an extra point of Vitality for each unit. If the snakes, animals or insects are poisonous, a mortal, physical target (spooks can't be hurt by poisons) of a successful bite by the swarm must make a Stamina + Athletics roll (difficulty 7) or take an additional four dice of lethal damage from venom.

This Horror lasts until the character wills himself to return to his normal form, or after the culmination of the scene (though the character's player may spend an additional two Vitality to extend the ability to stay in swarm form for each additional scene).

Skinriders cannot take this Horror.

Benefit: This Horror allows the character to act as a conduit through which a Horror and up to four other Benefits can be used in conjunction. That is, when the Benefit is active, one spook can "loan" his Horror to the Marrow and up to four other spooks can contribute their Benefits to that loaned Horror.

Spite-Fueled: When fueled with Spite, Legion Born allows the swarm to attack (Spite tapped x 2) opponents in one turn and inflict an additional die of damage

SWARM RULES

When a character uses Legion Born to transform into a swarm of creatures, the swarm has traits of its own.

A swarm's damage dice represent the number of dice it inflicts upon any target caught in the swarm. The Marrow can affect one additional target for each point of Vitality spent, as mentioned previously. (Spending another point of Vitality makes the swarm big enough to attack two targets at once, for example.)

In combat, roll to see if the collective swarm hits and inflicts damage.

Each type of creature is given a listing in the table. Roll the damage dice pool listed once per turn (difficulty 6), and allow the target to try to dodge or soak the result. (Remember that the damage is lethal, though, so normal mortals aren't capable of soaking it without some form of armor.) Packs attack once per turn per target and act with the initiative bonuses given in the chart.

If the target dodges, he moves normally for the remainder of the turn. Otherwise, his attackers slow him down to half his usual movement. If the swarm scores more than three health levels (or Vitality) worth of damage in one turn (after the target's soak), or if the player botches an appropriate roll, the character is knocked down and overrun. He can move only a yard or two per turn, and the swarm's damage difficulty falls to 5. Efforts to get back up and continue moving have higher than usual difficulties (7 or 8 generally).

Flying insects and birds can also blind adversaries by targeting their head. In the former instance, the player must roll Dexterity + Brawl against the opponent's Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 6). In the latter instance where the character is targeting the head to damage and blind, use the Targeting rules in *Orpheus* (p. 229). If the character succeeds, he blinds the opponent for that turn, who is now considered to be fighting blind (as per *Orpheus*, p. 229).

Pistols, rifles and small melee weapons (knives, brass knuckles, bottles, claws, bare hands) inflict bashing damage, and only on large creatures — rats, snakes and feral cats — but none on anything smaller. Shotguns, submachine guns and large blunt melee weapons (e.g., clubs) inflict full damage, again as bashing because they aren't actually penetrating the body, but stripping away the gauze. Large-area attacks (Molotov cocktails, concussion grenades, flame throwers, Wail, etc.) automatically cause lethal damage because they are widespread. Swarms and packs don't soak.

(probably from venom). The drawback is that without the supportive, regenerative effects of Vitality, the swarm units cannot lend or trade Spite to assist one another one turn after the units form.

CRUCIBLE HORROR

Crucible Horrors, the ultimate effect of characters combining their Horrors to work together, are also available to Marrows. In this case, two Marrows can combine Flesh-Flux to truly horrific effect.

FLESH-FLUX: CLAY JARS

Annie and Portman walked between the bodies of the technicians, still seeping warm blood, to the computer that held the information they had died for. "Either the unexpected gunplay freaked the killers out or our arrival scared them off," Annie said.

"Or maybe," began a cold, steely voice, "we're just not finished yet."

Annie and Portman turned to see the two gunmen step from the shadows. In the brief, panicked moment that followed, things happened quickly: The mercenaries cocked their guns and sneered, the manifested crucible reached out mentally to channel Vitality, and the bodies of the five innocent dead rose for a horrifying act of vengeance.

Building radically on the Marrow's ability to change and mold gauze, this Horror reanimates dead bodies, creating zombies under the crucible's control. When the crucible members join minds to use Flesh-Flux, together they can feel the presence of dead flesh, and their control of gauze extending to corpse flesh itself. They cannot control coma patients, however, or anyone flatlined and projecting. The body must be dead and completely severed from its soul. The mental "feel" of dead bodies is not pleasant, rather like a slight chill in space, and many Marrows prefer not using this Horror for precisely that reason. The number of corpses the crucible can animate depends on the kinds of corpses available as well as how much Vitality the group invests. Smaller bodies are easier to affect than larger ones.

These zombies are nothing more than walking corpses, marionettes being operated by the Marrows, and as such have no ability to think for themselves. Marrows can instill their animated bodies with limited "programs," but nothing of any complexity. The zombies can obey simple mental commands like "Batter down that door" or "Hunt down Majesty Jones," but anything more complicated ("Deliver a message to every address on this list" for example, or "Delete the names of deceased members from this database") is entirely beyond their limited capabilities.

Since corpses stick around only in the physical world and Crucible Horrors can't be augmented with Benefits, this Crucible Horror is accessible only to manifested spooks.

System: This Horror lets the characters channel Vitality into dead bodies to animate them, basically creating zombies.

The more Vitality the crucible channels into this Horror, the more health levels worth of creature it can animate. For example, a crucible that is able to affect seven health levels can animate either one human corpse or two dead rats.

For zero Vitality, the crucible can animate six health levels worth of dead flesh. Each additional point of Vitality channeled into this Horror lets the crucible animate another four health levels worth of dead flesh. A crucible that channels nine points of Vitality into Clay Jars, then, can animate 42 health levels worth of zombies (enough for about six human corpses or 12 dead rats). For more info on animal health levels, see the Familiar Horror on p. 66.

Zombies last for 24 hours, during which time they can wander as far from the characters as required. The characters can control the zombies verbally as long as the zombies are within natural earshot (no instructions allowed over radio or loudspeakers, for example). Otherwise, they follow the nature of their *last* instruction and won't attack unless otherwise told. The advantage to accompanying zombies is that the characters can change orders on the fly, instructing zombies to perform different, individual tasks. The advantage of leaving zombies with simple instructions is that they can wander pretty far during the day, wreaking all manner of havoc.

The instructions related to zombies can be compound (hunt and kill, wait and ambush, find and steal, locate and destroy, etc.), but they must remain simple. Characters can instruct zombies to go somewhere and attack someone without ever describing the target or offering directions. The summoner must have seen the target, item or location, however, with his own eyes. Zombies can't locate a place or person the character never saw personally. Neither can the zombie track the person if he isn't where the characters expect.

If the spooks cooperating to use Clay Jars vie for control of the zombies animated by this Horror, the players make contested Willpower rolls (difficulty 7), and control of all of the zombies goes to the character with the most successes. This can be an extended roll if the combatants want it to be, but under those circumstances, a character who loses the attempt loses a point of Willpower as well. In this instance, however, the character must remain with the zombie to retain con-

ZOMBIES

A typical zombie made with a human corpse does not possess the full Attributes of a living human. As automatons, they have no Mental or Social Attributes. On the plus side, however, once a body is reanimated, it has 10 health levels instead of seven and suffers no dice pool penalties due to injury. (To head off confusion: Vitality costs for reanimating a corpse are based on its health levels as a living creature, not on its health levels as a zombie; thus it costs seven Vitality to animate one corpse.) A zombie fights with all its dice until it completely loses structural integrity (i.e., falls apart).

Bodies brought back through Clay Jars act last in a turn and do not dodge attacks unless their operators specifically cause them to. They do not have (and cannot spend) Willpower, and they are immune to all Mental- and Social-based attacks, including illusions or any of the Horrors of the Phantasm Shade. Zombies have ratings of 0 for all Mental and Social Attributes. Zombies are immune to both Puppetry and Inhabit, although they *can* serve as fodder for Nightmarish Gestalt.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK Destroyed

Attack: Bite for one die of lethal; Punch for three dice of bashing damage.

Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 2, Stealth 1

trol. Otherwise the second or third summoner can simply intercept the zombies once outside the controller's immediate influence, and alter the instructions directly.

While the first tendency of many crucibles is to try to create a small mob of zombies to fight their battles, reanimated corpses aren't the most efficient fighters around, and there are many more subtle uses for the walking dead, including bullet-catcher, decoys and similar tasks.

As with all Crucible Horrors, Clay Jars can be fueled only with Vitality and cannot be enhanced with benefits.

FOURTH-TIER HORRORS

By now, your characters have had their chance to land some blows, roll with some punches and learn a few things about being spooks. They've also had a chance to bank some experience and learn how to use their ghostly abilities to their full extent.

Those lessons now reach a culmination. And just in time, too, because with this book, the characters are now in a position to deal with some *very* powerful adversaries, and to do so they'll need every tool, trick and technique they can muster to prevail against the forces arrayed against them. And so we hereby introduce the most powerful Horrors available to characters in **Orpheus**: Fourth-Tier Horrors.

These Horrors are the pinnacle of ghostly abilities (as far as any spook knows at this point, anyway), the sign that an individual has mastered his ghostly abilities.

With the introduction of the Fourth-Tier Horrors, the pattern established thus far changes. These Horrors can be taken only by spooks of the Shade specializing in the Horrors that lead up to them. Only one Fourth-Tier Horror exists per Shade. Only Banshees can take Screaming Nothing, for example, and that's the only Fourth-Tier Horror available to spooks of that Shade. No Shade, including Orphan-Grinders, can learn another Shade's Fourth-Tier Horror no matter how much she studies or tries to mimic the effects. A pint jar cannot hold a gallon of water, and while study and effort will take a spook far, it cannot give her potential she simply does not have.

So, without further ado, we present the powerful Fourth-Tier Horrors.

BANSHEE: SCREAMING NOTHING

The Spectre's claw had just missed Kate, but instead of being afraid, she was now pissed off.

She shrieked at the Spectre, angrily willing the scene in front of her to crumble onto the twisted thing in front of her. It was not only the physical world that gave way, however, but reality itself. A frigid blackness opened like a hungry maw to pull the Spectre... away, and in a moment it was gone.

It was not what she'd intended, thought Kate, but it was remarkably effective.

Sometimes she scared herself.

This frightful power is a more potent version of Wail that enables the character to shred reality, ripping open holes — called nihilis — in Creation itself with her voice. This hole isn't permanent, but it does create a vortex or portal that the character may use to descend into the Wasteland or Labyrinth, draw Spectres up to attack adversaries or suck enemies away.

Nihilis seem to appear more easily on some places than in others, as though the spiritual fabric of the world were more worn in some places than in others. Any character passing through a nihilis loses a point of Vitality (in addition to any cost associated with using this Horror).

Only Banshees can take Screaming Nothing.

System: Screaming Nothing opens up a hole in the fabric of the world that most residents of the Underworld know as a nihilis, a black hole that opens in one area and leads to another place. This is effective for reaching or traveling through the Underworld, though Banshees cannot travel from one place in the living world to another place in the living world. They would have to cross the Stormwall first, then cross back over. The nihilis's size and duration depends on the results of Perception + Awareness roll, while the placement of the hole, both on this end and at the other, depends on the Vitality spent.

Creating a nihilis is like cutting a diamond: The Banshee uses her understanding of the world and Underworld and its structure and phenomena to sense flaws in the fabric of reality and strike those flaws with her destructive voice. Because the Banshee needs to hit just the right flaw in reality to open a nihilis, the duration and size of the Screaming Nothing depends on the results of a Perception + Awareness roll by the character. The standard difficulty for this roll is 6, but time and place have a significant effect on this Horror. Reality is thicker in some places and thinner in others, affecting the ease of Screaming Nothing.


Setting	Difficulty Modifier
Busy Street	+1
Broad Daylight	+1
Sterile Ambiance (laboratory, new dorm room)	+2
Late Night	-1
Cemetery	-1
Haunt/Hive	-2
Underworld	-2

The following sizes and duration limits are maximums; the Banshee determines the nihilis's size and duration up to the maximum statistics given in accompanying the table:

Successes	Size	Duration
1	Two feet in diameter	One Turn
2	Three feet in diameter	Three Turns
3	Four feet in diameter	Five Turns
4	Six feet in diameter	Ten Turns
5	10 feet in diameter	One Scene

The more complex aspects of creating a nihilis, the necessary insights and ability to open the nihilis to exactly the right place, are controlled by how much Vitality the character channels into this Horror.

At **zero Vitality**, the nihilis is little more than a simple black hole in space. It creates a connection to



some random place in the Underworld or living world. Without spending Vitality, the character can determine only the general direction in which the nihil opens, and she has no control over its spatial orientation. It could appear in the floor, on a wall or just hanging in the air at any random angle.

Spending **one point of Vitality** grants the spook greater control over where the nihil appears. The Banshee determines the planar orientation of the nihil and its whereabouts to within a foot or two. At this point, the Banshee has sufficient control to place the nihil beneath an enemy's feet, although the opponent receives a Wits + Athletics roll (difficulty 7) to avoid falling through the nihil.

Two Vitality let the Banshee determine the precise location of the nihil to within an inch. Furthermore, the spook's familiarity with the Maelstrom and assorted phenomena (its freakish meteorology in particular) allow her to create the nihil in such a way that it creates a pressure differential to pull items away. Small, light items (loose papers, empty plastic bags and the like) are pulled into the vacuum from a couple of feet away. A target still receives a Wits + Athletics roll to avoid a hole opened up beneath him, but the difficulty is now 9. The Banshee's manipulations also allow her sufficient control of the nihil that she can sense where it terminates (i.e., where it leads), letting her decide if she cares to step through the nihil herself.

At **three Vitality**, the character can place the nihil exactly where she wants it. At this point, the Banshee can create enough of a pressure differential to create a strong wind going in either direction, sucking away small items of up to a pound or pulling through items of a similar weight. The Banshee's sense of where the nihil goes becomes even keener, and she can sense what kinds of creatures are on the other side of a nihil. With that kind of knowledge, the Banshee can use a nihil to transport herself (and her crucible) to a specific site in the Underworld — or open a gateway into a hive of Spectres.

Spending **four Vitality** grants the character the ability to create a slowly moving nihil. The Banshee could, for example, create a nihil over an enemy's head and drop it over him, sending him into the Wasteland. The spook can create enough of a pressure differential at this level of Vitality expenditure that powerful winds form around the nihil and pull in items weighing up to 50 pounds from up to three feet away. The Banshee can also create small sparkles of Vitality-infused light around the nihil's rim to attract Spectres from the other side (the Spectres make a Willpower roll against difficulty 6 and come through to investigate if they fail).

Lastly, when the player spends **five points of Vitality**, the character can place the nihil anywhere she likes (except inside a target) and move it rapidly to any locus she chooses. If she so chooses, the Banshee can create a powerful enough pressure trough near the nihil that even human-sized targets are sucked in by the screaming winds (Wits + Athletics, difficulty 9 to avoid the nihil for one turn). The light effects around the nihil's rim grow brighter and more appealing to Spectres at this point as well (such that the difficulty of the Willpower roll rises to 8).

Note that the Banshee has no control over the Spectres once they come through the nihil, but if she needs a distraction or just some random mayhem, a cluster of Spectres more than fits the bill.

The truly nasty application of this ability is that the Banshee can use it against living targets, whether she manifests or not. The nihil is a rend in space, and visible to humans. The mortal, animal or object sucked through ends up in the Underworld, though Underworld relics, structures and perfect steel cannot be brought into the living world. Anything from the living world in the Underworld is now a beacon to all Spectres within a two-mile radius (at least two miles, since the hive-mind connection will draw more from further away). Objects age rapidly and crumble. (Storyteller's option in the matter, but objects shouldn't last for more than a month since they rarely possess a strong spiritual presence.) Mortals trapped by Spectres, however, will be taken back to a hive or Malfean, and experimented on mercilessly. The Spectres haven't had mortal visitors for quite some time, and they are rather curious if humans can be made into Spectres, flesh and all.

Benefit: The nihil-forming aspect of this Horror enables the donor to invest the recipient with macrodispersion of an effect, quadrupling the number of targets, the range or the area affected by that Horror. This Benefit essentially disperses a Horror's effect through a sieve of minute, microscopic-sized nihil.

Spite-Fueled: Fueled with Spite, Screaming Nothing has a notably different effect. The hole that it opens in the world seems to lead directly to Oblivion, because whatever is on the other end of the nihil seems infinitely cold and dark, like a large, frozen surface made of onyx. While such nihil won't suck in a whole individual, it does devour his Vitality or even flesh. For every point of Spite tapped, this version of Screaming Nothing absorbs two points of Vitality from the target every turn he's in contact with it. If the target is dead set on not surrendering his vital essence to the Nothing, the player can spend a point of Willpower to retain Vitality in the usual manner (see p. 191 of **Orpheus**). As for flesh, each Spite

tapped acts as a die of lethal damage that tears at people like scabbling claws.

HAUNTER: HELL ON WHEELS

The swarm of Spectres that surrounded Hoyt extended as far as he could see. He feared that his days of defying death might have come to an end. He could think of no way of escaping. At no point in his life had he ever wished for a car as much as at that moment. Not just a car. A truck. A big-ass truck with enormous tires and four-wheel drive to plow through these creeps. And he felt something going on with his Vitality. He let the feeling build and, inadvertently, he felt himself growing, changing, taking on a shape he'd inhabited several times before.

The Spectres were more than surprised at Masterson's change. They had no idea where the monster truck had come from, but it was quickly turning their goon squad into pulp and ichor.

Up to this point, Haunters have been capable of inhabiting inanimate objects. At this stage of progression, the Hunter is able to physically remember the shape of vehicles he has possessed and adopt that shape himself. This ability allows the character to manifest in the form of a large motorized vehicle just shy of the size of a house (though a trailer or RV is viable). To spooks (and normal folks if the character is manifested), the Hunter looks just like a large motor vehicle: van, Hummer, monster truck, even a tank (albeit one without guns). The character using this Horror feels his own gauze taking a form that he usually only inhabits. This Horror does not grant the character the ability to turn into planes, boats, tunneling machines, dirigibles, blimps or backhoes, all of which are too complex or too unfamiliar to mimic.

The automobile form granted by Hell on Wheels grants the character a range of abilities depending on how he wants to spend Vitality. He can use the car body for speed or protection (of himself or others), or he can combine additional Horrors with Hell on Wheels for powerful effects (i.e., using Hell on Wheels with Anathema to drive up walls, or with Witch's Nimbus to surround the vehicle with ghostly flames).

Only Haunters can take this Horror.

System: Because the vehicle is "solid," it possesses health levels that must be depleted first before the Hunter can be forced back into his normal form. Even if the Hunter is in the Underworld, the health levels apply, with penalty modifiers for damage serving as an indication of car's inability to function properly. Without spending Vitality, the character can assume the form of some basic

standard automobile: a Toyota Corolla, for example. This basic form grants the character two levels of armor and nine health levels (two of which are OK) and allows for a basic speed of up to 80 mph (safe speed: 60), as well as space for carrying up to four passengers. Spending Vitality augments this basic form. Please note that with any vehicle born from this power, each successful attack that delivers damage above the vehicle's armor rating reduces that armor rating by one. Car damage is a matter of attrition. Conversely, neither does this armor affect Dexterity-related dice pools with penalties.

The character determines what additional attributes his car form has by channeling Vitality into the automobile form. The character assigns Vitality to size (granting additional "OK" health levels), to armor (which benefits both the character and his passengers), to speed or to carrying more passengers. A character who simply wanted to go fast, for example, could channel all his Vitality into speed and reach astonishing speeds, while a character who needed to safely carry a man and his infant son out of a swarm of Spectres could focus all of his Vitality into armor.

This is one of the few Horrors that allow a character to channel more than five Vitality. A character who wanted to ram through a wall and leave the scene *really* fast while protecting passengers could channel three points into speed, three points into armor and three points into health levels (if and only if he had enough Vitality, of course).

A **single point of Vitality** increases the car's armor rating by two (for a total of four) *or* grants two extra "OK" health levels *or* increases speed by an additional 40 mph (for a top speed of 120 mph; safe speed: 70) *or* increases his carrying capacity by one additional passenger.

At **two points of Vitality**, the character's armor increases by three to a total of five or he gains four additional OK health levels. The character's top speed at this level is 160 mph (safe speed: 110), or he increases his carrying capacity by two additional passengers.

With **three Vitality**, the character becomes very well armored, gaining an additional six units of armor (total of eight) *or* the character gains an additional eight "OK" health levels. Pumping three Vitality into speed brings the character's top speed up to 200 mph (safe speed: 120); otherwise he increases his carrying capacity by three additional passengers.

Spending **four Vitality** allows the character to increase his armor rating by an additional eight points (total of 10) making him incredibly difficult to damage. If the character puts this much Vitality into health levels, he gains 12 additional "OK" health levels (for a total of 14

extra in this form). The character's top speed with four Vitality is 240 mph (safe speed: 140). Or he increases his carrying capacity by four additional passengers.

Channeling **five Vitality** into armor grants the character 10 additional levels of armor (total of 12), basically making the character a tank capable of withstanding immense amounts of damage. Some fortified bunkers can't take as much damage as this character can. If the character channels the Vitality into health levels, he becomes incredibly dense, solidly put together, and gains 20 additional "OK" health levels. Channeling five Vitality into speed puts the character's top speed at 280 mph (safe speed: 180). Conversely, the Haunter increases his carrying capacity by five additional passengers (nine people total).

Example: Hoyt has a long, difficult trek to make across the Wasteland — with his crucible. He needs a fair amount of speed, but lots of armor and health levels. He spends two Vitality on speed (letting him go up to 160 mph), three Vitality on extra health levels and three Vitality on armor to protect his passengers (in total, then, he has an armor rating of 8 and 15 OK health levels). While he's going to be low on Vitality for a while (unless the crucible shares with him), he'll get his crucible to their destination quickly and, in all likelihood, safely.

This Horror lasts for two hours or until the car has no health levels left. The character can attempt to "repair" the vehicle on the fly, but the expenditures are double their normal cost because repairs are hard to exact in that form. Use the Driving rules (**Orpheus**; pp. 218-219) to determine the particulars of crashes and failed driving rolls over the vehicle's Safe Speed limits. A Haunter can assume this form and drive around even without the Drive Skill (though, in this case and only in this case, every two Vitality expended on this Horror translates as one innate dot in Drive).

Benefit: This Benefit bridges two Horrors, meaning that the Benefits of two Horrors can reciprocally affect each other's Horror abilities. By way of example: This Benefit links two characters who wish to use Witch's Nimbus and Wail at the same time. Therefore, Witch's Nimbus Benefit (doubles the duration) affects Wail while Wail's Benefit (double the range, number of targets or affected area) affects Witch's Nimbus.

Spite-Fueled: The Spite-fueled version of this Horror never quite manages to achieve the form of a car, but it does turn the spook into a hellish mechanized juggernaut covered with curved blades, insectile spurs and cruel barbs. The more Spite the Haunter taps, the more monstrously mechanical his form grows. Tapping a single point of Spite will result in the spook looking only a little bigger and a little more metallic. Tapping three

Spite renders the character into a form more akin to a large robot covered with a profusion of blades, and tapping five Spite will transform the character into a barbed tank with jagged appendages on either side. The main drawback to this form is that it does not move very quickly, resulting in significant penalties to initiative while in this form.

Spite Tapped	Punch Tapped	Initiative Modifier	Extra Soak
1	Strength + 2	0	1
2	Strength + 4	-3	2
3	Strength + 6	-5	3
4	Strength + 8	-7	4
5	Strength + 10	-9	5

MARROW: NIGHTMARISH GESTALT

The snotty goth kid thought he was too tough for Annie. His expensive black boots, his array of piercings and, above all, the cobras draped around his neck made him arrogant and intractable.

His cockiness disappeared, however, when she grabbed his snakes and absorbed them into her arms. Their flesh merged with her flesh, then their hoods spread from her forearms, and their venomous maws extended from the palms of her hands, stopping just short of the face of their owner.

"Now," demanded Annie, "who supplies you with pigment?"

The Marrow achieves a terrifying degree of control over her powers of flesh- and gauze-control with this Horror. When manifesting, the spook can absorb organic matter into herself, thereby augmenting her mass, innate abilities and Physical Attributes with those of anything she absorbs. To the spook it feels as though she's becoming sticky and the creatures she touches clump onto her and start sending her sensory data. The Marrow can absorb a small tree for shielding, a venomous snake for offensive purposes and then absorb an enemy to prevent him from attacking (or use his mass as a shield as well). More subtle uses might include absorbing leaves and foliage for camouflage or incorporating a large fish to make use of its gills. A determined Marrow can turn herself into a nightmarish chimera of whatever type of creature happens to be nearby (this includes dead bodies, if the Marrow primarily wants only to increase her mass or incorporate some dead shield material into herself). Not only can she absorb the mass of various beasts, she can absorb other human beings into herself, thereby increasing her mass and using health levels instead of her own Vitality to take damage.



Only Marrows can take this Horror.

System: The Marrow's player first expends the appropriate amount of Vitality to begin the absorption process. She must then make a successful Dexterity + Brawl roll to hit any *living* creature the Marrow intends to absorb. Once struck, the person or creature is immediately integrated into the Marrow's gauze. (Obviously this roll is unnecessary with immobile targets such as corpses or trees.) If the Marrow is absorbing a human opponent, the player must also win a contested Willpower roll (difficulty 7). For animals, the Willpower roll's difficulty is based on the target's Willpower rating.

If the Marrow has successfully absorbed a sentient target but loses the Willpower roll, that indicates that the target has been absorbed, but still has a mind of his own and has no intention of acting in accordance with the Marrow's wishes. Such a target can, in theory, still attack, depending on how he is oriented with regard to the main mass of the character's body. If the Marrow botches the Willpower roll, the target takes control of the Marrow and the Marrow is stuck being part of the target until the target frees itself from the Marrow's mass (usually the very first thing a target does). The matter

that the Marrow absorbs remains part of her for the duration of the scene unless she releases it before that.

Assimilating additional creatures is very empowering for the Marrow (and terrifying for her enemies), because she adds the targets' Physical Attributes on a dot-per-dot basis to her own, and she uses the cumulative health levels to absorb damage instead of reducing it from her own Vitality. The only limit to these additional Attributes and health levels is that imposed through Vitality expenditure. If the Marrow is using its absorbed mass to shield herself from damage, the damage is assigned first to plants, then to animals, then equally divided between any human beings she has assumed. Once all the health levels are gone, the Marrow is again vulnerable to attacks against her Vitality and her physical aspects are expunged in a gory mass of bone, muscle, organ and flesh. When encased in flesh, however, she is considered "living" and can only be affected by those Horrors that would normally affect the living (or if an adversary manifests to attack her). Spooks cannot use Puppetry on the mass of flesh to control it either. Volunteers, like projectors who absorb their own bodies, can survive as long as they aren't killed during combat from excessive wounds.

Absorbing animals requires only moderate effort, and the character enjoys some of the non-supernatural related abilities that the animal possessed (within reason). The character might gain a venomous bite or the ability to see better in the dark. Complex abilities like flight of a bird, a bat's sonar or cat's agility are not applicable. At the end of the scene when the Horror ends, the scrambled animal is expunged from the Marrow's mass to die horribly, its physical integrity completely destroyed by its absorption.

Humans absorbed by a Marrow have a better shot of surviving the experience due to their more coherent self-image (hence why they are damaged last). The Marrow, however, gains no knowledge or insight from people. They are merely additional mass and bone, capable of dying if wounded sufficiently. When they are ejected from the body, however they retain their human form.

Plants absorbed by a Marrow impart two health levels for shrubs (no Stamina), four for saplings (four inches in diameter; two dots in Stamina), six for young trees (six inches in diameter; four dots in Stamina) and eight for full grown trees (about a foot in diameter; eight dots in Stamina). The character cannot absorb redwoods or anything larger than a foot in diameter or over 20 feet high, but any full-grown tree imparts Class Two armor equivalent (with appropriate penalty modifier). Flora does not possess, and thus does not impart, Strength or Dexterity improvements.

How much mass the Marrow can absorb depends entirely on how much Vitality she channels to that purpose.

Zero Vitality: The Marrow can absorb one small animal up to the size of a rat. She could absorb a snake and have it look around a corner for her. She could absorb a rat to keep it from biting her.

Maximum Physical Attributes: 5*

Maximum health levels: 3

One Vitality: Expending a single point of Vitality lets the Marrow absorb the mass of three creatures the size of a rat or one creature the size of a dog or a sapling.

Maximum Physical Attributes: 6*

Maximum health levels: 5

Two Vitality: The character can absorb four large rats or one other human being.

Maximum Physical Attributes: 7*

Maximum health levels: 15

Three Vitality: The character can absorb mass equal to that of three large dogs or two human beings.

Maximum Physical Attributes: 8*

Maximum health levels: 25

Four Vitality: When spending four points of Vitality, the character can absorb mass equal to that of five large dogs, three human beings or one large creature (such as a rhinoceros).

Maximum Physical Attributes: 9*

Maximum additional health levels: 35

Five Vitality: If the character channels five Vitality into Nightmarish Gestalt, she can absorb mass equivalent to 50 large snakes, 10 wolves, five human beings, an elephant or a single oak tree.

Maximum Physical Attributes: 10*

Maximum health levels: 45

*This indicates the maximum dots the character can possess in any one Physical Attribute.

Benefit: The changing and mercurial nature of Marrow Horrors infuses this Benefit. The Marrow may allow one character to "lend" a Horror to another character for one use. This lets the borrowing character use a Horror he might not have. This Benefit grants access only to the Horror's main effect, not its Benefits. Furthermore, Shade restrictions still apply, so characters still can't lend Fourth-Tier Horrors to spooks of another Shade and Skinriders (for example) cannot be "lent" Marrow Horrors.

Spite-Fueled: A Marrow using Spite to fuel Nightmarish Gestalt becomes a sort of vampire, absorbing not the form of living creatures around her, but their energy and health. For each point of Spite tapped, the Marrow absorbs two points of Vitality for every health level in her target (destroying that health level). The Marrow must be in direct contact with the target to use this Horror, but aside from that, the transfer is made as soon as the Spite is tapped. The target cannot give up more health levels than it currently possesses. The target does not receive a soak roll against this Horror.

ORPHANGRINDER: SALVATION

Tom and his crucible waited like assassins in a pile of Maelstrom debris. Their timing was good. The Spectre master came flowing out of the pit he'd disappeared into earlier, flanked by two thralls.

The thralls moved to peruse the debris in case the Maelstrom had delivered something useful into their hands. Tom's cohorts sprang into action, and the Spectres were on the ground, bound in chains in an instant.

The Spectre master, regally unperturbed, did not flee, as Tom had feared he would. On the contrary, he glided swiftly to the aid of his assistants.

Tom jumped from his hiding place and placed his hands

on his target's head. "You're not going to like this now, but you can thank me later."

The Spectre master thrashed and struggled for a moment. Its eyes bugged out, it opened its mouth as if to howl, but all that came out was a very small, "Oh." Then he passed out.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Tom, "I think we have another good guy on our hands."

This extraordinary ability all but ensures that any Spectre that was once a human being is redeemed from the Spectral condition. Spectres reclaimed in this manner become Orphan-Grinders in their own right. In effect, the Orphan-Grinder hacks into the Spectre's gauze and reworks the wiring in order to re-awaken the parts of the Spectre's soul that are human.

Salvation requires gauze-to-gauze contact between the Orphan-Grinder and his target Spectre. Those watching the Orphan-Grinder in action may see small blue, white or silver sparks surging from the Orphan-Grinder's gauze and into the Spectre. From the Grinder's perspective, the brief time it takes to use this Horror feels like sacrificing his very being to reclaim the Spectre. That sense fades rapidly, especially when replaced by feelings of accomplishment upon viewing a new Orphan-Grinder, but for those few seconds, it feels like dying a painful death.

Of all the Shades, only Orphan-Grinders truly understand the full power of redemption and what's required to rescue the Spectre from his personal hell. In fact, this ability isn't so much destroying the Spectre, but empowering the ghost within. Orphan-Grinders welcome the opportunity to pull Spectres back from the brink. That said, Salvation takes a *lot* out of the spook who uses it, and for that reason, most Orphan-Grinders learn to differentiate those Spectres who are good candidates for reclamation from those who are not.

System: Salvation is a difficult Horror to use, and if the results weren't so heartening, very few spooks would be willing to try.

To start with, Salvation requires gauze-to-gauze contact, so the Orphan-Grinder's player needs to make a successful Strength + Brawl roll to grapple the target Spectre.

Once the Orphan-Grinder successfully grapples with the Spectre, the player rolls Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty 6). The player must achieve three or more successes before the Horror can continue. If he rolls fewer than three successes, the character has to stay in contact with the Spectre for another turn. If the Spectre is restrained, the player is free to keep rolling Manipulation + Empathy every turn (and hope that the Spectre isn't calling in lots of reinforcements via the hive-mind).

Once the player achieves three successes, the Orphan-Grinder makes telepathic contact with the Spectre

and the real work begins: For each point of Vitality the player spends, he transforms one point of the target Spectre's permanent Spite rating into one point of Vitality. If the character stops the process before all the Spite is gone, the Spectre regains it at one Spite rating per hour. If the character brings the Spectre's Spite rating to zero, he must then spend two Willpower points to turn the Spectre into an Orphan-Grinder. Unfortunately, doing so does not net the Orphan-Grinder any Spite reduction or Vitality increase.

While this is a phenomenally powerful Horror, it has its limits. Only those Spectres who were originally ghosts can be reclaimed in this way. Spectres who were never human in the first place have no humanity to re-awaken, and while being subjected to this Horror might give them some difficulty, it has no further effect other than to replace their Spite (they will always have one Spite remaining) with Vitality. Some Spectres also have the ability to absorb new Spite or regenerate their Spite, offsetting the introduction of "putrid" Vitality, so characters shouldn't be too certain that this Horror will change a Spectre in every circumstance or as quickly as they'd like.

Finally, Orphan-Grinders can use Salvation to one odd, offensive effect. By activating this Horror in combat, the Orphan-Grinder essentially surrounds himself within a Vitality field. The Orphan-Grinder can infuse it with as much or as little Vitality as he wishes, adding Vitality to it each turn as a reflexive action. Any Spectre that touches the field, whether the Orphan-Grinder strikes it using Brawl or the Spectre directly touches the Orphan-Grinder, automatically absorbs a point of Vitality that offsets one of its Spite ratings (the Orphan-Grinder loses that Vitality). The Spectre is slowly weakened during the course of combat, unable to tap its full potential because of this toxin. While it regains the Spite at one level per hour, the immediate effect is that it is weakened (especially useful against those Spectres that enjoy swarming targets).

PHANTASM: DRAW FORTH

Pig knew that the ghost was in the room, knew that she was some slant-eyed bitch, and knew that he couldn't trust a thing he saw when she was around. He also knew that she was protecting the teenager he had dragged here. He had the girl in an arm-lock, and figured he'd handcuff her to the radiator and then find a way to deal with the ghost.

When he first saw the pack of dogs, it was almost enough to make him drop the girl.

Almost.

"If you think I'm falling for your head games again, bitch, you're on crack!"

The growling pack of dogs lunged at the cultist, and Pig was very surprised when their very solid teeth drew blood. As it turned out, Grace — the ghost who had called them forth from his nightmares — was just as surprised, but Pig had no way to know that.

Up to this point, the Phantasm's Horrors have pulled illusions and dreams from the target's mind, but once the spook develops this power, he can give real substance to the terrors he coaxes from the mind of his target.

Unlike many of the Phantasms' Horrors, this one is fully visible to those watching, although the nightmare attacks only the person from whose head it sprung. The nightmare, however, can't be touched by anybody else. Onlookers may see the giant scorpion (or whatever), but they are powerless to touch it or interfere with it in any way. For its part, the nightmare appears to be unable to even perceive anyone but the target character. Objects and bystanders are unaffected by anything the nightmare does. Only the Phantasm's target can deal damage to (or take it from) this terrible dream monster.

The Phantasm can use this Horror on spooks and living folks alike, and he doesn't even have to manifest to make it effective on those in the living world.

Only Phantasms can take this Horror.

System: The appearance and power of the creature pulled from the target's mind depend on how much Vitality the character sinks into the Horror. A target who is afraid of snakes, for example, only has to contend with a normal-looking boa constrictor if the Phantasm doesn't invest any Vitality into it. On the other hand, if the Phantasm channels five points of Vitality into Draw Forth, the nightmare creature will be even more terrifying than the target had ever imagined: a twenty-foot long, malevolent golden-eyed snake with venom dripping from its fangs.

The nightmare creature lasts one scene or until it is vanquished by the target. If the target *does* vanquish his nightmare, this Horror will never work on him again, and he gains a point of permanent Willpower for defeating his greatest fear. Note: This is not the case for Spectres. Not only does a Spectre not gain a point of Willpower for defeating its nightmare, but the lot of a Spectre is so nightmarish that there are *always* new things to fear.

A target's nightmare is so perfectly plucked from his mind that it is inherently, profoundly terrifying. Even without the Phantasm spending Vitality, the

nightmare creature is so frightening that the target must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6 unless otherwise stated otherwise) or flee the area at full speed for [13 – Willpower] turns.

Without even spending a point of Vitality, the character can bring forth the most basic image of his target's nightmare. At this level, the target is able to experience his nightmare with all five senses. He can smell the dog's breath, feel its bristling fur and hear its ominous growls even as he watches it snarl at him. The nightmare is terrifying at this point, and quite unmistakably solid, but it isn't quite substantial enough to do any damage yet. It possesses five health levels (OK x 5, Banished) before vanishing. Because the creature is "solid" to the adversary, it relies on health levels instead of Vitality/Spite ratings to determine damage.

Once the Phantasm begins investing Vitality into a nightmare, however, it grows into an increasingly greater threat. Beyond the listed stats, the creature behaves exactly as the target believes it would at its malevolent worst. (Wild dogs attack, a succubus will attempt to seduce him and devour his soul, a phantom hearse will attempt to run him over, et cetera). Given the wide range of shapes a nightmare can take, the Storyteller will need to determine the full abilities of any given nightmare, but basic stats for each level of a nightmare are provided.

One point of Vitality is enough to make the nightmare dangerous. At this level, the nightmare has physical statistics that allow it to damage its target. While its traits are relatively unimpressive, it does get the equivalent of one Stain (determined by the Storyteller) to use against the target. The chosen Stain, obviously, should be appropriate to the creature or nature of the nightmare.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Health Levels: OK (x10), Banished

Attack: One attack for three dice of lethal damage

Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 3, Stealth 1

At **two Vitality**, the nightmare's stats increase, and it has the equivalent of two Stains to wield against the target.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Health Levels: OK (x15), Banished

Attack: One attack for five dice of lethal damage

Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 4, Stealth 2

For **Three Vitality**, the creature manifests the equivalent of three Stains *and* gains the ability to teleport at will anywhere in line of sight of the target (all the better to make it a terrifying enemy). The difficulty of the Willpower roll to avoid running away increases to 7.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4
Health Levels: OK (x20), Banished
Attack: Two attacks of five dice of lethal damage
Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 5, Stealth 3

For **four points of Vitality**, the nightmare gains the equivalent of four Stains and can teleport (as above). The difficulty of the Willpower roll to avoid fleeing remains at 7.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5
Health Levels: OK (x25), Banished
Attack: Three attacks of six dice of lethal damage
Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 6, Stealth 4

A character spending **five Vitality** summons up the largest, most terrifying version of the target's nightmare imaginable. This most horrific of nightmares possesses the equivalent of five Stains to use on its target (in addition to its ability to teleport). The difficulty of the Willpower roll to avoid running away increases to 8.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6
Health Levels: OK (x30), Banished
Attack: Three attacks for eight dice of lethal damage
Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 7, Stealth 5

Note: The Storyteller may substitute Stains for Thorns instead, if the Stains are insufficient for the intended creature. When using a Stain, however, the creature does not suffer from the Stain's drawback, only its advantage.

Benefit: The Phantasm can use the Benefit of this Horror to cloak the effects of another Horror in an illusion, hiding tell-tale signs that might give the nature of the Horror away or simply making it more terrifying. For example, the Phantasm may make Witch's Nimbus appear as a swarm of bees around the user, or it can make a spook using Juggernaut appear as a small child.

Spite-Fueled: When fueled with Spite, this Horror sends the target into a psychotic break that warps his thinking and makes him his own worst enemy. A target under the effect of this Horror believes that something about his physical form is deeply twisted or corrupt. Worse, the Horror prompts the target to take steps to rectify the situation via the most self-destructive means possible. The target may hallucinate that his skin is covered with maggots, for example, and will therefore try to cut it all off. Or the target may feel that his genitals are the source of all evil, and therefore castrates himself. A character who feels fat will slice all the fat from his body — and face — until all that's left is lean, glistening muscle (or he dies or passes out, whichever comes first). The effects of this Horror are slow, but inescapable unless the target is prevented from hurting himself by

some outside force. For each point of Spite tapped, the target damages himself aggressively for one full hour in an attempt to "fix" his phantom problem — usually more than long enough for the target to end his existence. Spending a point of Willpower lets the target make a contested Willpower roll against the Phantasm. If the target wins, he does no lasting damage to himself — usually no more than a die or two of bashing damage. The Storyteller is free to determine how much harm a target can cause herself in an hour, but it should be at least two levels of lethal damage.

POLTERGEIST: REND AND RAKE

"I'm sorry, Ms. Vitt," said the agent, "but your services are no longer required."

Zoë barely had time to turn when she saw the Spectre-possessed agent pull the trigger. In the flesh, she could do nothing. Fortunately, she wasn't alone.

Ben Cotton watched the muzzle blast flare in slow motion and, at the speed of thought, he gripped the fabric of space itself. The bullet traveled fast, but Ben's thought was faster. The bullet shot from the barrel of the gun aimed squarely at Ben, but then it veered to the left, did a complete circle around the gunman and slammed into the would-be killer's chest as though he'd aimed it there. The gunman spent his last seconds of life wondering what he'd done wrong.


"Thanks," said Zoë as she took the gun from the agent's hand. She'd need it.

Up to this point, Poltergeists have been able to channel their anger into relatively constrained "weird" phenomena. Once the Poltergeist attains this degree of mastery, however, the fabric of reality is his to fold, spindle and mutilate as he chooses. Physical reality is the plaything of a spook with this Horror, to twist and torque as he sees fit. Before his withering gaze, doors splinter, walls undulate and limbs stretch like silly putty. Weapons can be made to melt like Dali's watches, and even the Maelstrom can be tamed — a little.

A Poltergeist using this Horror sees — and, more importantly, feels — reality around him and can pull, twist or wrench it out of shape with a nudge of his will. Space can be made to shrink or grow, straight lines can be made to curve into spirals, and up and down can be made to switch places as gravity goes awry.

The spook using this Horror does not need to manifest to affect the corporeal world. So long as he can perceive the corporeal world, he can affect its laws just as much as those on the other side or in the Underworld.

While this Horror doesn't usually affect living (or at least sentient) targets, a Poltergeist willing to give in to



his darker nature can inflict horrible and obscene damage on a victim.

Only Poltergeists can take this Horror.

System: Within the area of effect, natural laws bend in accordance to the character's desire. Weather and light conditions, gravity, distance, friction and curvature of space are all subject to the spook's will when he uses this Horror. If the Poltergeist decides that iron needs to melt at room temperature, then it does. If he decides that temperatures are ideal for fog, then they are. Space curves, distance grows or shrinks, and such forces as gravity and friction behave as the spook wishes. When fueled with Vitality, this Horror has profound effects on inanimate objects, but it can't directly affect living tissue or gauze (that requires the tapping of Spite, though some indirect effects such as manipulating the Maelstrom or sending objects flying are permissible).

While it takes all of the Poltergeist's concentration, he can even use this Horror to calm or intensify the Maelstrom within its area of effect. Each point of Vitality channeled into the Underworld storms lessens or increases the Maelstrom's force by one point, so while a Poltergeist using two points of Vitality can calm the storm by two points in a 10-foot radius (more than enough space for a crucible), a spook using five Vitality to fuel Rend and Rake can render even a powerful Maelstrom squall completely still in a 30-foot radius. Conversely, the Poltergeist can amplify a storm's effect, but never to anything above an F6 (use the Crucible Horror: Storm-Gloom as a marker; see **The Orphan-Grinders**).

After the expenditure of Vitality, the Poltergeist's player rolls Intelligence + Enigmas (difficulty 6) to elicit one specific change, though nothing prevents the Poltergeist from altering another phenomenon the next turn. (Remember, however, that affecting the Maelstrom requires concentration for the duration it is active; the Poltergeist can't pursue any other action without losing his control.) Each success allows the spook to manipulate reality to greater effect. Each success allows the character to expand or shrink distance by a factor of 10 (except in expanding his own sphere of influence), increase or decrease the ambient temperature by 20 degrees or warp space around him by 90 degrees. The change lasts for the duration of one scene (or until the Poltergeist moves from the area, dragging the effect with him), during which time, reality as established by the Poltergeist holds. Therefore, if the character altered the trajectory of bullets by 90 degrees, then all projectiles during that scene are flying at wild, right angle turns. Once the scene is over, reality asserts itself again, though damaged items remain damaged. Players and Storytellers can talk about other facets the spook might

manipulate, including gravity, friction, the flow of electricity or other phenomena. Space considerations prevent mapping successes onto every phenomenon the character might manipulate, so use what's written as guidelines. Bear in mind, however, that the effects are all "physical" in nature, meaning this Horror isn't limited wish fulfillment. It can't create something from nothing. (Characters, for instance, can't change someone's gender, or bring back their dead bodies.)

Finally, the Poltergeist must be at the center of the effect, meaning that if he changes the environment drastically (like augmenting the Maelstrom), he and any companions present are equally affected.

At **zero Vitality expenditure**, the character can control the world around him in a two-foot radius. If he is damaging objects, he can twist an item so that it suffers one level of lethal damage.

Spending a **single point of Vitality** enables the character to warp reality in a five-foot radius. At this point, he can inflict two levels of lethal damage on objects.

Two points of Vitality let the Poltergeist rend the world in a 10-foot radius and lets him inflict four levels of lethal damage to objects.

At **three points of Vitality**, the spook affects reality in a 15-foot radius. Buildings and objects can be damaged at a rate of six levels of lethal damage per turn as their very fiber is wrenched and sundered.

Four points of Vitality allow the character to shift the world around him in a 20-foot radius. He can inflict eight levels of lethal damage to inanimate objects.

Channeling **five points of Vitality** into Rend and Rake grants the character truly remarkable powers to change reality around him. The land around him can be made to warp and shake, and space twists and bends to suit his wishes, all in a 30-foot radius. The Poltergeist can inflict ten levels of lethal damage per turn on objects or structures.

Benefit: Imagine condensing all that Poltergeist rage and anger into a tiny ball... and then throwing it to a compatriot to use as he wishes. The Benefit of this Horror lets the Poltergeist infuse another's Horror with the violence to which Poltergeists are so prone. Add eight dice to the damage pool of any Horror that inflicts damage.

Spite-Fueled: The Spite-fueled version of this Horror does not affect space, but it does affect flesh (and gauze, and ichor...) in a particularly gruesome fashion. Anything Rend and Rake can do to space, this application allows it to do to a body. The Poltergeist can effectively warp the target's bones, wipe away the target's face or turn the target inside out if he chooses. If this

THERE ARE LIMITS

This Horror makes the fabric of reality remarkably malleable, but it does not let the character unweave the fabric of reality entirely. That is to say, this Horror is not an invitation to break the game. This Horror grants the character a great deal of power over reality itself, but efforts to push reality too far are likely to cause a violent reaction as *something* gives way (if the player rolls a botch, tries something well beyond the providence of this power or just plain abuses the laws of reality). Given the immensity of the forces the character is manipulating, such events can take a variety of forms. The following is a list of potential backlashes, but the Storyteller should feel free to come up with more and make the backlash fit the nature of the character's excess.

- The Stormwall rating could go up or down by as many as three points
- The character's Vitality rating could drop
- The *crucible's* Vitality rating could drop
- The character's Spite or even Spite rating could go up
- The character could take one health level of damage for each point of Vitality he was channeling into the Horror

Horror is used simply to inflict damage, it inflicts three levels of lethal damage per point of Spite tapped. More subtle or creative uses of this Horror (fusing the target's hands over his eyes, wiping away the target's face, stretching the target's tongue and fusing it to his forehead, etc.) are possible, although how much Spite must be tapped to achieve a particular effect is up to the Storyteller, though guidelines are provided. In these cases, however, the Poltergeist must touch the target. Due to the truly ghastly nature of this Horror, any Spite gained from tapping Spite for Rend and Rake is *doubled*.

Spite tapped Effect

- 1 Upper and lower teeth fused together, eyes fused shut
- 2 Neck stretched three feet, forearm bones transformed into long osseous corkscrews
- 3 Torso shrunk to size of watermelon, arms and legs switched
- 4 All bones turned to cartilage, body fused into permanent fetal position
- 5 Target turned entirely inside out, but without inflicting damage

SKINRIDER: DOPPELGÄNGER

The old senator continued fixing his bow tie and didn't seem perturbed in the slightest by the hooded gunman. "I'll have you know I've been paid very good money to vote for the NSA's 'ghost-buster' budget," said the senator, "and you can't stop me. And you can't very well kill me, either, since they're expecting me downstairs in just under ten minutes and security's out in the hall. You don't look like you're doing this for the principle, son, you look like a hit man, and that means you don't want to get caught."

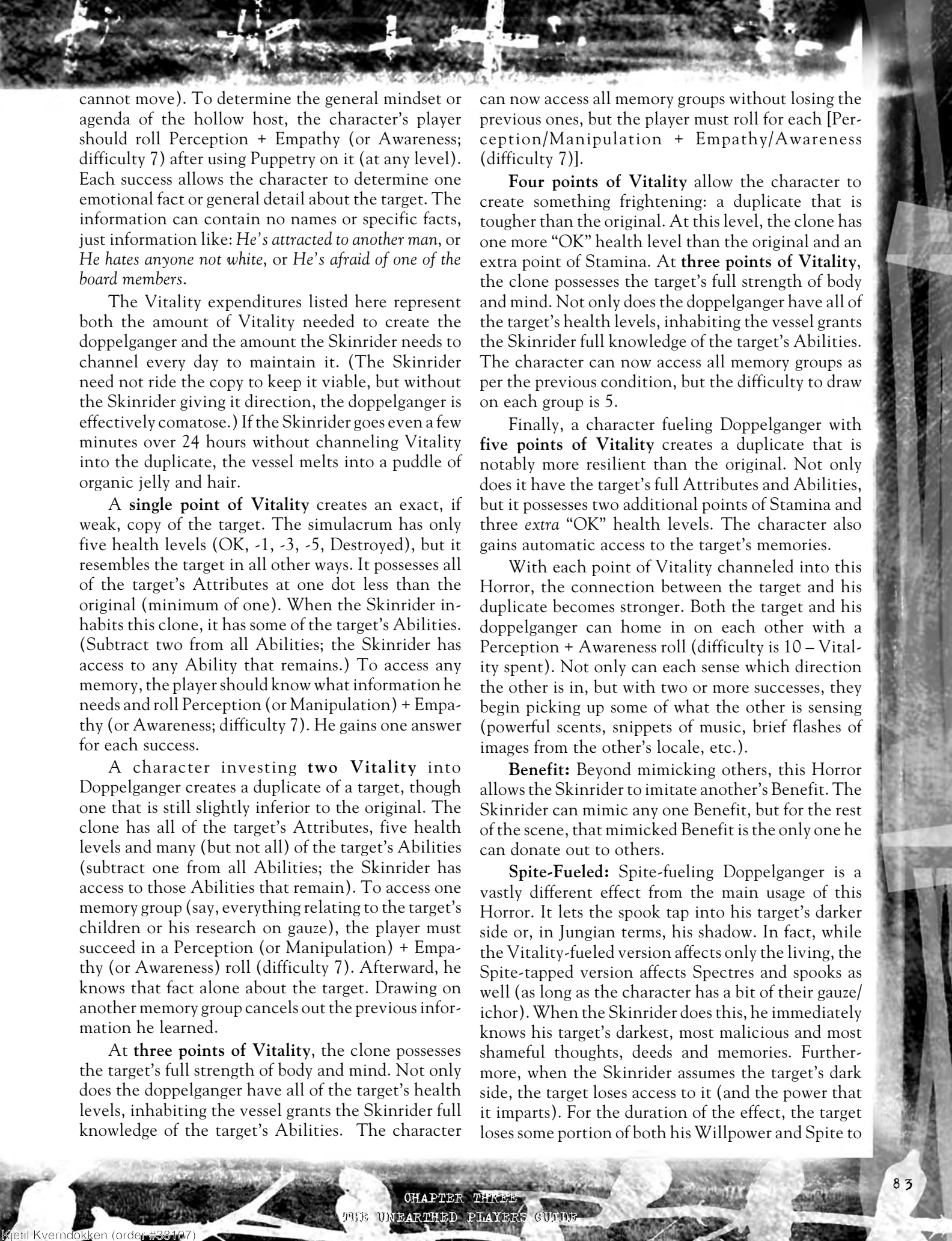
"Actually, you're right," said the gunman, slipping off the mask. The senator gasped. It was as though his reflection had gone rogue. The face smiling menacingly at him was his own. "I don't really think they'll miss you, Senator."

This disturbing Horror allows the Skinrider to create a skin and bone duplicate of his target (a la *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*) by touching a simple genetic sample (a drop of blood, a lock of hair, nail clippings, cheek cells, etc). The Skinrider may then ride this empty vessel as his own body for as long as he channels Vitality into the new body on a daily basis. If this new body takes more damage than it can withstand, it immediately melts into a pool of sticky ectoplasm.

When the Skinrider is inhabiting the vessel, he has the target's memories and Abilities — and the target senses the doppelgänger's presence. The spook can choose whether he wants to use his own dice pool or the target's for any given action. The two bodies are connected by a sympathetic link that they can use to track the other down (much as a spirit's disadvantage with its counterpart). This Horror works only on humans, and only if they're still alive. If the target dies while the doppelgänger is still active, the body remains, but the Skinrider loses access to its Abilities and memories.

Only Skinriders can take this Horror.

System: Without spending Vitality, Doppelgänger lets the character create a simulacrum of the target. The duplicate is only a shell and possesses only a single health level. It can't move beyond appearing to breath, nor can it speak, but it resembles the target in every way. If the Skinrider occupies this hollow vessel, he might sense a few of the bigger issues running through the target's mind, and he may have some insights into what the target's Abilities are, but he can't bring them to bear himself (since he can use them only when he's in the vessel, and the vessel



cannot move). To determine the general mindset or agenda of the hollow host, the character's player should roll Perception + Empathy (or Awareness; difficulty 7) after using Puppetry on it (at any level). Each success allows the character to determine one emotional fact or general detail about the target. The information can contain no names or specific facts, just information like: *He's attracted to another man*, or *He hates anyone not white*, or *He's afraid of one of the board members*.

The Vitality expenditures listed here represent both the amount of Vitality needed to create the doppelganger and the amount the Skinrider needs to channel every day to maintain it. (The Skinrider need not ride the copy to keep it viable, but without the Skinrider giving it direction, the doppelganger is effectively comatose.) If the Skinrider goes even a few minutes over 24 hours without channeling Vitality into the duplicate, the vessel melts into a puddle of organic jelly and hair.

A **single point of Vitality** creates an exact, if weak, copy of the target. The simulacrum has only five health levels (OK, -1, -3, -5, Destroyed), but it resembles the target in all other ways. It possesses all of the target's Attributes at one dot less than the original (minimum of one). When the Skinrider inhabits this clone, it has some of the target's Abilities. (Subtract two from all Abilities; the Skinrider has access to any Ability that remains.) To access any memory, the player should know what information he needs and roll Perception (or Manipulation) + Empathy (or Awareness; difficulty 7). He gains one answer for each success.

A character investing **two Vitality** into Doppelganger creates a duplicate of a target, though one that is still slightly inferior to the original. The clone has all of the target's Attributes, five health levels and many (but not all) of the target's Abilities (subtract one from all Abilities; the Skinrider has access to those Abilities that remain). To access one memory group (say, everything relating to the target's children or his research on gauze), the player must succeed in a Perception (or Manipulation) + Empathy (or Awareness) roll (difficulty 7). Afterward, he knows that fact alone about the target. Drawing on another memory group cancels out the previous information he learned.

At **three points of Vitality**, the clone possesses the target's full strength of body and mind. Not only does the doppelganger have all of the target's health levels, inhabiting the vessel grants the Skinrider full knowledge of the target's Abilities. The character

can now access all memory groups without losing the previous ones, but the player must roll for each [Perception/Manipulation + Empathy/Awareness (difficulty 7)].


Four points of Vitality allow the character to create something frightening: a duplicate that is tougher than the original. At this level, the clone has one more "OK" health level than the original and an extra point of Stamina. At **three points of Vitality**, the clone possesses the target's full strength of body and mind. Not only does the doppelganger have all of the target's health levels, inhabiting the vessel grants the Skinrider full knowledge of the target's Abilities. The character can now access all memory groups as per the previous condition, but the difficulty to draw on each group is 5.

Finally, a character fueling Doppelganger with **five points of Vitality** creates a duplicate that is notably more resilient than the original. Not only does it have the target's full Attributes and Abilities, but it possesses two additional points of Stamina and three *extra* "OK" health levels. The character also gains automatic access to the target's memories.

With each point of Vitality channeled into this Horror, the connection between the target and his duplicate becomes stronger. Both the target and his doppelganger can home in on each other with a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty is 10 - Vitality spent). Not only can each sense which direction the other is in, but with two or more successes, they begin picking up some of what the other is sensing (powerful scents, snippets of music, brief flashes of images from the other's locale, etc.).

Benefit: Beyond mimicking others, this Horror allows the Skinrider to imitate another's Benefit. The Skinrider can mimic any one Benefit, but for the rest of the scene, that mimicked Benefit is the only one he can donate out to others.

Spite-Fueled: Spite-fueling Doppelganger is a vastly different effect from the main usage of this Horror. It lets the spook tap into his target's darker side or, in Jungian terms, his shadow. In fact, while the Vitality-fueled version affects only the living, the Spite-tapped version affects Spectres and spooks as well (as long as the character has a bit of their gauze/ichor). When the Skinrider does this, he immediately knows his target's darkest, most malicious and most shameful thoughts, deeds and memories. Furthermore, when the Skinrider assumes the target's dark side, the target loses access to it (and the power that it imparts). For the duration of the effect, the target loses some portion of both his Willpower and Spite to



the Skinrider. Note, however, that the character can never affect anything that has more Spite than she has in Vitality (so no affecting Malfeans or Grandmother). The benefit, however, is that the character can tap any stolen Spite without the normal repercussions. (That is, the character can tap stolen Spite without raising her own ratings or points.)

Tapping one Spite gives the Skinrider access to the most recent petty thoughts, cruel deeds and bad behavior lurking in the target's mind. Anything the target has done wrong in the last 24 hours becomes instant knowledge for the spook using this effect. Furthermore, the Skinrider steals one Willpower and one Spite point for the duration of the Horror.

If the Skinrider taps two Spite, he sees the target's bad deeds from the past month, including any guilty thoughts he may have had and anything malevolent that the target has been plotting. The spook using this effect also steals two points of Willpower and two points of Spite from his target and adds them to his own pools.

By tapping three Spite, the spook gains access to knowledge of the target's immoral or unethical behaviors and desires from the past year, as well as any evil deeds he may be plotting currently. The Skinrider also absorbs three points apiece of Willpower and Spite from his target.

Tapping four Spite gives the spook access to all but the target's most repressed evil urges. The only aspects of the target's bad behavior and shameful memories to which he does not gain access are those that happened in the target's childhood; all other similar knowledge floods his mind. He also takes five points of the target's Willpower and Spite to add to his own totals.

If the Skinrider risks tapping five Spite on this application of Doppelganger, he knows every guilty thought, repressed urge and vile deed that the target has had or done in his entire life. Furthermore, the target loses all but one point of Willpower and Spite, which flows into the Skinrider (up to a maximum of 10 Willpower and 15 Spite) This assumed Spite will not cause the spook's Spite pool to roll over into Spite rating, though. Rather, it stays liquid and expendable until it flows back to its real "owner" at the rate of one point per day.

As Spectres are largely creatures of malice, using this Horror to drain them of their Spite and Willpower is profoundly traumatic to them. Unfortunately, tapping in to that kind of pure malice is also more than a little devastating to the Skinrider.

Taking so much pure malice into oneself is a risky proposition at best. When a Skinrider uses this Horror on a Spectre and the Spite points subsumed would have been enough to increase his Spite rating, the two immediately enter into a contested Willpower roll. If the player rolls more successes, the Spectre falls unconscious. If the Spectre garners more successes, the character is subject to one of the following repercussions: He gains one point of the Nightmares Flaw, he loses a point from his permanent Willpower rating, he suffers two lethal wounds, he loses consciousness for five to 10 turns, he gains one point in his permanent Spite rating, or he loses one point from his starting Vitality.

WISP: CONSUME

"You don't deserve this," Carruthers said to the boy in the hospital bed, "and I can help you where your doctors can't, if you believe in magic."

The boy was too tired from fighting the tumor to take the gee-whiz attitude that Carruthers had wanted, but he still seemed interested. Carruthers channeled his power through his fingertips, and touched the boy's arm. The boy shivered under his touch. Blink felt the place where the boy's stomach hurt, where the cancer grew, and he felt his tumor implode into nothingness.

"There," said Carruthers, "Let's see your doctors explain that."

And so saying, he disappeared like the magician he was.

This Horror grants the character the ability to channel the force of raw negation or nothingness. Consume weakens or destroys a target with but a touch of pure negation from the Wisp. The more Oblivion the Wisp channels, the greater the destructive effect. Small items (a key, a sheaf of papers, a CD) can be destroyed outright, while larger items can be weakened to such a degree that they are easily destroyed by normal means. Alternatively, the spook can channel Oblivion out of and away from his target, making it stronger, more vital and less prone to the effects of entropy and decay. It is the character's decision whether to use this Horror for wholesale destructive purposes or whether he chooses to annihilate weaknesses in a system, thereby strengthening the system as a whole.

When using Consume to channel Oblivion into an object, the Horror rots and cracks wood, rusts metal, erodes plastic and glass and causes pain and withering in living (or at least sentient) targets. More complex targets break down and become useless if



more than a single point of Vitality is used to inflict damage on them. A computer stops functioning if just one point of Vitality is channeled into Consume, but it takes five points of Vitality to completely degrade all the plastic, glass, metal and rubber in it.

When harnessing this Horror to channel Oblivion away from an object, the Wisp lightens the object's (or the individual's) burden of age, infirmity and decay. An engine on the verge of blowing up can be made to purr like a kitten and run perfectly. A sick man can have his illness and frailty eaten away by Oblivion (but not his age; redirecting Oblivion cannot reverse time). Small objects can be restored to perfect condition, sans even the small imperfections that may have been inherent in the object from its very creation, and large objects can be strengthened enormously, making crumbling walls (for example) as strong as they were the day they were erected.

Only Wisps can use this Horror.

System: When not fueled with Vitality, Consume's effects are only minor and short-lived. If using Oblivion for destructive purposes, the character's touch inflicts a terrible icy pain that inflicts the target with a "wound penalty" of -3 for a number of turns equal to the number of successes on the player's Manipulation + Occult roll (difficulty 5). If a Wisp uses Consume to destroy those things that weaken or hinder the target, he can grant the target a -2 difficulty modifier for all actions for [Manipulation + Occult] turns. Regardless, the character must be touching the target to affect it either way.

The destructive effects of Consume may affect inanimate objects, Vitality pools or living beings. Channeling the power of Oblivion directly into a living target causes grievous harm by chilling, weakening and withering its body (or gauze). In this case, the Wisp chooses whether to impair the target (taking two dice from the target's dice pools for each point of Vitality spent) or damage it (inflicting two health levels of aggravated damage for every point of Vitality invested).

When used against objects, Consume weakens the integrity of the object, making it easier to damage or destroy. All objects have hardness ratings, so to affect them, one must first exceed their hardness rating on a damage roll (which is effectively a difficulty rating against damage). The following table is based on combining an object's hardness scale (using Mohs mineral scale) + a base difficulty. This means some objects have hardness ratings above 10, which means the characters should (rightly) never be able to affect them, even if they roll a 10. Consume, however,

BASE HARDNESS

Mohs Rating is the standard, real-world hardness scale ascribed to minerals. Object is an exemplar of that hardness, though included are some example objects to facilitate the Storyteller's job. The Difficulty Modifier indicates the additional penalty ascribed to the object, while the Hardness Rating is the final value to beat on a damage roll to actually inflict lasting damage.

Mohs Rating	Object	Difficulty Mod.	Hardness Rating
0	Paper	+0	0
1	Talc	+0	1
2	Gypsum	+1	3
	Fingernail		
	Gold		
	Ivory		
3	Copper	+2	5
	Door		
4	Platinum	+3	7
	Brick Wall		
5	Steel	+4	9
	Light Post		
6	Tungsten	+5	11
	Titanium		
7	Quartz	+6	13
	Silicon		
	Vault Door		
8	Chromium	+7	15
9	Tungsten Carbide	+8	17
10	Diamond	+9	19

allows the Wisp to reduce the object's hardness rating by one for every point of Vitality expended in the process. In game, the effect is to essentially rot the object or riddle it with imperfections until it becomes brittle and vulnerable to damage. Please note that characters can spend only five Vitality in a turn with this Horror, which means to weaken really hard objects takes time.

If the character channels Vitality into Consume's strengthening aspect, the target receives extra dice in his dice pools equal to twice the number of Vitality the Wisp spent (i.e., if the Wisp spends two Vitality, the target gains four dice). This effect may be applied to soak rolls, Attribute + Ability rolls or any other roll or dice pool the Storyteller deems appropriate. It may also be used to heal bodies or gauze, returning two health levels (or four Vitality), or increase the hardness ratings of materials by one per point of Vitality invested.

The destructive effects of Consume are permanent until healed normally (in which case objects are permanently damaged). The reinvigorating effects

last for three turns per point of Vitality spent, and then wane, losing one die per turn after that until the item's (or creature's) dice pools are back to normal. The only time this doesn't hold true is when the Wisp heals or cures flesh and gauze. In this case, the treatment is permanent (though cancer is never really cured, but simply in remission). And no, you can't eliminate Stains through this Horror!

Benefit: The Benefit of Consume lets the Wisp tap Spite points for a Horror without the danger of gaining more Spite. This Benefit protects against only those Spite expenditures less than or equal to the Wisp's starting Vitality. If the total Spite expenditure exceeds the Wisp's starting Vitality, the beneficiary's player rolls dice equal to the difference between Spite tapped and the Wisp's starting Vitality.

Example: Zoë, being both angry and low on Vitality, taps Spite to fuel Helter Skelter. John uses the Benefit of Consume to protect her from the potential hazards of using Spite to fuel a Horror. As a Wisp, John's starting Vitality was four. If Zoë taps four or fewer Spite for Helter Skelter, the Benefit of this Horror lets her avoid rolling to

gain Spite altogether. If Zoë goes all out and taps the maximum five Spite to fuel her Horror, then she will have to roll the difference between the number of Spite tapped (five) and her helper's starting Vitality (four), for a total of one die, to see if she gains any new Spite for her aggressive act — far better odds for avoiding more Spite than rolling all five dice.

Spite-Fueled: When using Spite to fuel Consume, the Wisp can only use this Horror's overtly destructive effects (and cannot use it to decontaminate, bolster or empower anyone or anything), but each point of Spite channels twice the amount of Oblivion into the target, causing twice as much damage.

VITALITY EMBLEMS

Vitality, as the very essence of life, has more than just the obvious uses (such as manifesting in the physical world or powering Horrors). High Vitality spooks (those with Vitality ratings of 6 and above) who have ventured into the Underworld have recently discovered that they can also solidify Vitality into four distinct archetypal forms. Linked as it is to the spook's psyche, Vitality can take on only certain deeply ingrained, iconic forms. When it does so, these so-called "Vitality Emblems" are unusually powerful objects for the duration of their existence, giving high-Vitality spooks yet one more advantage over those whose life force has waned.

Only those characters who have ventured into the Underworld can learn to manifest Vitality Emblems, typically in response to the harsh stimuli there. Once a character has learned to create a particular Vitality Emblem while in the Underworld, he can thereafter use it anywhere. Whether this is because the lore of such Emblems exists only in the Underworld or for some other, more complex metaphysical reason nobody knows.

Vitality Emblems typically manifest initially as a self-defense measure against the Maelstrom, although Emblems of Protection may just as easily appear automatically when some other hazardous catalyst presents itself. Creating Vitality Emblems is essentially a form of forging one's own life force into utilitarian objects.

Any given individual manifests a particular Emblem in whatever form most optimally fits her mindset or unconscious expectations. Therefore, one person's Emblem of Protection might be samurai armor while another's is a shield or a flowing robe. In the case of Combat Emblems, one character's Emblem might be

a scythe (scythes are enormously popular Emblems of Combat in the Underworld), while another spook's Combat Emblem might be a baseball bat. In general, Vitality Emblems are immediate effects and generally highly iconic for the spooks manifesting them.


The archetypal nature of Vitality Emblems allows the character to create four kinds of Emblems: the Emblem of Protection (robe, armor, shield, etc.), the Emblem of Combat (scythe, whip, sword, staff, etc.), the Emblem of Illumination (lantern, flashlight, candle, etc.) and the Emblem of Restraint (chains, manacles, handcuffs, etc.).

Vitality Emblems can be used only by the character who manifested them. They can have no "moving parts," so there are no ranged weapons, like bows or handguns, and they're classically iconic, meaning no suits of powered armor or the like.

A character's Vitality Emblem always takes the same form, with one key difference: The more Vitality one invests in an Emblem, the more remarkable its appearance becomes. A character whose Emblem of Protection is a heavy robe notes early on that, at a single point of Vitality, the robe feels thin and sports no particular embellishments. If that same character channels five points of Vitality into that Emblem, however, it appears (and feels) far more impressive. It may sport small gems sewn into the cuffs and hem, and in all likelihood, it feels both thicker and more comfortable to the wearer. A one-Vitality scythe appears as the most basic possible scythe consisting of a handle and a blade, while a five-Vitality scythe seems sleeker, sharper and more menacing. It may have symbols important to the character etched into the handle, or it may have small gems set into the metal blade. When a character gains the ability to manifest Vitality Emblems, the player should decide just what the Emblem looks like at each level of Vitality investment.

As with Horrors, Vitality Emblems require an investment of Vitality (a minimum of one point, up to a maximum of five), and they last for one full scene before dissolving.

Unsurprisingly, knowledge of Vitality Emblems comes most easily to those spooks with higher Vitality Ratings. Each Vitality Emblem costs [20 - Vitality Rating] experience points to learn, though the Emblem of Protection is automatically conferred when Maelstrom winds arise. Otherwise the player must purchase this Emblem to be able to use it at any other time. Incorporeal or manifesting characters may use Vitality Emblems; projectors who are in their physical bodies may not. Characters may not learn Vitality



Emblems until they have ventured into the Underworld for at least one hour. (Chapter One presents a situation in which the characters may learn the Emblem of Protection while not in the Underworld; this is a unique instance.)

EMBLEMS OF PROTECTION

The Spectre advanced on her, maggot revolver in hand, with a palpable aura of menace and, Grace thought, satisfaction. She was cornered. None of her illusions had saved her, and now she was clearly about to meet her end in this desolate and horrifying place.

As the Spectre fired three shots from the grotesque revolver, Grace turned away so she didn't see the repulsive ordnance coming at her.

All she felt were three soft impacts in her side but no real pain. Glancing at her side, she saw that her trench coat had changed to unthinkably fine scale mail, so supple that it flowed like silk, but so strong that it had blocked all three shots without so much as a scratch.

The Spectre stopped gloating. This new development changed everything.

The protective Vitality Emblem is nearly always the first to be discovered and used by those spooks capable of producing them. Protection Emblems initially appear as the character unconsciously channels his Vitality to protect himself from some source of damage, be it the scythe of a Spectre, the ghost-shot bullets of an NSA agent or the Maelstrom's winds. After that, the character may remember how it felt to summon the Protection Emblem and summon it again at will any time he needs it. Characters almost always discover the use of the Emblem of Protection while in harm's way (if they don't know about it already), and such discoveries may even save the character from a bad end.

Protection Emblems take a wide array of forms — thick protective scale mail robes, a shield, plate mail, or even riot gear — usually whatever's most appropriate for its first manifestation based on the character's psyche and unconscious notions of what constitutes a durable and suitable spiritual panoply. Once a character has created the Emblem of Protection, that particular manifestation becomes associated with defense and safety in the character's mind, and the Protection Emblem thereafter always takes the same form.

However it comes into being, a Protective Vitality Emblem provides among the most durable armor found in the Underworld. Better yet, it also

provides additional protection by acting as camouflage, allowing the character to traverse the strange territory of the Underworld with much less fear of attack by Spectres.

System: Protective Vitality Emblems defend the character from harm in a myriad of ways.

As armor, a Protection Emblem provides two additional soak dice for every point of Vitality the character invests in it. These dice can be used to soak any kind of damage including aggravated. Protective Vitality Emblems also defend their wearers from the damage of the Maelstrom. Each Vitality point invested in the Emblem offsets the Maelstrom's destructive effects by one rating. A five Vitality Emblem, therefore, protects the user from the Maelstrom's damaging effects completely.

Protection Emblems also have an offensive capability that can be used only if the character is being grappled or held. Upon activation, the Emblem is capable of surrounding its wearer with a fiery nimbus that inflicts four dice of lethal damage for every additional point of Vitality the character chooses to channel into the Emblem for that purpose. For example, a player who wanted his character to wear five-point armor had to expend five points of Vitality to get it. Assuming that an antagonist grapples with his character, and he wants to do the most damage possible with his armor's nimbus, the player could spend up to five additional Vitality points (if the character has it) to inflict 20 dice of damage to the enemy grappling him.

Lastly, the camouflage effects of the Protection Emblem cause the Emblem to take on the general color and appearance of the surroundings, thereby decreasing the difficulty of all Stealth rolls by two so long as the character is wearing the Protection Emblem. This function is automatic in the Underworld.

EMBLEMS OF COMBAT

Zoë had done this once before, but she wasn't sure how. Now, as the swarm of Spectres descended on her, she really needed it. She willed the weapon into existence and felt the Vitality churning inside her.

When she felt the heft of it in her hand, she smiled and opened her eyes. The enormous silver scythe fit in her grip perfectly, weighed nearly nothing and glinted more brightly than any light she'd seen since entering the Underworld.

As the Spectres advanced, Zoë raised the silver scythe and readied herself for the violence to come.

Following the development of the Protective Emblem, many spooks often correctly deduce the

possibility of creating a Combat Emblem. Urgent need for a weapon can also trigger the manifestation of an Emblem of Combat in the heat of battle. In the absence of a strong archetypal image of a melee weapon in the character's mind, Emblems of Combat most often default to the shape of a scythe.

Emblems of Combat are improbably fast and highly accurate weapons. They also prove remarkably lethal in the hands of almost any character wielding them. An Emblem of Combat is so light that the wielder never grows fatigued from its use. The Combat Emblem grows from the character's concept of pure lethality, and it will always be a sleek and deadly example of its type.

System: Whatever its appearance, a Combat Emblem always provides the same benefits. Since such melee weapons are powerfully iconic, very few people use daggers or other unimpressive weapons as an Emblem of Combat. Sleek swords, massive clubs and the ever-popular scythe are the most common Combat Emblems seen in the Underworld (so far).

Vitality Benefit

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | +2 initiative modifier, -1 difficulty to hit, Strength + 6 damage |
| 2 | +4 initiative modifier, -1 difficulty to hit, Strength + 7 damage |
| 3 | +6 initiative modifier, -2 difficulty to hit, Strength + 7 damage |
| 4 | +7 initiative modifier, -2 difficulty to hit, Strength + 8 damage |
| 5 | +8 initiative modifier, -3 difficulty to hit, Strength + 9 damage |

The table shows the bonuses added to the Emblem's base stats by investing Vitality. The damage done by a two-Vitality Emblem, therefore, would be Strength + 7 lethal damage (Strength + 4 base plus three additional dice for the Vitality expenditure).

EMBLEMS OF ILLUMINATION

Kate was still dazed from her vision, and the light from Blink's hands seemed to dim considerably in the oppressive gloom of the tunnel. He heard something move from beyond his vision, and felt fear rising in his heart. You could be out of here in a second, man, he thought. You could blink back home in a second.

He shook off the thought and pointed at the noise, wishing, hoping, willing his light to become brighter. The burst of light that emanated from his palm not only illuminated the tunnel, but sent the Spectre clinging to its wall shrieking back into the darkness.

All right, *thought Blink*. I'll stay for the encore.

Less obvious than the Emblems of Protection or Combat, but very necessary (and incredibly helpful) in the darkness of the Underworld, is the Emblem of Illumination. The Emblem of Illumination is a light that never goes out, that reveals things for what they are and grants the ability to see across vast distances. It also exposes and impairs Spectres caught in the path of its illumination. The true necessity for Luminous Emblems in the Underworld can be understood only after a character has had to tinker with a source of light that will not stay lit in Maelstrom winds while a swarm of Spectres closes in and the only way to safety is a thin path wending through otherwise lethal territory.

Some characters may manifest a Luminous Emblem the first time they find themselves in the dark of the Underworld. Others may develop theirs while trying to peer through the storm eddies of the Underworld. The appearance of such Emblems is as variable as any other Vitality Emblem. Most tend to look like large old metal lanterns, though others resemble simple pillar candles, or even simple balls of light centered on the character's palm. As with all Emblems, the form taken by the Emblem of Illumination depends on what kind of archetypal device is paired with the concept of illumination in the character's mind.

These Emblems emit a warm golden radiance. This unearthly light can penetrate Maelstroms, improving visibility immensely, even in a powerful storm. In clear weather (rare in the Underworld), the light from a Luminous Emblem can be seen up to seven miles away.

The Luminous Emblem grants two obvious advantages: the ability to see clearly through the black Maelstrom winds and the ability to use the "Bridge of Thoughts," (a form of telepathic communication) with any ally currently illuminated by the Emblem.

System: The light shed by an Emblem of Illumination extends far beyond the range of any normal light source, and is unimpeded by the black winds of the Maelstrom. Within the radius of illumination, the character gains many advantages.

First, the character sees everything clearly in the illuminated area. Neither the black swirling winds and dust of the Maelstrom nor artificial darkness of any kind can obscure the light of the Luminous Emblem. Additionally, all Perception rolls made by those in the radius of illumination are made at -2 difficulty.

Second, Spectres entering the radius of illumination suffer from exposure to the Emblem's light. While it causes no actual damage, the light does inflict the equivalent of a wound penalty on all Spectres in the radius of illumination. Most Spectres prefer to stay beyond the Emblem's range, although larger or more malevolent Spectres may risk the agony in an attempt to kill the Emblem's bearer.

Vitality	Illumination Range	Spectre Penalty
1	30 feet	-1
2	50 feet	-1
3	70 feet	-2
4	80 feet	-3
5	100 feet	-4

The Bridge of Thoughts is a method of telepathic communication that foregoes the need to yell over the winds of the Maelstrom. A character manifesting the Emblem of Illumination can establish mental communication with anyone currently illuminated by the Emblem and with whom he is on intimate and amicable terms. The player need only succeed on a Willpower roll to establish this silent communication, though the difficulty of that roll depends on the amount of Vitality invested in the Emblem. The character may speak telepathically to only one person at a time. While he

may speak with many persons in succession, the player must make a Willpower roll each time he establishes (or re-establishes) communication with someone.

Vitality	Difficulty
1	8
2	7
3	6
4	5
5	4

EMBLEMS OF RESTRAINT

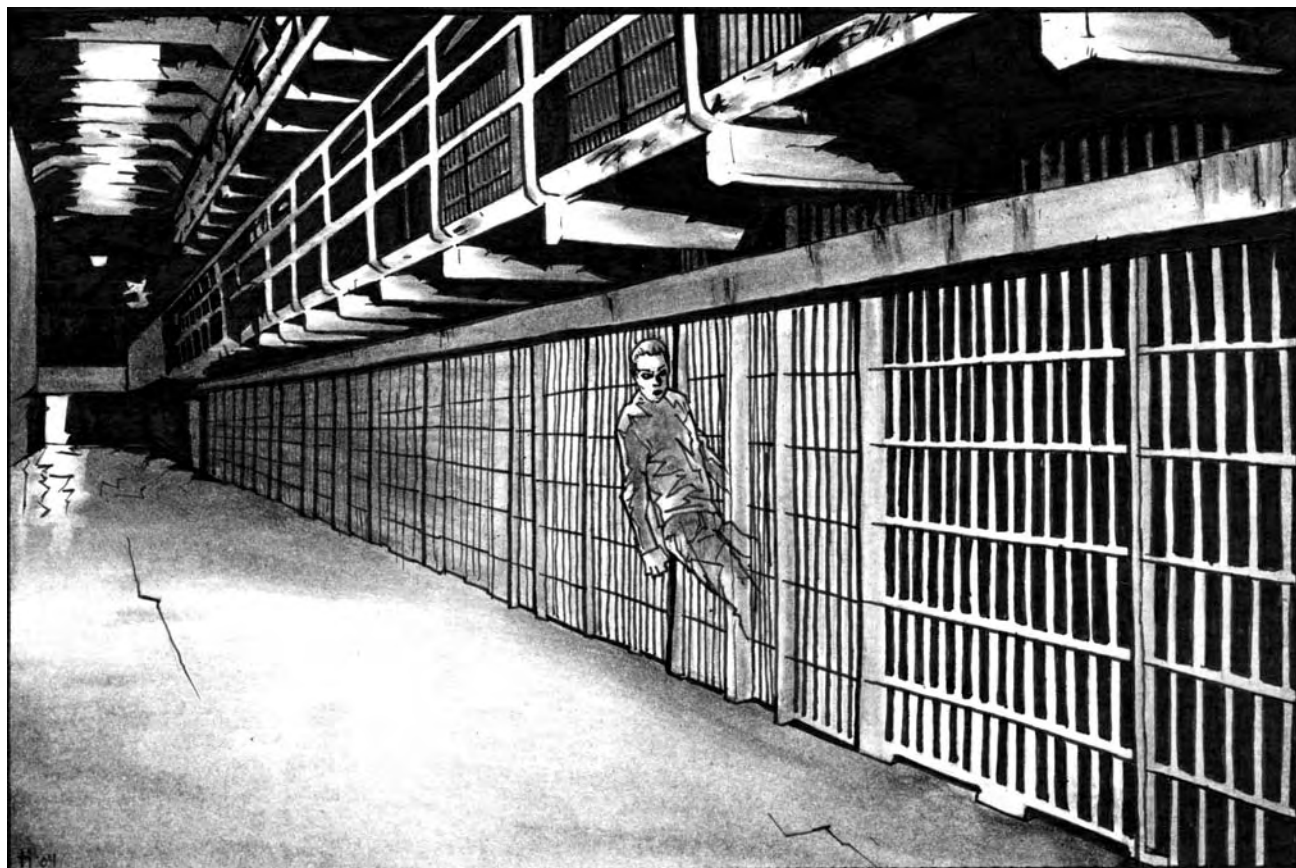
The Spectre commander was retreating.

"Stop him!" yelled Tom.

"And get our asses kicked?" said Blink. "You see the size of that thing?"

Chet kept his eyes sharply on his target. "Hang on," he said. "There's something I want to try."

Tom and Blink stepped back as Chet closed his eyes. In his hands appeared a bolo, three lengths of fine silver chain with weighted ends joined at a central ring. Hesitating only a moment to take aim, he threw the bolo at the monstrous Spectre's legs.



The Restraint hit and wrapped several times around the Spectre's legs, tripping it. Once down, the monster's attempts to get up were feeble at best.

"Now let's see how tough it is," said Chet, a look of profound satisfaction on his face.

From time to time, a character may need to capture or bind an opponent more than she needs to kill it. Under such circumstances, the character may find that she's capable of manipulating her Vitality in a way that creates a powerful Emblem of Restraint. Emblems of restraint typically take the form of chains, manacles or leg irons, although they may also take the form of a length of silver rope, handcuffs or other such restraining devices.

Emblems of Restraint may be used to secure a target after he's been grappled into submission, or, if the user has a keen aim, they may be thrown to stop a moving target. Once in place, the chains weaken the captive physically and mentally, making it hard for the captive to even try to struggle. Depending on how much Vitality the character invests in the Emblem, the Restraints may even inhibit the use of all Horrors (especially Spectral ones) and cut off a Spectre from the hive-mind.

Some Restraining Emblems appear to vanish once their captive is secured, making it seem as though he

remains unfettered. In such cases it is possible for the captive to walk normally, but even that limited mobility ends if the Emblem's creator gives the mental command. When such Restraints are in use, only the Emblem's creator and the captive himself know that the Restraining Emblem is in place.

System: The creator of a Restraint Emblem can place the Restraints on the target after subduing him with a grappling attack. Alternatively, the Restraints can be thrown at the target [requiring the user to make a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 7) to hit]. The target may dodge, but if he fails, the Restraints fasten themselves around his legs, holding him fast.

The captive on whom the Emblem of Restraint is being used is overcome by a profound lassitude. Any action requires an act of will (i.e., a Willpower roll is required any turn the captive wishes to take an action more strenuous than just lying there). The more Vitality the Emblem's creator invests in the Restraints, the greater the difficulty of the Willpower roll becomes.

Furthermore, the Emblem of Restraint saps the captive's physical capabilities and inhibits the use of Horrors. These effects are cumulative, so a Restraining Emblem into which three Vitality have been invested reduces Dexterity and Strength by two and raises the difficulty of all Horrors to 8.

Vitality	Willpower Difficulty	Additional Effect
1	7	Reduces Dexterity by two (minimum of 1)
2	7	Difficulties for all Horrors raised to 8
3	8	Reduces Strength by two (minimum of 1)
4	8	Disconnects target from hive-mind
5	9	Reduces Stamina by two (minimum of 1)

CHAPTER FOUR: STORYTELLING THE DEAD



Orpheus: Of what does the marble think while it is hewn? It thinks: I am struck, insulted, ruined, lost... Life sculpts me, Heurtebise. Let it finish its work!

—Orpheus

First learn your rules of engagement.
Then decide if you want to follow them.

—Capt. Chet Mason (Ret.)



Welcome now to the fourth stop in our carnival of terrors: the chapter of advice and resources for Storytellers. Here are the various sections of the chapter:

- **It's a Whole New World.** We begin with practical guidance in constructing and running stories based on the Spectre Breed War and the confrontation with Grandmother Death. We suggest ways the Storyteller can introduce these events into her chronicle. Storytellers also receive suggestions on motivating characters to stay together and work closely with the chronicle's supporting cast.

- **A New Beginning.** Next, Storytellers receive advice on how to introduce new characters into a long-running chronicle.

- **Anatomy of Adventure, or How to Run a Chronicle.** Pretty self-explanatory.

- **Battles in the War and The Spectre Breed Wars.** The chapter continues with a guide to the Spectre Breed War. Storytellers learn the reasons for the war and how the Spectres fight and strategize. Just how *do* you fight a war when everyone knows what everyone else thinks? Just as importantly, what do the *characters* do when they find themselves caught in such a war? This section describes the various stages of the war and offers scenarios that can drag the crucible into the conflict.

- **New Allies.** Storytellers also receive a selection of spook and Spectre characters. Some of these characters may become the crucible's allies; others could become adversaries. Depending on the characters' choices, they may end up with some very strange and terrible allies indeed.

- **Dead Cities.** As a further resource, Storytellers receive two major locations in the Underworld. Once upon a time, the cities of the living cast shadows into the realm of the dead. Ghosts dwelled in these phantom cities. The terrible Maelstrom destroyed these "Necropoli," but not completely. The characters may find danger, important clues or valuable resources in the wreckage of the New York Necropolis. Even greater peril and prizes await them in the ruins of a city built by ghosts themselves. No one but the Malfeans remembers its name, but this Nameless City has become one of the most important battlegrounds in the Spectre Breed War.

- **Ghost Stories.** The chapter concludes with several more story seeds. These follow the "mission profile" format set forth in previous supplements. If the characters persevere, they can discover the truth about the Spectre Breed War, find some hint of Grandmother's nature and intentions and learn what they must do to save the world.

Although this chapter is meant for Storytellers, players may feel free to read it too. Players can actively help their Storyteller move the troupe into this new phase of **Orpheus**. Reading the rest of the chapter won't help a player to anticipate a plot: The character, plot and setting materials are mere starting-points that each Storyteller will develop differently.

IT'S A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Each previous **Orpheus** supplement brought big changes to the characters and the setting. **End Game** does too. The characters have grown considerably from the callow recruits who joined the Orpheus Group. Their world has become more dangerous than they could imagine. In **End Game**, the characters face the ultimate peril, but great opportunities as well. These challenges demand that the characters grow and change again — though they have considerable freedom in deciding what they will become.

As with the previous supplements, these new directions are optional. Storytellers are certainly free to cherry-pick the elements they like from this and the previous **Orpheus** supplements, while ignoring the rest. As Storyteller, you may want to hew more closely to a chronicle style described in a previous book. Or you may skip some of the story arcs and chronicle styles from earlier books and push characters directly into the events of **End Game**. It's your chronicle; we just try to help.

WHO ARE THE CHARACTERS NOW?

In the long and turbulent path since the Orpheus Group recruited the characters, they have been salaried employees, therapists to the dead, spies, fugitives, occult investigators and held many other roles besides. Most recently, (in **The Orphan-Grinders**), they became soldiers fighting a ghostly war of resistance against a massive invasion of Spectres. Perhaps they even became generals in that war.

The characters also became *powerful*. They are now some of the most skilled and experienced spooks in the world, as well as the most organized. Rival organizations such as Terrel & Squibb or Uriah Bishop's pigment cult have fallen — to the characters themselves, to the machinations of other rivals or to the cunning malevolence of Spectres. A crucible that has passed through the trials of the previous stories has surely learned a wide variety of Third-Tier and Crucible Horrors, and is ready to discover the potent Fourth-Tier Horrors. The crucible has also learned how to combine Benefits for even



greater power. The characters have gone from minor agents to movers and shakers in their own right. Foes that once terrified them have dwindled to become comparatively minor nuisances. They receive choices, responsibilities and new enemies equal to their power... whether they want them or not.

The characters' burgeoning power opens new roles to them. They can pass the Stormwall, which once seemed like an impenetrable barrier, to explore the dreadful Underworld on the other side. Few other spooks can equal this feat — or survive the Underworld's dangers.

The crucible's power also enables it to face more powerful Spectres as... well, not *equals*, but as a force of sufficient power that the Spectre leaders may view them as a resource and a threat, rather than as anonymous souls to harvest and devour. On one hand, this may lead Spectral commanders to negotiate with the crucible and permit brief alliances of convenience (outside the negotiation process involving emissaries). On the other hand, the leaders of the Spectre factions may consider the characters worth the trouble to hunt, trap and destroy.

Their power and their access to the Underworld may push the characters into the most amazing role of all — the last hope of humanity. Only they can save the world from the warring Spectres and their horrific masters. Exactly *how* the characters save the world may push them into roles they could scarcely imagine before, from sacrificial saviors to history's greatest mass murderers.

WHAT DO THE CHARACTERS DO?

The crucible gains new commitments, but older commitments do not end. The characters still elevate other ghosts by resolving their tethers. They still battle hostile ghosts, especially Spectres. They might still hide from authorities that think they are criminals. Their new power and responsibility, however, gives new meanings to these familiar activities. The crucible might be rescuing once-human Spectres from the hive-mind. Each blip or drone raised to self-awareness becomes another soldier to join the world war against the Spectre invasion. The crucible may, indeed, elevate or battle Grandmother herself, the source of many Spectres. Characters on the run must avoid capture for the sake of the entire world — or they must clear their names so they can alert the mortal authorities to the danger.

Their new access to the Underworld lets the characters add a new role, that of explorer. To solve the mystery of why the Spectre Breeds now fight each other and stop the Spectre invasion, the characters must pass the Stormwall. The answers they seek exist only in the Underworld, but they are not gained easily.

When the characters solve the mystery of the Breed War and discover the Malfeans and Grandmother, they must make decisions about how to use what they learned. They cannot defer their choices or foist them onto someone else: No one else can equal their power, and all the evidence suggests that humanity faces imminent doom. They must act *now*, and the world shall live or die with their choices.

The Storyteller can do a number of things to draw the characters into this decision-making role. Most importantly, don't let any Storyteller characters tell them what they need to do. Either no one else knows — or the crucible receives multiple, conflicting advice. For instance, one ally might argue that the crucible should try to cooperate with at least one Malfean. Another ally argues that no moral person should ever compromise with such evil, no matter what the threat. A third ally could suggest that Grandmother is actually the lesser evil. Ideally, the characters themselves present diverse viewpoints and plans of action and hash out the merits of each plan of their own volition. If the crucible decides not to consider alternative strategies, that's fine. The characters made their choice. Just make sure that it's *their* choice, not something spoon-fed to them by a Storyteller character.

In order to place maximum responsibility on the characters, the Storyteller might plant clues for at least two of the methods provided for dealing with Grandmother (see Chapter Five). By the time the characters understand the full and immediate danger of Grandmother, they need to have reason to believe that at least two methods might work. Yet, they also need to have reasons to believe each method might *not* work, or that a plan might call for the characters to commit deeds they find abhorrent.

WHY DO THE CHARACTERS STAY TOGETHER?

If a chronicle has played through the events of all the previous *Orpheus* supplements, the players should have a good idea why their characters need to stay together. Still, players and Storytellers alike may benefit from a review of the benefits of unity.

Most simply, a crucible gains greater power than the sum of its component characters. Benefits increase the power of Horrors beyond what any single character can attain. This becomes even truer as characters gain higher-tier Horrors, whose Benefits may cumulate and synergize. Crucible Horrors expand upon this notion by offering supernatural powers that *only* a group can use.



A group of diverse Shades and Laments also enjoys wider options than would a crucible of, say, all Wisps or all skimmers. Each Shade can gain only *one* Fourth-Tier Horror. Clearly then, a crucible that can employ several Fourth-Tier Horrors is better able to survive the diverse perils of the Underworld than is a crucible that lacks so many options.

Different Laments likewise have their strengths and weaknesses. Projectors can call on their living bodies for Vitality, but the truly dead need not fear the abduction or destruction of their bodies. Projectors are still legally alive, so they can call on the benefits of citizenship, such as bank loans and the right to ask the police for help. Ghosts are legally dead, so they avoid complications such as paying taxes and becoming the subject of police APBs. Skimmers can flip between spook and mortal forms with ease, but sleepers can tuck their bodies in locations they *hope* are safe. Hues can call on their Stains more easily than spirits can, and they don't have an evil twin striving to screw up their afterlife. (Actually, they're like most ghosts that do have a Spectre counterpart, but their Vitality is sufficiently low that neither senses one another, not even when facing each other in direct combat.) Spirits can attain greater Vitality and run less risk of becoming Spectres themselves, though. A crucible that contains a mix of Laments can probably deal with any situation in the realms of the quick or the dead; a crucible with only one Lament probably suffers grave impediments in at least one realm.

Quite apart from the strategic advantages of belonging to a crucible, spooks need companions who understand what the heck they go through because they go through it as well. How can someone who's never left the meat behind understand the glories and terrors of existence as a spook? A crucible may begin as a tactical squadron or work team, but a successful crucible grows to become a circle of friends and maybe even a sort of family. The emotional support (and vigilance) of the crucible may be all that keeps a traumatized character from succumbing to Spite and becoming a Spectre.

Players and Storytellers may also want to remind themselves about the crucible's ties to the chronicle's supporting cast — allied spooks, mortal or ghostly informants and assistants, lovers, friends and family. If the players start to take the supporting cast for granted, the Storyteller may want to devote a story to those characters. After all, loyalty must be a two-way street, or it tends to wither and die. Any crucible can use an occasional reminder that the Storyteller characters are part of the team at the very least, if not part of the family. These characters help the crucible because they want help in return. (Forget about mere hired help: No one

can be paid enough to endure the dangers the crucible faces, which tend to spill over to everyone around them.) Family, friends, spouses and lovers expect their emotional commitment to be returned. Spooks or mortals who associate with the crucible out of a common cause expect the characters actually to work for that cause now and then. For instance, a brother on the police force may pass information to help the crucible track down a Jason. In return, he expects the crucible to help with other cases. He wants assurance that the characters really are on the side of law and order, no matter what the feds say. ("And would it kill you — sorry — to call Mom now and then?") A story devoted to personal matters or the interests of a supporting cast member may also provide a welcome break from the cosmic doom and danger of the Spectre Breed War.

ALTERNATIVE CHRONICLES

Although **End Game** presumes that the characters began with the Orpheus Group, escaped its destruction and eventually shook pursuit from government authorities, we do not *demand* that Storytellers follow this sequence. Here are a few suggestions about ways to run chronicles in which the events of one or more previous supplements didn't happen. Intrepid Storytellers may use these suggestions as jumping-off-points for still more divergent chronicles.

ORPHEUS NOT DESTROYED

For the first divergence, the events of **Crusade of Ashes** might not have happened. The characters could still work for the Orpheus Group. (For slight variations, they could work for Terrel & Squib, Next World, Lazarus Redux or their own ghost firm — plenty of entrepreneurs leave big companies to set up their own operation.) The characters never became outlaws. If they found Orpheus' ties to the pigment cult network, they may have shaken up the company's management but not to a fatal degree. The characters may, indeed, have become leading figures in Orpheus.

Characters who still work for an intact Orpheus Group enjoy some advantages in facing the Spectre Breed Wars. They retain all the organizational support implied by Backgrounds such as Health Insurance. A staff of researchers does all the tedious legwork of tracking down property deeds, police records, obscure technical articles and the life (or death) stories of people associated with a case. A prosperous company has a good chance of retaining friendly connections with federal, state and local government authorities. Not only can such connections expedite investigations and fumigations, Orpheus can give the characters credibility if they try to warn the authorities about the



Spectre invasion. The characters also don't need to worry so much about day-to-day concerns such as paying the rent. Orpheus pays its most powerful and experienced agents very well indeed.

On the other hand, working for Orpheus imposes various constraints. Saving the world from malevolent ghosts and elder gods is all very well and good, but Orpheus still has to turn a profit. Characters still have to take assignments and justify their activities and expenditures to their superiors. (If they run the company, the characters still must answer to the Board of Directors and the shareholders.)

The Orpheus management could well see the Spectre Breed War as a chance to engage in the traditionally lucrative field of military contracting, especially if Operation: Black Mercury is operational (see **The Orphan-Grinders**). Comparatively few Spectres possess the power or interest in slaughtering mortals *at the moment*... but no responsible government could tolerate such an invasion, especially when government and business leaders are just as vulnerable as the bag lady that falls prey to a Jason. Orpheus becomes one of the prime contractors in helping the government with endeavors like Operation: Black Mercury, though Terrel & Squib (if it still exists) and NextWorld (ditto) also receive contracts to train military projectors and recruit

deceased veterans. Military contracts may well force Orpheus to work with these two old enemies.

WAR STORIES

The crucible would, of course, turn out to be the only group of spooks capable of penetrating the Underworld to gather intel on the Spectres. The mood of the stories would be more like a war movie, however, with the Wasteland replacing the sands of North Africa or the jungles of Vietnam. Depending on how long the Storyteller wants to pursue this story arc, ghostly versions of *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Lost Battalion*, *Three Kings* or *Apocalypse Now* become possible. The characters no longer possess such total responsibility and freedom of choice, of course — though they must still agree to carry out whatever plan Central Command decides upon for dealing with Grandmother and the Malfeans. For a more remote variation on this sort of chronicle, the characters might be part of Black Mercury or some analogous “Extremely Special Forces” team. Indeed, the crucible might never have been part of Orpheus at all.

THE CHARACTERS ARE STILL FUGITIVES

Crusade of Ashes stripped away the characters' organizational support and turned them into fugitives.





Although this supplement offered characters a chance to end the government pursuit, a Storyteller might want to keep the characters on the run, or the characters might have missed or rejected their chances.

Since **End Game** presumes that characters have little organizational support, leaving them as fugitives does not greatly affect the story arc. Compared to Spectres, G-men are just minor nuisances. The FBI or NSA certainly will not trouble characters while they explore the Underworld...

Conceivably, however, the government captured the characters. For still another war-story variation, the government could demand military service as its price for pardoning the characters. In this case, the chronicle becomes a ghostly version of *The Dirty Dozen*. A Storyteller should give some thought, however, to how the government plans to keep the characters from taking their first opportunity to go AWOL. The military could hold sleepers' bodies hostage, but the military has few possible holds on spirits and hues. Most likely, the military will appoint its own ghost or projector to the crucible. A Storyteller should design the crucible's "handler" with special care, since he becomes an extremely important character for the chronicle.

At first, of course, the characters and their handler feel suspicion and resentment for each other. If they can win each other's respect, (a traditional dynamic), theirs could become a powerful partnership. (A government liaison/overseer is also a good way to introduce new Shades and Horrors to the crucible.) If they move from resentment to actual loathing, (another traditional dynamic), matters may turn out very badly for at least one side. The Storyteller may want to make the handler incompetent, treacherous or dangerously deluded, to justify the characters' hatred. The players will enjoy giving the dastard his just desserts.

THE PIGMENT CULT STILL EXISTS

Shades of Gray and **Shadow Games** give the crucible a chance to discover and destroy the network of pigment cults. They also learn a bit more about Spectres and witness the appearance of the first hives. **End Game** demands the existence of the Spectre hives, but the pigment cult is negotiable.

If the pigment cult and Uriah Bishop's malign crucible never existed — or at least never became a major threat — the Spectre invasion can still take place. The Spectres simply don't have help from Bishop and his group. The Spectre Breed War, in turn, can happen without any major alterations. The Storyteller does need some alternate explanation for who produces and distributes pigment, though.

After all, explaining the hue Lament becomes difficult if pigment doesn't exist at all.

If the crucible simply never pursued Bishop and his followers, the Storyteller can bring them into the Spectre Breed War. By now, Bishop and his fellow spooks have become full-fledged Spectres themselves, while retaining their Horrors. Their duped pigment cultists can become a potent fifth column operating within the mortal world. Bishop might stay loyal to Grandmother, or he might shift his allegiance to the Malfeans along with the other once-human Spectres. The latter case shifts the war's balance of power: Bishop could use poisoning plots like the one in **Shades of Gray** to slaughter waves of cultists, in the hope that their agonized deaths tip many of the victims from hue to Spectre. Do the characters bust the cult to save the cultist's lives and souls, or do they coldly accept the mass murders in order to fight Grandmother?

A NEW BEGINNING

Over the course of a long chronicle, the troupe may find it necessary to introduce new characters to the crucible. Considering the threats that **Orpheus** characters face — especially in **End Game** — some characters may meet their end. The player, naturally, wants to keep playing the chronicle, so she needs a new character. Players also may tire of their starting character and want to play someone else; or one character's deeds or personality may render her intolerable to the rest of the crucible. Storytellers, meanwhile, may want to introduce new Shades and Horrors to the chronicle. If a crucible moves far away from the chronicle's starting location, a Storyteller may also need to replace most of the supporting cast as the characters lose their old contacts, allies, landlords and other people with whom they interact regularly. Bringing new characters into a chronicle can become awkward, though. A starting character has much less power than the other characters. Why would characters who've become closer than family bring some new person into the fold? With the **Orpheus Group** destroyed, how will the crucible meet prospective new characters, anyway?

HELLO...

In some sorts of games, it's enough for characters to meet in a bar, instantly recognize each other as players' characters, and set out for adventure. **Orpheus** players have other options, with a bit more concern for character backgrounds and the ongoing plot.

One of the easiest and most graceful ways to bring a new character into a crucible is to let a player take over a Storyteller character. As a chronicle progresses, the



characters encounter many ghosts (including those they raise to self-awareness) and other projectors. Some of these spooks may become recurring guest stars. Mary Fern and Rajeev Mohan (see later in this chapter) are examples of potential allies who could be promoted to full members of a crucible. Any crucible that has played through several stories has probably met a number of other spooks who players could use as replacement characters.

If none of the Storyteller character guest stars appeals to a player, she can easily bring a new ghost into the chronicle. New hues and spirits can appear at any time. The only questions are how the characters meet the new character and why they bring him into the group (questions we shall address later in this chapter).

One especially satisfying way to justify a replacement character is to work her background into the chronicle itself. For instance, the crucible could raise a blip to self-awareness, and that spirit could become the player's new character. If a player wants to play an Orphan-Grinder, the Storyteller can give the crucible a chance to redeem a Spectre from the hive-mind.

Mortal friends, family and other associates could become spooks because of their ties to the crucible. For instance, a character might teach his best friend how to project as a skimmer, or a kid sister might die as the crucible tries to rescue her from a pigment cult, only to endure as a hue. Such personal ties give the new spook a reason to stay near the crucible and give the crucible a reason to accept the new character.

If a Storyteller wants a replacement character to possess a bit more power, to maintain play balance with the other characters, the new spook could be a survivor from another crucible that was destroyed by Spectres, the pigment cult or government action. After all, the players' characters were not the only spooks at Orpheus, nor the only refugees from the company's destruction. A

character could also come from Terrel & Squib, NextWorld or some smaller organization.

Players and Storytellers can also use new characters as a way to explore unusual character backgrounds and other ways that someone might become a spook. For example, Orpheus researchers studied the trance techniques of Voudou *houngans*, tribal shamans and other mystics. Maybe a few talented individuals have always know the secret of projecting — and the crucible encounters one of them and brings him into the team.

...AND WELCOME

A troupe also has many ways to explain why the crucible shares its mission and Vitality with a new character. The suggestions later in this chapter do not exhaust the possibilities.

If a new character already has personal ties to a crucible member, the troupe has no problem.

A new character may offer a strategic asset to the crucible. A character from a Shade not yet represented in the crucible might bring new Horrors, Benefits and manifestation powers to the team. A new Lament offers other advantages. For instance, a crucible hitherto composed of spirits and hues could value a skimmer, who can more easily deal with mortals. A character could also bring new Abilities or Backgrounds to the team. A crucible that's heavy on investigation but light on combat training, for example, could use a spook who's a former soldier, street gang member or martial arts practitioner. (In the same way, a combat-oriented crucible could benefit from gaining a member with more academic skills.)

A crucible might need a new member because of her special knowledge and experience. Perhaps the new character has information about Spectres, the Underworld or a rival organization of spooks. For example, a tribal shaman might bring information about the Underworld before its destruction, gained by skimmer ancestors. A character who used to work for Terrel & Squib could help tie up loose ends dealing with that corrupt corporation. Of course, Orphan-Grinders give first-hand reports of Spectre abilities and the hive-mind.

The events of the chronicle may impel characters to team up. The characters might meet a new member when they both fight the same group of Spectres, or when the crucible rescues the new character from a hive. The crucible and new character might meet because they investigate the same mystery. A massive disruption (such as the Stormwall breach from Chapter One) could draw a spook to the site at the same time as the crucible, and they could work together to close the breach. Whenever a player's character is destroyed, or he succumbs to Spite

OUT OF THE UNDERWORLD

End Game assumes that none of the ghosts in the Underworld survived the Maelstrom, the Spectre swarm or Grandmother's rise. A Storyteller could easily permit one survivor, though, whom the crucible could rescue. Such a character could join the crucible and provide guidance and background information about the Underworld.

If the troupe played **Wraith: The Oblivion** some time ago, the lone survivor could even be a player's character from the other game, suitably rewritten for **Orpheus** — a pleasant but completely optional way to link two chronicles.



without any chance of being redeemed, the Storyteller should watch for opportunities when a new character could enter the chronicle.

ANATOMY OF ADVENTURE, OR HOW TO RUN A CHRONICLE

In **End Game**, all the dangers and mysteries from the previous story arcs converge. Characters have a chance to encounter Grandmother, the prime mover behind all the events of the **Orpheus** saga. They learn what happened to all the world's previous ghosts. They find the origin of the Spectres. Most importantly, however, they make a very big decision, with the fate of the world at stake. For a moment, they become the most important people in the world.

Just as each previous supplement brought a new change in style and new challenges to Storytellers, so too does **End Game**. Old concerns about how to motivate characters and give them the information they need have not gone away. In **End Game**, however, the Storyteller faces the special challenge of helping the characters understand what's at stake in the conflict with Grandmother. This time, they risk far more than their own existence. If they fail or run away, it's curtains for all humanity, both the living and the dead.

EXISTING STORY HOOKS

In this climactic chapter of the **Orpheus** chronicle, the Storyteller may want to downplay or eliminate some of the previous methods of drawing characters into stories. For instance, the crucible should no longer rely on Storyteller characters such as Terrence Green to tell them what they need to do. Terrence Green, the **Orpheus** signature characters or the sample characters from later in this chapter may supply clues or point the characters in certain directions at the start of the story arc. The Storyteller should keep these characters' information obviously incomplete, and possibly mixed with grave misconceptions, so that the crucible does not rely on their help.

As the story progresses, even these expository characters should drop out. They might become casualties of the Spectre Breed War, or circumstances separate them from the players' characters. Of course, the characters lose all organizational support from Lazarus Redux, Black Mercury or any other group that might assist them in the material world once they enter the Wasteland.

The now-familiar expository device of "old Orpheus Group files" also becomes less valuable. Orpheus researched every aspect of ghost lore, but the researchers eventually discounted the worldwide legends about "lands of the dead." Their spooks never found these lands, so the scientists applied Occam's Razor and decided that they didn't exist. Even the Orpheus Group's cryo-revival patients, who helped steer the company to ghost research, never described a realm of the dead that was clearly distinct from the world of the living — or if they did, their stories were so sketchy and contradictory that the scientists did not consider them reliable. This long after Orpheus' destruction, the Storyteller may feel justified in ruling that there are no more lost files to be found. Once the characters discover the Underworld's existence, they might remember the cryo-revival patients' stories... but that's information they already have, and the current state of the Underworld renders all that information obsolete.

As the **End Game** story arc develops, however, some standard character hooks retain their importance. Some new sources of information and motivation may appear, too.

- **Forebode.** The extinction of humanity is a sufficiently large event that characters with Forebode pick it up whether they want to or not. Whenever a character tries to see the future, the Storyteller can offer a vision of doom instead of what the character wants. (Success or failure on the player's dice roll determines whether the character *knows* her vision is not related to the specific question she asked.) End-of-the-world imagery can range from the literal to the highly symbolic. A literal vision might show crowds of people dying horribly on a city street. A symbolic vision might show a vast hall of candles blown out by a sourceless wind.

- **Threats.** One of the surest ways to motivate characters is to endanger something or someone they hold dear. The angry characters usually pursue whoever threatened them, their property or their loved ones. For instance, if the Storyteller wants to hurry the crucible into the hive breach right away, she can have a Spectre grab someone close to the characters and drag the person into the Underworld. (Any Spectre can grab a ghost ally; Jasons or Spectres with materialization powers can grab mortal loved ones.)

Stupid Spectres may inadvertently give the characters a clue where they should do, by telling them not to go somewhere or do something, on pain of massive Spectre retribution. For instance, a Spectre might grunt out that the crucible better not go into the Underworld if they know what's good for them. Smart Spectres can lead characters



by the nose using this exact same method. For example, a Malfean agent who wants to lead the characters to some clue that helps them defeat Grandmother might stage an attack and threaten worse if they go to New York. Guess where the crucible will go next? Of course, smart characters probably see through this little ruse... but they still need to follow up the clue.

- **Malfean Emissaries.** Hitherto, the Malfeans remained hidden from the characters, rarely compromising their tenuous position or risking exposure. Now, however, the Malfeans may force themselves to engage in rare displays of diplomacy since they need the characters to survive Grandmother's Spectres. Sure, they and their new Emissaries (such as Mr. Jigsaw, introduced in **The Orphan-Grinders**) still hate the characters and want to destroy them or bring them into the hive-mind... but they are willing to exploit the characters for a little while. Emissaries may be slick and cunning or brutally honest. Their masters are smart enough to send them only when they are sure they can make an offer the characters can't refuse. If the characters can stand to treat with such vile beings, however, they might wheedle important information about the Underworld and Grandmother from an Emissary.

- **Prophecies.** Long ago, people with mysterious powers of foresight, or who had knowledge of the Underworld, the Malfeans and other hidden things, wrote prophecies about Grandmother's coming and what would have to be done to stop her. Introducing prophecies gleaned from musty occult tomes or inscriptions in long-sealed tombs is a great way to feed the characters clues — including the clue that no one else has any chance of stopping Grandmother. How did the prophecy's author gain this information? Who cares? Prophets have powers and knowledge that other folk know not of; that's why they're prophets. When the characters read the prophecy and find that part of it has already come true, they tend to take the rest of the prophecy seriously.

The characters can also gain prophecies from the ravings of the mad. Ancient tradition holds that some lunatics are touched by God and may reveal His will and wisdom. A more recent tradition holds that latter-day prophets are driven mad by their more-than-human knowledge or are taken for insane by a disbelieving world. The Storyteller can run a story that takes the crucible to a mental hospital — and there they find a schizophrenic patient who can not only see spooks, he raves about Grandmother coming to devour the world. Perhaps he knows a few more clues as well... but because he's crazy, his information is vague and couched in weird metaphors that the characters must puzzle out.

- **Loot.** Let's face it, players like their characters to acquire cool stuff. The Underworld in particular is well

sued to offering characters the chance to gain loot. They already know that Wisps with Beckon Relic can pull random but useful objects out of the Stormwall. Anyone with half a brain can figure out that these relics come from the Underworld... so *the Underworld must hold more stuff, too.*

Dangle the possibility of loot in front of the characters, and odds are they will follow. For instance, the Storyteller may *really* want the characters to find a stable "back door" into the Underworld, hidden within a remote tomb. If the characters don't show great interest in exploring the Underworld, however, she can lure them to the tomb with a hint (delivered through Forebode vision, the ghost of an explorer or some such ploy) that the tomb holds the ghost-killing sword of an ancient, legendary hero. (This is not as cheesy as it may sound. In Taiwan, the descendants of the famous Chinese wizard Chang Dao-Ling still own his legendary demon-quelling sword and hundreds of clay jars said to contain trapped demons.)

ACTION!

Here, at the climax of the **Orpheus** chronicle, pacing becomes very important. Plenty of otherwise

COINCIDENCE

Sheer, dumb luck is another powerful tool available to **End Game** Storytellers. It isn't really luck, of course; it's the Storyteller giving characters what they need on a silver platter. They need a certain moldering tome of prophecy? They meet an eccentric bibliophile who knows where it's held. They need a magical Silver Key to reach Grandmother? It's in the Underworld crypt where they hide from battling Spectres (and maybe the Spectres are battling over who gets to take the magical key).

Action stories have always used this sort of blatant, ridiculous coincidence to speed the protagonists on their way. Storytellers should not hesitate to follow this tradition. Just remember that coincidences serve to expedite the plot, not to replace the characters' judgment. A Storyteller's goal in **End Game** is to move the characters into a position where they can decide the fate of the world. If necessary, use coincidence to give characters the information they need to reach that crisis-point and make an informed decision, knowing the price each option carries. Also use it to give them the tools they need to carry out their decision. If the characters choose poorly, however, by ignoring what they know or refusing to face their responsibility, the Storyteller should not use some coincidence or "lucky break" to save the characters. Destroy the world.



excellent movies have fallen down at the climax because the plot slowed down or a scene lasted too long. Games may suffer the same fate.

Throughout the **End Game** story arc, therefore, keep the characters moving and the action level high. If the *players* want to take a break to discuss what the characters have learned and what it might mean, that's fine. If the *characters* start dithering arguing without any information to make a judgment or obsessing over some detail that doesn't really matter, the Storyteller should throw something at them to start them moving again. That "something" could be anything from a Spectre attack to an offer to sell the characters a rare book. Make sure that the "something" pushes or pulls them in a direction that advances the story: When the Spectres flee, they can lead the characters to a hive they need to know about. The rare book gives an account of a projector's out-of-body visit to the Nameless City long ago.

On the other hand, don't let the story get bogged down in endless fight scenes against hordes of Spectres. Arrange fights based on their tactical and dramatic possibilities: Either the characters can win quickly by using their Horrors and Benefits cleverly, or the characters are so grossly overmatched that the challenge lies in getting away before the Spectres slaughter them all. If the characters must fight their way to a goal, make sure their reward is worth the final and ultimate sacrifice that characters may need to make in order for the crucible to claim victory. Likewise, once the characters achieve their goal, give them a quick way out instead of forcing them to slog through still more enemies. Dramatically, the scene is over. Don't drag it out.

This dictum applies to the end of the chronicle as a whole, too. If the characters settle on a plan to stop Grandmother and manage to carry it through, don't spend a lot of time on the denouement. After the crucible has defeated Grandmother, a blow-by-blow fight with some Spectres will seem thoroughly tedious. Hand-wave the defeat of any remaining petty adversaries and move on to showing the consequences of the crucible's deeds. Once the characters know they have saved the world — or doomed it — give each character a chance to make a final statement... then declare the chronicle over.

Fade to black. Roll credits.

BATTLES IN THE WAR

A war is not a monolithic phenomenon, it is made up of smaller units called battles, and even battles are sometimes broken down into subunits called skirmishes.

The following are several such skirmishes, snapshots of the characters' existences in the Underworld as they find themselves in a battle larger than anything they have ever seen. Think of these as small but important battles in the greater campaign, as well as a way to supplement and flesh out the main plots.

Each of the following scenarios, snapshots in the Spectre Breed War, is broken down into a similar format. They begin with a brief fiction section (for spice, and to see how it might look in the cinema), a section on the problems associated with the particular situation, and, lastly, a section containing ideas and suggestions to help inspire the Storyteller.

SHELTER FROM THE STORM

The spooks looked at the pack of vanquished Spectres with a sense of satisfaction. They were beginning to feel that they might yet live through their time in this Wasteland.

And then they heard the shrieking.

They looked around, alarmed, ready to do battle again, but what they saw they could not fight.

The black and screaming cloud stretched from horizon to horizon, and it was rolling toward them, poking at the plain with fingers of light and fire. An assemblage of black cones touched down and scoured the plain, throwing buildings around in their winds as if they were only empty boxes.

Kate mouthed the word silently before she could put her voice behind it.

"Run!"

The crucible has very little concept of what the Maelstrom was really like. Sure, they can imagine what the Storm might have been like based on the devastation they see all around them in the Wasteland, but the fact remains that the relatively mild (yet still lethal) winds that infuse the Stormwall are the worst the characters have experienced. Old ghosts, if they still existed, would know better. They knew that the Wasteland can be and frequently is the site of vast, Spectre-guided storms pelting the surface of the wasteland with everything from hail to frogs to ball bearings.

The geography of the Wasteland doesn't offer a lot to protect characters from the storms of the Maelstrom, not that there's much that can resist full-force Maelstrom winds, but those, thankfully, are rare. But even in the face of a smaller storm, how do the characters avoid getting caught in the storm, bashed by baseball-sized hail stones, pulled up in storm funnels and driven head-first into the side of an upended aircraft carrier at 200 miles per hour? That's the kind of situation the characters must learn to avoid as they begin their sojourn into the Underworld.



STORMS WILL COME

Escaping from the Maelstrom is one of those aspects of Wasteland existence that should instill terror in the characters no matter how often they wind up doing it. If the constant fight against Grandmother and her Spectres is getting your players down, a brush with the Maelstrom is as good a change of pace as any other. If you're an easygoing Storyteller, give the characters a relatively pain-free first brush with the big storm, just to make sure they realize the potential dangers of getting caught in the middle of nowhere. Once the characters have been caught in the plains of the Wasteland with nowhere to take cover, or when the only way out of the path of the storm is to go through a summoned nihil or, worse, through the Stormwall, they'll begin to pay more attention to the geography around them and means of escaping. Be sure to describe the howling winds that presage the arrival of the Maelstrom. Give detailed accounts of the lightning, the hail (or rain of frogs or whatever), the tornado funnels, the dust that's stirred up and as many other aspects of the storm's fearful appearance as you can think of. Remember that Spectres sometimes ride on the winds of the Maelstrom, so what if the characters get caught in the path of two Maelstrom

storms guided by Spectres from opposite sides of the Spectre Breed War? Let Maelstrom storms be one of those things that keep your players on their feet, something that gets their blood pumping from the first indications. After all, that's what a Maelstrom is to the characters, so the players may as well get a taste of that same fear.

HOME BASE

The Maelstrom winds had taken their toll, but they had also done something else: scoured away enough of the Wasteland's dead sand to expose a few towers and one very intriguing obsidian doorway leading down into the sand. It reminded Annie of the door to her grandmother's storm cellar.

Annie nodded toward the doorway and asked Kate, "What's it look like?"

Putting her hands on the smooth black diagonal door, Kate read the place.

"Hm," she said, "Pretty good. A damn sight better than out here. Look."

The Spectres Kate pointed at hadn't seen them yet, but they would soon.

"Good enough for me," said Annie. Everyone had to





work to open the door, but once inside, they felt safer than they had since entering the Wasteland.

"Needs some work," Annie said looking around, "but I think we might just have a field camp."

The Stormwall presents a formidable barrier between the crucible and the comfort of the living lands, especially if the characters venture far enough into the Wasteland and find that there are no thin places in the Stormwall. One way of dealing with this problem is to find a relic building suitable for a base camp. Not just any building will do, obviously. Strategic locale, defensibility and solid (i.e., Maelstrom-resistant) construction are three of many factors the crucible will want to take into consideration when seeking out their ideal fortress. The problem, of course, is that suitable buildings are at a premium given the warring masses of Spectres. Given that situation, characters aren't likely to have much luck if they just traipse around the Wasteland making targets of themselves. On the other hand, clever crucibles can systematically set out to discover buildings that have yet to be discovered by Spectres. The other choice is to find a solid location already occupied by Spectres and take it from them, either through brute force or by their wits.

HOLE SWEET HOLE

Don't force the characters into setting up a base. Let them face a few challenges and suffer a few consequences of *not* having a place to retreat to, and then let them decide for themselves that it's the most sensible method of exploring the Wasteland.

It's very unlikely that any building in the wasteland is fine "as is." Anything that has survived has lasted through years of nearly unimaginable storms. On the bright side, that suggests that anything that has survived is probably remarkably sturdy. On the other hand, it has almost certainly sustained damage of some kind, and it's up to the characters to find out what that damage is and figure out of to shore up the weaknesses of their new headquarters. A hole in the ground is likely to be more secure than a tower that sticks out over the surrounding plain, especially when the Maelstroms come around. If the characters want a truly secure place to retreat to, they'll need to invest some time and effort into a place to do so. Reinforcing entryways is a good start, as is exploring every last yard of basement, tunnel and, in newer buildings, elevator and ventilation shafts. Characters may assume that they're safe because their building is impregnable from the outside, but if the lowest sub-basement merges with the tunnels of the Labyrinth, they're going to be in for a nasty surprise.

As Storyteller, it's your job to make sure that the characters take certain important matters into consideration. You're

in charge of both the carrot and the stick in this case, and you, consequently, get to explore these scenarios fully before the characters do.

SUPPLY LINE SLICE

Finished with her vision, Kate opened her eyes as she finished her sentence, "...and if we don't somehow stop their advance, they'll cut through the ranks of the Malfean Spectres without so much as a bad day."

"So what is it that you're saying here? We have to stop an entire army of Spectres?" Annie's face warped with anger as she asked her question.

"No," said Kate. "We don't need to do anything more than cut their supply lines to keep them from launching a full-scale offensive against the Malfis. With just a little time and notice, the Malfis will have enough time to shore up their defenses. It looks like they're already trying to do that, but somehow they were surprised, something they're really not used to."

"And does this Spectre supply line have a weak point?" Annie didn't dare sound hopeful.

Kate smiled. "I'm glad you asked that..."

All armies rely on supply lines to bring necessary supplies from the army's stronghold to its vanguard.

If an army advances too quickly, its supply lines can become thin and vulnerable. When the flow of those supplies is interrupted, especially if the interruption is for any significant length of time (more than a few days), the army quickly ceases to be able to function properly. Falling back is generally the best way of handling cut supply lines, but whether Spectres buy into that philosophy remains to be seen.

Cutting supply lines is a difficult task because supply lines are generally either on the enemy's territory or they're well defended. For the characters to successfully pull this off, they'll need to do a few things. First, they'll need to figure out where the supply lines are in the first place. Then they'll need to determine where the weakest point is in the supply line defense. Then they'll need to launch an offensive on the supply line to stop the flow of goods — and keep them stopped for a few days. This is a more difficult proposition when dealing with Spectres because the hive-mind lets information travel so much more quickly.

And traversing enemy territory — particularly when it's as radically foreign as the Underworld is to the characters — is a challenge in itself.

CUTTING THE TIES THAT BIND

Possibly the most difficult part of this kind of story is getting the characters into a position where they have enough information about what's going on between the



Spectral armies that they'll know when they need to make a raid like this. Most crucibles, if they're wise, anyway, are likely to stay as far as possible from the armies themselves. The Forebode Horror is a good way of giving characters information that they wouldn't normally have, the other option is for a newly redeemed Orphan-Grinder to inform the party of what he knows. Then they'll need to figure out some way of getting into enemy territory and surviving the experience. Depending on how the characters go about it, this could potentially be the hardest part of this mission. The Horrors Hell on Wheels and Screaming Nothing can help out a lot here.

The hardest part of this mission is likely to be the actual interruption of the supply lines. Spectres need supplies for battle — weapons, flasks of liquid Spite, reinforcements, etc. If the characters are lucky (and the Storyteller is kind), there may be some point in the supply line where defense is weak or missing altogether. All it takes from there is a diversion, an all-out attack or, (if the crucible contains Orphan-Grinders or Marrows), even a little espionage to interrupt the flow of supplies to the front.

Obviously, the heat on the characters gets turned way up once the knowledge of the cut line makes its way into the hive-mind, but if the characters are determined, they can keep the line cut long enough to achieve their goal (whatever that may be).

BETTER PART OF VALOR

They needed to get back to the living world. They were wounded, drained and needed rest. But the Stormwall was thick here. A hive blighted the horizon not a mile away, but they were in no shape to attempt the crossing that way. But back a ways, past the bleeding obelisk and the giant sinkhole, there was a fordable stretch that led to an allegedly haunted warehouse.

And all that stood between them and home was a two-mile stretch of sand, and two vast armies of Spectres clashing right where their ideal path would take them through.

Staying here was not an option. Unfortunately, drained as they were, getting home was beginning to seem like a remote possibility.

Even as the characters are discovering it, the Wasteland is becoming one enormous battlefield. While they're making their first tentative forays into the terrifying geography of the Underworld, vast armies of vile, malicious things are amassing throughout the Wasteland in preparation for a conflict of nearly unimaginable magnitude. It is almost inevitable that the characters are eventually going to find themselves caught in the middle

in some way. If the Spectral armies are fighting hand-to-hand, the characters are in moderately less danger. On the other hand, if the Spectres are using ranged weapons (and that could be anything from Gattling guns to trebuchets to bow and arrows), the characters could easily become caught in a crossfire. While the characters may be trying to aid the Malfean Spectres in some odd way, that favor is not necessarily reciprocated. Both Spectre breeds would be happy to kill the characters, if only to gather a new and more interesting type of trophy (though the Malfean-aligned forces have more self-control in the matter).

Crucibles need to bear in mind that reconnaissance is crucial to their survival and the success of their missions. Characters who find themselves caught on a flat, dusty plain between two advancing Spectral armies are going to need to take serious evasive action if they hope to survive their mistake.

CAUGHT BETWEEN

If your players are lax with their reconnaissance, and they might well be before they realize the gravity of the situation that they're in, they should have the experience of finding themselves caught between two advancing armies. Early on in their exploration of the Underworld, it's okay if those armies are small, or not quite marching toward the characters themselves. One close call should be enough to give the characters the idea. After that, if they don't do their recon homework, feel free to let them suffer the consequences of their own sloth.

The fact of the matter is that the characters simply will not survive getting caught between two armies. The assembled masses of Spectres are malicious and hateful. If they actually come within closing distance of the characters, they may race to see who gets to do the honors. And even if the characters are seasoned veterans with access to Fourth-Tier Horrors, they'll still be outnumbered a thousand to one.

Don't be afraid to make the characters take some lumps and maybe resort to some extreme tactics (like forcing their way through the Stormwall at a thick point) if they don't take proper precautions. They'll have to learn eventually.

Be sure to give vivid descriptions of the two sides that are approaching. Do the armies have banners to identify themselves, or are Spectral armies too bestial for that? Can the characters make a guess as to which army is fighting for which side? It's up to you whether the Spectres consider the crucible a prime target or an afterthought. The one commandment above all others here is this. Don't let the players get bored.



STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

The crucible watched the huge, shambling thing writhe beneath the nets of the two dozen inhuman Spectres

"Stop them!" said Tom.

"What?!" said Kate

"Are you blind, or are you just not connecting the dots here?" Tom's voice was low, but angry and urgent. "That thing is aligned with what passes for the lesser of two evils right now. If that swarm of Spectres takes him out, that represents a significant loss that... I hate saying that, that our side, ultimately humanity, can't accept."

The others looked at Tom in disbelief. He continued, "Believe me, in any other situation, I'd be the first to support a monstrosity like that getting whacked, but this time is different."

The others in the crucible looked at each other, uncertain. Tom had actually been one of them not so long ago. Was he trying to betray them now? Or did he know something they didn't?

"So are you guys going to help me, or do I have to die trying to do this all on my own?"

Haltingly, hesitantly, the crucible fell in line behind him and went to free the monstrosity.

There's no such thing as a likeable Spectre. That said, characters who stand back a bit and look at the situation realize that the defeat of the Malfean Spectres by Grandmother's brood will result in much worse trauma and horror for those on the living side of the Stormwall than if the Malfean Spectres win.

If a key Malfean Spectre is taken captive — in preparation for being tortured, killed and, in all probability, eaten, the characters might realize that it's in their own best interest to prevent this, and, incredibly, to free the Spectre.

This approach has its own problems, of course. For example, how do the characters go about freeing a malevolent monster that may try destroying them the moment they cut it free (although pivotal Malfean Spectres may understand the necessity of alliances with the characters)? How do they go about defeating a pack of Spectres who are capable of bringing down a monster of that size and power? How do they avoid becoming prime targets for Grandmother's brood henceforth?

FRIEND TO THE ENEMY

Putting the characters into the situation of having to rescue a powerful Malfean Spectre makes for great roleplaying. For one thing, inter-crucible politics can flare up in an ugly way over something like this. Maybe all the characters are enlightened enough to realize that saving a hideous monster is in their best interest, but

that's not necessarily the way to be, especially if the powerful Malfean emissary has tried to hurt or kill the crucible before. Feel free to fan those flames.

You're now in position to pit the crucible against two distinct forces: the Spectres of Grandmother's brood who are attempting to capture the Malfean emissary, and the Malfean emissary itself. The characters may find that it takes all of their might (and Vitality) to fight off the Spectral hunting party, and it's only after they attend to that first problem that they can even start fighting the Malfean emissary, who is himself an obscenely powerful Spectre, and probably an important lieutenant to one of the great Malfeans.

While it may be possible for the characters to take flight immediately after freeing the emissary, it might also prove interesting to block any kind of immediate retreat and let them see just what kind of powerful evil monsters they're dealing with.

SETTING AN AMBUSH

In the days they had spent in the Wasteland, they had grown to hate Spectres. The best of them embodied the worst of human nature. The rest were so far beyond human that hating them seemed like a waste of energy.

They had targeted the pack coming toward them and dug the pit trap along a path the monsters favored.

Making the pit large enough for the largest Spectres in the pack had taken some effort. And the sharpened, barbed sticks poking up from the bottom of the pit weren't exactly easy to come by, either.

Now they stood there acting as bait for the trap. As the Spectres recognized the crucible, they began to pick up speed.

All they could do now was pray that nothing went wrong.

The situation is, loosely, something like this: A key cluster of Grandmother's Spectres is about to go somewhere or do something that would win them something — a good vantage point for future attacks, maybe.

The characters are in perfect position to intercept this attack, but only if they can keep the element of surprise. So they plan an ambush.

The Wasteland does not lend itself well to ambushes. The flat open terrain is broken only intermittently by buildings, cliffs and the like. The crucible needs to approach the situation with great caution.

If the enemy has to pass through a narrow path with high walls — a canyon, for example, or a street in a Necropolis lined with tall buildings — the characters can make the most of attacking while they are out of reach of the Spectres. On the other hand, an ambush on the scoured flat surface is a challenge. Pit traps are vaguely feasible, but it takes a long time to dig such a



thing, even through the relatively light grit that passes for dirt here.

CATCHING PREY

Characters attempting to ambush Spectres are, to put it mildly, at a bit of a disadvantage. It's remarkable how effective hive-mind can be at preventing surprise attacks. The Storyteller is cautioned not to under-power hive-mind to make Spectres a suitable threat for the crucible. That said, if an entire swarm of Spectres is distracted and effectively lured toward a trap, there's not much hive-mind can do to prevent the characters' win. Of course, unless the characters take steps to prevent it from happening, the last thoughts of the dying Spectres will tip off any other nearby Spectre to the characters' strategy and it won't work a second time.

AIDING AND ABETTING

Annie's Emblem manacles locked around the ankles of the enormous Shade, and he fell over limp. Looking in its hollow black eyes, she could sense that it thought she was going to kill him, and he hated her for it.

"I'm not going to hurt you, but there's something you have to know. A wave of..." She hesitated, trying to figure out how best to describe Grandmother's forces to the Spectre, "...a wave of your enemies is going to strike your outpost by the tower ruins tomorrow. Tell your... others they need to defend that outpost, or it will be taken."

When the Spectre spoke, it was with a cold, malicious contempt. "Listen to me you cunt," he spat the last word. Annie hated the word and had to fight to keep herself from striking the Spectre. "You are not part of the hive-mind, and you cannot know anything that we do not already know concerning our estranged cousins' whereabouts. This is an attempt to mislead us, and a pathetic attempt at that."

"It's not," said Annie, "but if we let you learn that lesson the hard way, my entire world loses, so we're going to keep at this until you clue in or die. And I hope you're quick on the uptake, because I'm not going to be able to stand much more of your charm."

In this scenario, the characters have information about the movement of Grandmother's brood that they urgently need to pass on to the Malfean Spectres to prevent a major win for Grandmother. The characters may have learned this through their own reconnaissance, or they may have learned it from an enemy they were interrogating. The difficult part of this assignment isn't getting the information in the first place, it's getting the Malfean Spectres to believe that upstarts could know something that ages-old Spectres hadn't somehow heard through the hive-mind.

The hive-mind is as much a given for Spectres as water is for fish. Bringing them information on enemy

movements is likely to strike them as ludicrous. After all, if the enemy had anything planned, they would have heard about it in the space of minutes as that knowledge quickly flowed from mind to mind.

In this case, that's not so. This scenario depends on Grandmother's brood figuring out a way to sidestep the hive-mind. The mechanism for this is likely something rare and difficult to achieve — a difficult-to-forge item or relic helmet of some sort, for example. While Grandmother's brood isn't as skilled with Memory Towers as the Malfean Spectres, that might be another way that Grandmother could get around the problem of having her enemies know what she's planning shortly after she has told her generals. Alternatively, there is something about the ruins of the great fallen city of the dead (see p. 129) that blocks the hive mind from working altogether, and this bit of knowledge may or may not have made its way through the hive-mind by this point.

UNDESERVED KINDNESS

This scenario breaks into a number of segments. First, the characters have to learn something about Grandmother's troop movements that the Malfean Spectres do not know. Again, captured members of Grandmother's Brood might be helpful here, or good reconnaissance. Note that this is not the kind of information an Orphan-Grinder can provide, because Orphan-Grinders cannot be made from the never-human Spectres of Grandmother's brood.

Then, the characters must meet with (or capture) a Malfean Spectre in order to communicate with it. Capturing a Spectre temporarily is obviously the easiest way to force this kind of communication. If time is short, it may be the only way, since Spectres are *very* unlikely to be interested in anything the characters have to say — unless they have something the Spectres need, like a powerful relic.

The third and hardest part of this mission is likely to be getting the Spectre to believe the characters (for the reasons mentioned thus far).

On the bright side, once the characters have presented their information, even if the Spectre they're communicating with doesn't believe them, the information is still in the hive-mind, and it's *possible* that a Malfean might want to follow up on the tip. That, however, is a pretty sloppy way of trying to save the world, and a higher degree of certainty would obviously be better, so the characters have to be *very* persuasive. A Charisma + Expression roll might be appropriate here, with the difficulty starting at 8 and going up from there depending on the circumstances of the conversation. (Hint: A bound and gagged Spectre is not going to be swayed, no matter how persuasive the character is.)



THE SPECTRE BREED WARS

Malfean Spectres thought they'd finally won control of the Underworld—all of it—with the fall of the Nameless City and the destruction of all non-Spectre ghosts.

They were wrong.

The conflicts between the Malfeans and Grandmother were initially petty and rote, like most of the internecine conflicts between Malfeans. Combat in the tunnels of the Labyrinth is as common as misery or Spite.

In time, the Malfeans realized that the conflict with Grandmother wasn't just another Underworld conflict, it could easily be the end of the Malfeans themselves.

That's when things got ugly.

PERSONA MAJORA

Every war has its generals, its spies, its notable figures who come to symbolize the entirety of the side they fight on. The Spectre Breed War is no different. Both sides have their heroes (if such repulsive, inhuman monsters can be so considered) and their icons, and this section introduces you to them.

GRANDMOTHER'S BROOD

The aberrations spawned by Grandmother do not have any hint of human memory. They have never been human. They never will be human. They were bred to be terrible monsters, and terrible monsters they are. And if

THERE ARE NO FRIENDLY SPECTRES

Given the new direction taken by the plot and the necessity for characters to side with Malfean Spectres against Grandmother's brood, Storytellers may be tempted to treat Malfean Spectres almost as though they were allies and friends of the characters.

Don't do this.

This odd alliance is an instance of choosing the lesser of two horrible evils, nothing more. The characters are assisting the Malfean Spectres *only* to defeat the forces of an even more dangerous primordial destructive force; they are *not* helping the Malfean Spectres out of some sense of amiable camaraderie. Assuming that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" is a good way to get killed in this situation, because no matter how much the characters are obliged to side with the Malfean Spectres against the spawn of Grandmother, that sense of obligation goes one way and one way only. As far as the characters go, the Storyteller should describe these so called "allies" in such detail and with such clarity that assisting the Malfean Spectres in any way is likely to make a character feel unclean to the point of nausea, like kissing a pedophile or eating a tumor. Regardless of the bizarre alliances made necessary by Grandmother's emergence, Spectres are not like us, not like the characters, and not — you should hope — like anyone you know.

Corruption, malice and pure annihilation are their idols, their inspiration and their absolute overriding goals. They are the negative images of kind, decent people. Malfean Spectres are ghosts who have been turned inside out and warped by their pettiness, resentment and hatred. And since that

moment of transformation, they have been force-fed a diet of Oblivion and its bizarre and unholy rites.

Spectres take a deep delight in pain, horror, destruction and death. When fighting on the battlefield they lose themselves in an overwhelming ecstasy of annihilation. Every bit of spilt ichor and severed gauze serves to intoxicates them further. In a sense, they don't care who or what they're destroying, as long as they're bringing pain or destruction to something.

Such creatures cannot ally with individuals like the characters, because it is not a part of the Spectral condition to feel anything positive about anyone or anything. They will not develop a grudging respect for the characters. They will not reward the characters' assistance with forbearance or compassion. They *will* go out of their way to cause the characters suffering — and kill them outright if they sense an opportunity to do so.

While Spectres may become tolerable once they've been redeemed, they cease to be Spectres at all at that point. They are then known as Orphan-Grinders.

If a Storyteller is inclined to ally the characters with the Spectres, there is one way that can happen: The Spectres can use the characters to further their goals in the Breed War. Using someone doesn't require respect or appreciation, just acknowledgement that the used party can do something that the user cannot do alone. Spectres may find allying with the characters quite gratifying because using someone is a form of superiority over them. Then again, the characters are using the Malfeans to stop Grandmother, so the favor is ultimately returned anyway.



they win, they may join Grandmother in feasting on the world that exists on the living side of the Stormwall.

ADVANTAGES

Brute Force. Without a doubt, the advantage of sheer brute power goes to Grandmother's brood. She is a vast, primordial force of nature, and her children tend to resemble their mother. Her larger children can be measured not in feet or in yards, but in *acres*. Were they to cross into the world as we know it, many of them would rival skyscrapers in size. Their blows, when they hit, are powerful enough to sunder mountains. Obviously, this is not the case for all of Grandmother's brood; on the contrary, only a few notable individuals are so vast, but even her humanoid spawn are large and physically powerful. Only some seemingly possess the Spectral equivalent of Horrors, but all brood Spectres possess Thorns in abundance (though Storytellers should note that many Spectres listed in the series were the exceptions instead of the rule, if only to challenge characters).

Troop Replenishment. Grandmother produces her spawn from her own primordial mass. Grandmother replenishes her own mass by absorbing bodies around her, especially the ichor of fallen Spectres (and, of course, the gauze of spooks). After each great battle, a line of brood Spectres can be seen carrying the dead and wounded away from the field of battle, not for burial or healing, but to feed into one of Grandmother's great maws, considered holy sites by her children. Whether she wins or loses, every battle adds to Grandmother's mass and allows her to spawn more of her brood. After a large battle, Grandmother can not only replenish her forces in the space of a few days, she can increase her numbers by as many as a few hundred Spectres. In time, this can't help but give brood Spectres an overwhelming advantage.

DISADVANTAGES

Lack of Skill. What they possess in might, they lack in skill. Grandmother's brood comprises little but Spectral infantry. They may be large, and they may have the advantage of many Thorns, but the short existence of many of her brutish spawn prevents them from learning many (or, frequently, any) supernatural abilities beyond the ability to tap into the hive-mind. Only one brood Spectre in 10 seems to be able to use even simple Horror-like abilities, and only a small fraction of *them* appear to be able to do any more than that. Some spooks fear that with time, Grandmother will figure out a way to invest her spawn with the ability to master Horrors. If that happens, the Malfeans' hopes for victory drop from slim to none.

THE NATURE OF GRANDMOTHER

Vast and incomprehensible, Grandmother is a violent and powerful primordial storm that happens to be sentient.

Agewise, she spawned immensely powerful forces of death and decay that grew into the class of incredibly powerful Malfeans called the Neverborn. And then she fell into a slumber that lasted for millions of years.

She should never have woken up. She never *would* have except for the enormous Maelstrom, but when she did wake up, she decided that it was time to spawn a brood, push her way into a new world and continue spawning there as well. Creation, after all, is what Grandmother is all about.

GRANDMOTHER'S FORCES

Grandmother does not maintain the rigid caste system among her forces that Malfean Spectres use. Consequently, her Spectres span a much wider and looser gamut. Spectre types named in previous books that are allied with Grandmother include Carpet Crawlers, Clappers, Chitters, Chupacabras, Fetches, Hawgs, Outflyers, Ribber-Cutters, Spectre Hounds, Spreaders, Swarm Globes, Syrenes, Friendly Angels and Reapers (the latter three powerhouses being among the rare Horror-capable Spectres). The one exception to this list is Lawgivers, who were once ghosts. These former Orphan-Grinders are completely loyal to Grandmother and cannot be swayed by Malfeans.

In essence, Grandmother has three broad types of Spectres that serve her: the Sparagmoi (monsters that Grandmother has spawned from her own cancerous mass), Omophagia (Spectral animals) and Irrumo (chimera made when Grandmother devours two or more Spectres of the preceding types, fuses them together while they are a part of her, and then expels them from her mass).

SPARAGMOI

The Spectres called Sparagmoi (singular: Sparagmos) are the direct and pure issue of Grandmother generated directly from her vast mass; consequently they are as primordial as she if not as powerful. When Grandmother spawned the original Neverborn, they were Sparagmoi, and only over eons of exposure to the harsh black radiance of Oblivion did they grow into the Malfeans they are now.

CHORGRORBIZOG

Background: Spawned less than a year ago, but already full grown and powerful, Chorghorbizog is currently Grandmother's favored spawn. Twenty feet tall, handsome, taut-bodied and black as coal, he seems more like a young god than a demon. Huge and powerful, Chorghorbizog is perhaps her most dangerous creation to date, rivaling the lesser Malfean Onceborn without even incurring the



ambiguous blessings of Oblivion. Chorghorbizog is far more dangerous than many of his peers due to his unusual intelligence and his mastery of a number of Horrors and Horror-like powers. Chorghorbizog is Grandmother's greatest general, leading the large majority of her forces into battle against the Malfeans.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 6

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 5, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Empathy 3, Intimidation 4, Leadership 4, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 3

Nature: Thrill-Seeker

Willpower: 8

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Absorb, Blink, Flicker, Flit, Hive-Mind, Lullaby, Regeneration (Level 3), Vertigo, Wail

OMOPHAGIA

For reasons as yet unknown, the only once-living things that Grandmother can co-opt are Spectral animals (known variously as vulpines, *kuei* and barghests). The Omophagia are the few rare Spectral animals that have grown powerful (and not dissolved) in the presence of both Grandmother and Oblivion

KAKAK THE WOUNDER

Background: Kakak was originally the Spectre of a falcon who'd been tortured to death by a gang of boys after trying to fly through a window and falling stunned to the ground. Years of exposure to Oblivion and investments from Grandmother have made him much, much more than that.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 8, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 7, Intelligence 5, Wits 6

Abilities: Alertness 6, Athletics 6, Brawl 5

Nature: Sadist

Willpower: 7

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Absorb, Flight, Regeneration (Level 2), Shriek, Track, Vertigo. Kakak's talons and beak are infused with pure Oblivion. A successful strike inflicts four dice of aggravated damage, and the wounds heal very slowly, due to the nature of Kakak's weaponry. Anything wounded by Kakak's talons or beak heals at one quarter the normal rate. If some form of Horror is used instead, the Horror takes four times as much Vitality to heal as a normal injury.

ABSORB AND REGENERATION

These two new Thorns reflect the toughness and deadly nature of the characters' growing repertoire of adversaries. Storytellers should give them to only powerful Spectres (on either side of the conflict). Both Thorns operate on the principle that Spectres may tap their Spite for any number of effects, up to their maximum value, each turn. The danger is that Spite also functions as their health levels, meaning that by taking damage, the Spectres also become limited in what they can accomplish.

Absorb: When fighting within 50 feet of another Spectre with a Spite score of 6 or less, the Spectre can dissolve its comrade and enjoy a direct infusion of its target's liberated Spite. This does not require an action, but the Spectre must use that Spite within one turn (and can do so only once per turn). Otherwise, the Spite dissipates the following turn. The Spectre using Absorb cannot have a Spite score greater than 10.

Regeneration (Levels 1 to 3): Once per turn, the Spectre can regenerate damage at a rate of two Spite per level of regeneration. (Therefore, at level one, it regenerates two Spite per turn, while at level three, it regenerates six Spite.) This applies solely against Spite lost due to damage.

IRRUMO

Among the most monstrous things serving Grandmother, Irrumo are Omophagia that she has consumed, fused together into chimera inside herself and then deposited back into the Wasteland, typically after being gifting them with additional capabilities. Horrible fusions or "revisions" of Spectral animals and Grandmother's spawn have become among the most terrifying creatures in the Underworld, and some of the most devastating to the Malfean forces.

FLELIKSH

Background: From a distance, Fleliksh looks like a black spherical boulder 10 feet in diameter. As it nears, the baying of hounds becomes unmistakable. Made entirely of the heads of large dogs, Fleliksh is a terrifying monster that rolls over its opponents, crushing and savaging them with its fangs at the same time. Any head that takes serious damage recedes into the mass of heads and is replaced with another in the space of a few minutes.



Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Intimidation 4

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 6

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Absorb, Burrow, Claws, Envelop, Hive-Mind, Maw, Regeneration (Level 1), Shriek, Track

MALFEAN FORCES

In theory, the Malfean Spectres should at least seem more familiar to the characters. *They*, at least, were once human. And yet, oddly, that isn't the case. Years of devotion to Oblivion and horror have rendered most Spectres nearly as inhuman as most of Grandmother's Spectres appear. They lack the brute force possessed by Grandmother's brood, but they are far more cunning than their adversaries.

ADVANTAGES

Experience. The Malfeans themselves may spend long ages in slumber, but the greatest of their Spectres have had millennia to learn the ways of battle. Not only have they participated in innumerable internecine conflicts as various Malfeans make war on one another, but they fought the ghosts of the Nameless City and the other Necropoli for centuries. Many of the Malfean Spectres can easily be considered veterans of a thousand wars, and this one causes them no concern.

Tactics. While the Malfean Spectres have their share of dumb brutes (the Hekatonkhire come to mind), many of them have learned a great deal with the passing of time. They have learned strategy, tactics and cunning. They have learned to use tools, traps and complex troop maneuvers. Tactically speaking, they can out-think and outmaneuver Grandmother's forces nine times out of 10.

Power. In the course of their time in the Labyrinth, Spectres have learned their own "Horrors," for lack of a better way of phrasing it. It is not just spooks who can learn supernatural abilities, and old Spectres have had centuries to master a range of powers, some of which may even be familiar to the characters. These powers, especially when used by a powerful Malfean Spectre, can inflict hideous casualties on Grandmother's brood.

Memory Towers. Malfean Spectres make *much* greater use of Memory Towers than Grandmother's brood. Malfean Spectres have used Memory Towers for millennia, and they know how to place them and use

them for maximum combat effectiveness. While Grandmother and her more astute spawn know how to erect and use Memory Towers, their knowledge is rudimentary, and they have yet to learn the more strategic uses. (In fact, some diabolically clever ways of using such a construct — from creating *false* Memory Towers to which you lead the enemy to leading your own troops into a Memory Tower moments before they need the information contained therein to survive — could easily turn the tide of battle.)

DISADVANTAGES

Inability to Replenish. The Malfean Spectres have only one real disadvantage in their war against Grandmother, but it is enough. With the exception of the Neverborn, every Malfean Spectre began its existence as human. Through long ages, some of those human ghosts fell to their darker side and became Spectres. In time, many of them worked their way up through the Malfean hierarchy, losing more humanity at each stage until they were destroyed or found their niche. The greatest of them went on to become Onceborn, the god-emperors of the Labyrinth.

The creation of a powerful Malfean Spectre takes time. Ages. Eons. When one such Spectre falls to one (or several) of Grandmother's brood, the Malfeans lose millennia of history and accumulated power. On the other hand, when one of Grandmother's spawn is felled, she can simply birth another one. Or another two. Or three. So long as her brood continues to feed Grandmother the ichor and gauze of those who have fallen in battle, she can produce monster after monster without her mass ever diminishing. The Malfeans, long used to relatively superior numbers over Necropolis-dwelling ghosts, have only recently acknowledged that they must conserve their numbers as much as possible, even if that means shepherding even the weakest of their number — a radical new paradigm for Malfeans used to destroying enemies and allies alike on a whim.

The Malfeans' greatest — and only — disadvantage in the war with Grandmother is their inability to replenish their number, and that disadvantage alone is easily enough to let Grandmother win if the characters don't turn the tide of battle.

The forces of Oblivion are commanded by the Malfeans themselves, and the following are the horrors who lead the forces of malice into battle.

MULHECTUROUS THE FILTH GODDESS

A relatively young, but incredibly vile Malfean, Mulhecturous took the appearance of a gigantic crab with tufts of swollen and rotting tissue pushing out from between



the decaying segments of her shell. Pus, rancid lymph and other foul fluids seeped from these joins when she exerted herself, leaving a repulsive ectoplasmic trail behind her throughout the sections of the Labyrinth she wandered.

While Mulhecturous had been cultivating a following among the living, her cult in the Underworld was relatively small, and she was not among the more powerful Malfeans. Nonetheless, her annihilation by Grandmother was a serious loss to the Malfeans, if only for the loss of the moderately powerful forces she commanded (a powerful Hekatonkhire among them).

RABARK THE INHABITED

Enormous and corpulent almost beyond all imagining, Rabark is little more than an enormous head sitting atop a 1,000-foot-high mass of well-tunneled fat. Rabark's most favored worshippers, powerful Spectres in their own right, live inside the mountain of flesh and greasy fat that is their goddess. There their worship fires (fueled by the fat of their corpulent goddess) burn a dark red, shining through her taut sallow skin.

Since Grandmother's appearance, Rabark's followers have been covering their grotesque lady with a metal carapace, presumably some form of armor to protect her should she get involved in a war with Grandmother. Its efficacy as armor is questionable, but it undeniably makes this fattest of the Malfeans look all the more disturbing.

SULABIK THE DEATH MAKER

A skeletal, malformed giant covered in human skins stitched together, Sulabik, among the more powerful of the Onceborn Malfeans, feeds on atrocity. While he is physically weak, made so by his long proximity to the Well of Oblivion, Sulabik is notable both for his powerful charisma and for the Spectral shock troops he commands. More Hekatonkhire serve Sulabik than any other Malfean, and the Nephwracks in his service hold strategy and violence as their highest tenets. It was through Sulabik's powerful efforts through the hive-mind, causing Reapers to attack the hives they were stationed in, that ultimately led to Grandmother's decision to use only her own brood as troops and to forego human-derived Spectres altogether.

ZYRAS THE ALL-CONSUMING

Among the most powerful of the Malfeans, Zyras appears as an obsidian angel nearly 20 feet tall. Her six wings are blackened metal splotched with rust, while her enormous sword appears to be forged from Oblivion itself. Fit for the goddess she believes herself to be, Zyras' palace deep in the Labyrinth overlooks the Well of

Oblivion itself, putting her in extraordinarily close proximity to the powers of annihilation.

Zyras is a force of cold rage and well-honed malice. It is commonly believed throughout the Labyrinth that if any single Malfean has a chance to best Grandmother in violent conflict, that it is Zyras. To that effect, many of the Malfeans are nudging Zyras and Grandmother toward conflict.

DISTINCTIONS

Initially, at least, the characters are likely to have a difficult time discerning the Malfean Spectres from Grandmother's brood. Eventually, the characters are likely to realize that the more human (and that term is *loosely* applied here) Spectres are generally working for the Malfeans, while the more bestial and monstrous *things* are serving Grandmother. This is a relatively new development. For a time, Grandmother was augmenting her own inhuman forces with Spectres that had once been human. Her powerful presence within the hive-mind allowed her to control many, if not most, Spectres and even shape them to a degree. With the fall of the Malfean Mulhecturous, Grandmother is sufficiently fortified that she no longer has to rely on the less sturdy formerly human Spectres. Given their history and the steep learning curve, it may take characters some time to learn the new face of Grandmother's forces.

This realization is likely to serve the characters well — for a while. There will come a point, however, when the characters find themselves at a complete loss to explain why some humanoid Spectres are working with (and apparently obeying the orders of) some utterly inhuman looking monsters.

As it happens, there is a pronounced tendency for Malfean Spectres to become more monstrous with the

ASPECTS OF OBLIVION

Malfeans have grown to fill assorted niches in the Underworld. Every negative principle has a Malfean representing it. Mulhecturous the Filth Goddess, for example, epitomized disease, while Zyras represents malice or perhaps wrath.

The followers of these Malfeans, from their Nephwrack priests to the weakest Lost Boy, also tend to resonate with their master's "core principle." A child who dies while consumed by hate for the father who beat him to death is likely to seek out Zyras as the ideal Malfean. This is a tendency and not an absolute, but it is a very notable tendency, and perceptive spooks may notice this pattern as they develop more familiarity with Spectral culture.



passing of time. Characters who see inhuman Spectres commanding humanoid Spectres are seeing older Malfean Spectres commanding their younger armies.

The difficult part is learning to discern old Malfean Spectres from Grandmother's brood. There are ways, but they take a perceptive eye to spot.

Inhuman Malfean Spectres are what they are because of the influence of Oblivion and the Labyrinth. While these two forces have granted the older Malfean Spectres great power, they have also taken a visible toll. Older Malfean Spectres, even the most powerful and

least human, have a vaguely diseased, wan or corrupted appearance to them. Time and Oblivion have clearly had their effect. The Spectres of Grandmother's brood, while extravagantly inhuman and frequently quite twisted, still have a certain fresh or unsullied look to them. Many of them have been in existence for only a few weeks or days.

Once characters have gotten a fair degree of exposure to both types of Spectres, they will be able to discern younger Malfean Spectres from Grandmother's with a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 5). Telling Grandmother's brood from older Malfean Spectres is more difficult, resulting in a difficulty of 8.

A NOTE ON APPEARANCES

Because of the utterly inhuman appearance of many Spectres, the characters may not believe (or never guess in the first place) that all of the Spectres currently allied with the Malfeans were once human (with the exception of the Neverborn Malfeans themselves who were — in some distant primordial age — Grandmother's first spawn). While it may not seem much of a stretch to accept that Lost Boys or even Frighteners were once human, few of the older, more powerful Spectres have held their forms quite so well in the face of Oblivion. On the contrary, some of them seem to have gone out of their way to shape themselves into truly monstrous forms. The Hekatonkhire, for example, have four legs and many more arms and bear no resemblance to anything ever born to mortal woman.

If the characters find the intensely inhuman appearance of some Malfean Spectres confusing, however, let them look at it this way: Even in the brief time they've been spooks, their own gauze has likely been sullied by a Stain or two. Now, let them imagine what might happen to their gauze after a *millennium* in close contact with Oblivion. Given a Spectre's nigh-infinite capacity for developing Stains (or their equivalent) and the strange energies of corruption and annihilation that permeate the Labyrinth, it should come as no surprise that Spectres who began their Underworld existences looking perfectly human have since dropped (or, as they see it, transcended) all pretense of human self-image and transformed into something altogether... other.

As for Grandmother's brood: Neither Oblivion nor the Labyrinth have had enough time to affect their appearance much. Their monstrousness was their own from the moment Grandmother spawned them, all misbegotten, into the darkness of the Wasteland.

ENEMY ARMIES

Both sides of the Spectre Breed War control vast armies. The Malfean forces have been accumulating for millennia, though they're slow to replenish losses.

Grandmother's Spectral forces, on the other hand, have been around for no longer than a few years, but Grandmother makes more of them on a regular basis, and she replenishes her losses rapidly.

Since Grandmother and the Malfeans have joined the battle in earnest, firm lines have been drawn with regard to which Spectres serve which masters. While each side may somehow "recruit" a Spectre normally associated with the other side, these lines are surprisingly firm.

THE MALFEANS

The Malfean forces are made up of the corrupted ghosts of former humans who have been exposed to the transformational effects of Oblivion and the Labyrinth. Some of these, the oldest among them, no longer look even vaguely human, but their origins have not changed. Spectre types fighting on the side of the Malfeans that have been mentioned in previous books include E-Demons, Frighteners, Gatherers, Jasons, Geminis and Lost Boys. Additionally, human-turned Spectres have a wider field of individuality, allowing some to simply be Spectres without ever possessing species archetypes. Black Dog and the three Spectres who call themselves the Babd (from *Shadow Games*) are examples of human-born Spectres exerting their individual natures as opposed to falling into established roles. Mr. Jigsaw is another such potent example. Other types of Spectres, who emerge only rarely from the depths of the Labyrinth, include Mortwrights, Nephwracks and Hekatonkhire.

NEPHWRACKS

If the Malfeans are the gods of Oblivion, then Nephwracks are their high priests. Many Nephwracks



have, themselves, become so favored by Oblivion that they are in the initial stages of leaving their human form behind them forever.

JABLONSKI THE RAVEN

Background: In the early 20th century, a boy named Bill Jablonski escaped years of brutal beatings by his father by joining the Navy. On one voyage to Europe, Jablonski was traveling through Poland where he fell madly in love with a lean, dark-eyed woman named Francesca. He cared for her, bought her expensive jewelry and doted on her to the point of obsession. In return, she cheated on him, lied to him about it and manipulated him into doing for her anything she didn't want to bother herself with. She also gave him an unusually fast-developing strain of syphilis that drove him mad and, ultimately, killed him. The cycles of anxiety and depression became increasingly worse until he was intolerable to any civilized human being, including his own parents, who put him away in an asylum. It was there, in the company of lunatics, that Jablonski died, immersed in a bitterness blacker and thicker than tar.

In the Underworld, Jablonski rapidly fell to his darker side and became a priest of Zyras, the Malfean of wrath. Zyras was *not* inconstant like Francesca; on the contrary, Zyras bathed Jablonski in the cold gaze of Oblivion on a daily basis and protected him from the most deleterious of its effects. While the marks of his syphilis still cover Jablonski's body, now he wears them on his carapace as badges of office instead of reminders of betrayal. In time, Jablonski became one of Zyras' prized priests, and he leads a division of her army still.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 5, Empathy 1, Expression 1, Stealth 5, Subterfuge 1

Nature: Martyr

Willpower: 8

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Absorb, Black Hands, Carapace, Chill, Claws, Immolate, Track

MORTWIGHTS

The ghosts of those who die extremely violent deaths generally wake up in the Underworld as Spectres, already overcome by their darker nature. Mortwrights aren't particularly powerful, but as they are among the most common types of Spectre, they are almost always used as infantry in any big engagement with Grandmother's brood.

NIGEL NOTHING

Background: For a brief moment in 1989, Nigel was one of the most powerful skinhead gang leaders in the city of London. He brokered treaties, forged alliances and made himself an impressive amount of money in the heroin trade. Nigel assumed he would die at the hands of a rival gang leader. To his horror, he was drugged and burned to death by a gang of transsexual prostitutes he'd been roughing up for years.

In the Underworld, Nothing's shock became impotent rage, and he was a Spectre before he even realized he was dead.

Since then, he has traveled through the Labyrinth, serving one Malfean after another and always creating a following around himself. He put together a pack of Spectres that sacked the Nameless City after its walls gave way in the Maelstrom, and he now waits for his next big victory, this time against Grandmother. By serving the Malfeans well, Nothing hopes to rise up through their ranks and become a Nephwrack.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Etiquette 3, Firearms 3, Leadership 3, Melee 2, Stealth 5, Streetwise 5, Subterfuge 5

Nature: Architect

Willpower: 8

Spite: 7

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Carapace (hardened burnt skin), Flicker, Flit, Hive-Mind, Immolate, Regeneration (Level 1)

HEKATONKHIRE

These hideous, ancient Spectres are the closest the Malfean Spectres have to matching the more violent monstrosities in Grandmother's brood. Commonly thought of as Onceborn who have lost their minds to Oblivion, Hekatonkhire are the equivalent of (vaguely) sentient walking battering rams. When the Malfeans fought against the ghosts of the Nameless City and the other Necropoli, Hekatonkhire were their tanks, and there was little that could stand up to them. That is no longer the case in the struggle against Grandmother's massive spawn, but among the Malfeans, the more Hekatonkhire one commands, the greater one's standing in the hierarchy of Oblivion is.

TULAGAMMON THE TAINTED

This emissary of the Malfeans bears not even passing resemblance to a human being. It comes from the breed of Spectre called Hekatonkhire. Tulagammon stands 20 feet



high, possesses four pillar-like legs, six enormous Oblivion-spewing main arms and countless smaller arms that possess unthinkable strength and terrible claws at the end. Hekatonkhire are typically mindless, although Tulagammon has yet to lose all of his wits to the great Nothing. For that reason, his master considers him to be the perfect emissary to Grandmother's forces.

Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 5, Stamina 10, Charisma 0, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Brawl 8

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 7

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Regeneration (Level 1), Tulagammon's six main arms inflict 14 dice of lethal damage and an additional six dice of aggravated damage from the exposure to pure Oblivion. His smaller arms cause a mere 12 dice of lethal damage. If Tulagammon tramples a character, assume at least 20 dice of bashing damage.

How many attacks Tulagammon may take per turn is up to the Storyteller, but fewer than two isn't really giving this devil his due, and more than eight might be a bit much for even a powerful crucible. If the crucible has blindly and foolishly rushed in or showed stupidity above and beyond the call of duty, or if the crucible has just been tearing through everything in its path without being really challenged, the Storyteller may feel free to give this abomination as many as 12 attacks per turn, six with its major arms and six with its lesser.

DARK BATTLES

They say war is hell, but no war is more hellish than those battles that take place between Spectres. No war has ever been so vicious, so violent or so absolute as that unfolding between the Malfeans and Grandmother. Spectres are inherently creatures of malice and destruction, and giving them full reign to create as much carnage as possible before their annihilation is, in the minds of these creatures, the most desirable goal imaginable.

Tactics in this conflict change instantly as leaders try to execute maneuvers before the battle plan travels through the hive-mind to the enemy. While the Malfeans use deceit, tactics, Memory Towers and strategically employed Horrors to destroy the enemy, the Spectres of Grandmother's brood rely on brute force to pound, crush and liquefy the opposition into a greasy ichor paste. While the benefit to those in the living world is that hauntings and many of the horrific events that have been unfolding there come to a halt as Spectres pour back into the Underworld to take part in the enormous

battle, anyone in the Wasteland is hard pressed to avoid getting caught in the enormous and seemingly interminable battles between Spectre factions.

Given how things are currently, it's worth looking back at the events that led up to the current state of Spectre Armageddon.

PHASE ONE

For eons, the primary goals of the Malfeans were to undermine and destroy the ghosts with whom they shared the Underworld and to corrupt the living world to such a degree that they protected and expanded their power base. When the Great Storm erupted, they were able to accomplish the first of those goals as completely as they had ever dreamed possible.

Shattering the ghostly culture and toppling the Underworld's cities, however, was just a part of the Maelstrom's effect. Unbeknownst to them, it also awoke something bigger and darker than the Malfeans and upset their plans for ultimate victory.

When the Maelstrom first woke Grandmother from her eons-long slumber, her first tentative forays into the Underworld were weak, clumsy and ineffective. Despite her vast age and unrivaled power, she had largely forgotten what Creation entailed. While she had all the vast power she had ever had, the first of her Spectral children were weak and malformed unto inviability. Few of these made it out of the deepest Labyrinth pits that Grandmother occupied. In time, however, she remembered how to spawn proper monsters, and created a brood of young from her own vast mass. From time to time, Grandmother's spawn would wander into the tunnels of the Malfean Spectres and hostilities would ensue, generally resulting in the destruction of Grandmother's new children.

The Malfean Spectres were at a loss to explain these odd new aberrations. They were unquestionably Spectres and had full access to the hive-mind, but the thoughts they poured into the group consciousness were rarely more than a mish-mash of malevolence, hunger and rage. The Malfeans' knee-jerk response was to destroy these new Spectres as soon as they made themselves known, and for some time, that approach worked. And Grandmother learned from her mistakes.

In time, Grandmother created her first truly powerful child since waking: Belitensch the Abomination. Belitensch took a large chunk of Grandmother's mass to produce, but he was vast and powerful, and he posed the first real threat to the Malfeans.

The Malfean Spectres, their numbers swelled with all their recent acquisition, treated Belitensch not as a threat, but as a creature of sport. Wave after wave of new Spectres were sent after the Abomination, and wave



after wave of them were annihilated. At first the powerful Malfeans thought this was great fun, but then they began using the hive-mind to tune in to exactly what the creature was thinking, where it felt it had come from and what it thought it was doing as it trampled hundreds upon hundreds of helpless Spectres.

The thoughts Belitensch fed into the hive-mind caught the attention of the Labyrinth's most powerful residents: the godlike Neverborn. The creature's size, its thoughts and its vague memories reminded them of their own creation, and only then did they piece together that Grandmother — the spawning force behind the Neverborn — had somehow returned.

With the Neverborn's realization that Grandmother had returned, the battle was joined in earnest. No longer were the bizarre new Spectres the subject of sport and casual destruction. They were systematically hunted down the moment they came within range of a Malfean enclave. Grandmother, for her part, realized that a bit of strategy might not be a bad thing. Instead of sending her new children one by one to the slaughter, she began to hold them back for a time and create larger and larger forces to dispatch against the Malfeans.

The Neverborn dispatched an army of their most lethal warriors, whom they attentively advised, and within 48 hours, Belitensch — a Spectre the size of a mountain — had been sent to utter annihilation.

By the end of phase one, Grandmother reemerged in power and scope, recovering her ability to spawn healthy offspring and reasserting her presence within the hive-mind. She stoked the winds of the Maelstrom, whipping it into greater fury and making the Malfean forces victims of it as well. It was a monumental drain on her resources, but a necessary sacrifice that allowed her to scatter the growing forces arrayed against her. Through sheer will alone, she also seized control of a growing number of Malfean Spectres, converting them to her camp. The Malfeans suddenly found themselves among the harried instead of the victors, their forces rapidly dwindling as Grandmother reprogrammed more Spectres to her camp like a computer virus in the hive-mind

PHASE TWO

Grandmother's second massive coup was the breach of the Shroud. In controlling the Maelstrom, she directed its fury into the Shroud, weakening it but creating the Stormwall. By pushing huge chunks of her own mass across the Stormwall, Grandmother established the first beachhead in the living world in the form of hives, before sending her children across to reap more souls for her growing appetite (the first Spectre invasion that wiped out many old ghosts). Grandmother's ability to

create these conduits was taxing, but a significant advantage that allowed her to generate a "safe haven" for her forces. The Malfeans were surprised and enraged that she was able to do this when they had been unable to directly affect the living.

The Malfeans redoubled their efforts to destroy Grandmother, rightly believing that she'd taxed herself in manipulating the Maelstrom, in creating the hives and in controlling the Spectres. They also assumed that hives were permanent fixtures in the geography of the Underworld. They were quite confident that once Grandmother had spent her energies creating hives, that she would not have the strength to fight the Malfeans as well.

And the Malfeans nearly succeeded. Grandmother was forced to retract her primary anchors, leaving smaller, near inactive conduits to the living. Her control over the Maelstrom also slowly diminished, all in an effort to focus on the matter at hand. For some time, it appeared that Grandmother was going to fall to the Malfeans before her entry back into the Underworld had even properly begun. The Neverborn, presented with the very real possibility of devouring the primordial force that spawned them, were overjoyed at their luck. Massively increased power *and* easy access to the living? It all seemed too good to be true.

Grandmother, however, had been revitalized by the souls culled from her first invasion of the living world, and she produced more Spectres to contend with the Malfeans. The war was brutal and ugly, but with Grandmother's full attention on dominating Spectres through the hive-mind, she controlled most of the soldiers in the battle.

Meanwhile, among the living, Grandmother left small groups of Spectres to continue reaping poor souls. This skeleton crew (of a fashion), was among the first group of Spectres that Orpheus Group and its crucibles encountered. These Spectres were also among the savviest when it came to humanity. While Grandmother merely wanted souls, her Spectres' malevolence, cunning and cruelty are what spawned pigment and alliances with the likes of Uriah Bishop. Grandmother set policy, but it was her Spectres who arranged their implementation according to their own abilities and perceptions.

For a time, the Malfeans were left with meager and depreciating resources. Grandmother wasn't strong enough to battle them all directly, just as they weren't strong enough to wade through her forces to reach her. It was a stalemate, one that allowed both sides to nurse their wounds and prepare for the next violent outbreak. This time, however, the Malfeans discovered two sources of potential allies. The first seemed relatively insignificant, but usable nonetheless... projectors (hence the



reason Malfean-affiliated Spectres occasionally kidnapped projectors' bodies, potentially forcing them into alliances). The second proved to be potential allies of some consequence... Orphan-Grinders. The appearance of each Orphan-Grinder created shock waves in the hive-mind, ruining the perfection of Grandmother's model of unified thought. Orphan-Grinders remained tied to the hive-mind on subconscious levels, though they could capitalize on their connection through their Horrors: Song of the Hive and Oblivion's Husk. The side effect was that their presence created enough discord within the hive-mind to "liberate" some Spectres from Grandmother's control. The Malfeans capitalized on this immediately, using emissaries like Mr. Jigsaw to create more Orphan-Grinders and liberate more human-born Spectres back to their clutches.

One final, and seemingly pivotal, victory preceded the Malfeans' great assault on the hive detailed in Chapter One. The warped but oddly charismatic Malfean called Sulabik the Death Maker finally determined the nature of the disruptions and wrested control of all formerly human Spectres from Grandmother with a single powerful signal in the hive-mind. The key lay with humans themselves, the presence of individuality that, when strengthened, provided dissonance. All Lost Boys, Frighteners and similar Spectres were freed of Grandmother's control and brought under Malfean control. It was, the Malfeans thought, a devastating coup that would assure them victory given that nearly two-thirds of Grandmother's forces were now back under their dominion.

Ultimately, the Malfeans jointly decided that it was time to use Grandmother's hives as their means to take the forces of Oblivion wholesale into the living world. A major force of Malfean Spectres, including the Hekatonkhire Hruguk, pushed its way into a hive on the Underworld side of the conduit, easily destroying Grandmother's Spectres inside, while their allies fought to control the living side hive (see Chapter One). The hive was packed with the thousands-strong Malfean army ready to enter the living lands through the building on the other side. They were barely able to contain their glee over the magnitude of the orgy of destruction and horror that they were about to unleash on the living. And that's when Grandmother "uncreated" the hive, pulling her mass back and trapping the Malfean army within the Stormwall itself, where every last Spectre was annihilated.

Other Malfean Spectres in the vicinity, keenly tuned in to the hive-mind of the invasion force, were treated to a psychic barrage of their cohorts' excruciating, surprised and enraged final thoughts. While the

psychic din reached a fast climax and began fading quickly as most of the invasion force dissolved within the first minute or two of being trapped inside the Stormwall, the death agonies of the most resilient went on. The last hateful thought, belonging to Hruguk, faded away nearly 15 minutes after Grandmother's lethal maneuver.

A palpable shock went through the Malfeans. In particular, Mulhecturous the Filth Goddess realized that she had gambled too much on the invasion gambit in an enthusiastic attempt to connect with members of her disease cults in the living lands. The Hekatonkhire, Hruguk, was hers, as were nearly all of the Nephwrack priests. The Foul One had little time to reflect on the ramifications of her folly. Moments later, her worst fears were confirmed as a swarm of monstrous Spectres, led by the giant Chorgorbizog and followed by ghastly extensions of Grandmother herself, surged in force through her weakened forces and into her sections of the Labyrinth.

The other Malfeans tuned in to the hive-mind as that battle raged. They felt Spectre after Spectre fall in front of Grandmother's onslaught. They felt Mulhecturous call upon her full and terrible might to crush wave after wave of aberrant Spectres. They felt a swell of power as the repulsive Malfean did battle with one of the few things more primordial than she. And, after a brief moment of vicious conflict, they felt what it was like to be utterly consumed by Grandmother. Mulhecturous the Filth Goddess — along with her priesthood, her seemingly indomitable war packs and the majority of her Spectral followers — had ceased to be. The pus-dripping Disease Queen herself had been consumed whole.

The Malfean forces that had seemed so invulnerable twelve hours before now tasted despair as keenly as they ever had. Mulhecturous did not command a huge following in the Labyrinth, but she chose her warriors well. Some of their oldest and most powerful warrior Spectres, some of those truly and deeply blessed by Oblivion, had been lost in the hive assault. Worse, the unspeakably vile, but incredibly powerful presence of Mulhecturous had been taken from them, and Grandmother was rapidly assimilating the Neverborn's vast power and mass into her own.

PHASE THREE

The battles in the Spectre Breed War are now desperate and ugly. While pulling back her hive-appendage from the living world had been a necessary and strategically effective move, it was both painful and costly. It also lessened her already-weak grasp on the living a little more. Following that maneuver by taking



on a powerful Malfean took more effort than Grandmother had expended since awakening.

But it paid off.

Consuming Mulhecturous' vast foul mass (and that of most of her Spectre worshippers) more than made up for the damage Grandmother had done herself by pulling back her hive and the damage the Filth Queen had done her in their fight. Grandmother was easily at her strongest while the forces of the Malfeans were becoming strained.

The Malfeans' initial response to the fall of Mulhecturous was to send out onslaughts of Spectres to destroy Grandmother's Spectral forces. Their campaign was largely successful. The plains of the Wasteland were littered with the bodies of vast, dead things. Grandmother was devouring those dead, however, and spawning new Spectres at a furious rate. It was at this point that Grandmother dispensed altogether with using the hive-mind to control once-human Spectres. Grandmother decided that her own brood — the Sparagmoi, the Omophagia and the Irrumo — were far more effective than those delicate warped ghosts the Malfeans used. She was also spared any concerns about their loyalty, as she knew the Malfeans couldn't take control of her brood, as they could other types of Spectres.

As the battle now stands, Grandmother holds a narrow but growing advantage on the battlefields of the Underworld. Every battle loses the Malfeans a few powerful Spectres. Grandmother's brood, bestial and unthinking as they are, fall in battle at a terrible rate, but she replaces them within a matter of hours.

HELPING VILLAINS

The Malfeans are repulsive. Their goals are offensive. Their methods are repugnant. If the characters do not intercede on the Malfean's behalf, however, Grandmother's advantage will grow until the Malfeans fall and Grandmother is free to push through the Stormwall and lay waste to the living with her monstrous brood.

One Malfean has already fallen. The rest see their forces weakening daily. The characters can aid the forces of evil (as embodied by the Malfeans and their forces), or they can watch as their world is torn asunder by forces of destruction never before seen by conscious minds.

MAJOR GOALS

While both sides in the Spectre Breed War have their own goals, some goals are common to both sides. Anything one side wrests from the other is one more thing that can't be used by the enemy. The malice and pettiness of Spectres fighting this war cannot be overstated.



CONTROLLING THE NAMELESS CITY

Ironically, the most hotly contested territory in this war between Spectres is not over tunnels in the Labyrinth or even the Well of Oblivion itself. The most fought-for parcel of land in all the Underworld is the fallen city whose name remains a mystery. Once the largest city of ghosts anywhere in the Underworld, a site of great culture, ritual and power, the Nameless City is valued now for those things created by the ghosts whom the Spectres destroyed.

Many of the Malfean Spectres were ghosts in the city and many still have memories of the place. In that sense, they may have a slight advantage over Grandmother's brood, which can't really make sense of the city except through purloined flickers pulled from the hive-mind.

The remains of the Nameless City — and more of them remain intact than one has any right to expect after years of the most powerful Maelstrom ever — are a trove of memories, a storehouse of powerful relics and a site of great strategic advantage.

DEAD AIR

Among the many reasons the city is so hotly contested is that all of the space within its great (though tattered) walls, is utterly free of the hive-mind. Spectres not expecting this effect may feel as if they've suddenly been catastrophically cut off from their peers. Others may fall prey to strong memories of the days before they fell to their darker side. And others will recognize that if they can't hear each other, then Grandmother's side can't hear them either, and there, of all places, they can draw up plans for battle without the information being compromised within moments of its being generated

THE GRAND ARSENAL

For millennia, the Nameless City was the home of those ghosts who had gotten stuck on their way to their proper afterlives. Some of them were superb artisans. Some of them were master smiths, eager to make weapons to maintain the safety of the city from the Spectral forces working to undermine her. Their efforts were made moot by the raw power of the Maelstrom. As with all the Necropoli, from least to greatest, the Nameless City fell to Spectres and the Storm.

But her troves of weapons, many never used, are still there. Some were lost to the Storm, and others were stolen by looting Spectres, but the vast majority of the powerful weapons kept in the Nameless City remain there.

For Grandmother's brood, enormous and misshapen as they are, most of the weapons in this arsenal are

unusable. For them it's a race to destroy the arsenal before the Malfeans can benefit from an influx of powerful perfect steel weapons. For the Malfean Spectres, it's one of the few things that could potentially turn the tide of the war.

ACCESS TO THE LABYRINTH'S HEART

Only one route through the Labyrinth never changes, shifts or closes. It leads from the Well of Oblivion, up through the Labyrinth and directly into the heart of the Nameless City. Its black stairs never change, shift or vary. Why the Venous Stair (as it's called) links these two points is unknown. Ghostly philosophers once tried to explain it, but their words have long since been lost in the Maelstrom winds.

What is known is that a direct and unchanging path from the Wastelands down to the very Heart of Oblivion is a serious advantage for any Spectre needing to traverse the distance between those places quickly. Controlling the Venous Stair gives the Malfeans mastery of the easiest point of access into their sacred spaces. For Grandmother's brood, it provides a quick route down to the Malfeans' most vulnerable sites. The Malfeans have done a fair job of cutting off tunnels that lead to Grandmother's section of the Labyrinth, but if Grandmother's forces can enter the Malfeans' warrens en masse through the Venous Stair, they will have a phenomenal advantage over their enemies.

CAPTURING NECROPOLI

Armies need resources. Both Grandmother and the Malfeans are eager to capture any holdout Necropoli. Grandmother would be happy to incorporate a few high-Vitality spooks into her mass. Malfean Spectres, on the other hand, would like to replace their numbers, and converting a few spooks into Spectres would serve that goal nicely.

FINDING KEY RELICS

As stated earlier, relics and artifacts are highly sought by Malfean Spectres. One or two items of significant power could help to turn the tide of a battle or two and possibly even the war itself. Most of Grandmother's Spectres, on the other hand, are motivated to keep them away from the Malfeans because such items can destroy the size and power advantage that most of the brood have over the average Malfean Spectre.

OTHER GOALS

The following are six additional goals for each side in the conflict between Spectre breeds.



GRANDMOTHER'S GOALS

Destroying Malfeans

Above all, the key goal for Grandmother's brood is to destroy at least one more Malfean, ideally one of the Neverborn. With the destruction of each Malfean, the power of the Malfean forces is lessened considerably, and, once Grandmother has devoured and assimilated the fallen Malfean, her ability to extend herself, push hives into the living world and beget new spawn is greatly heightened. That said, Grandmother is not stupid. Mulhcturous the Filth Goddess was not one of the stronger Malfeans, and it was a closer call than Grandmother had expected. She knows that time is on her side, so she won't push her spectral forces to act rashly unless a key Malfean appears to be significantly weakened.

Harvesting Spooks

Everyone has a place in Grandmother's plan, and she's eager to include spooks of all types. Those with low Vitality become fodder for hives, and others become Vitality batteries or just food for her, aiding her never-ending Spectre spawning process. While Grandmother has shown herself capable of devouring entire acres of Spectre ichor, ichor doesn't have the same sweetness as gauze, so Grandmother's brood is always looking to add variety to her diet. The more spooks she can consume, the more likely it is that she'll learn how to grant the use of Horrors to more of her spawn.

Destroying Relic Weapons

Grandmother's brood includes, for the most part, enormous and monstrous Spectres. Few of those who are able to use relic weapons have the wherewithal to do so. The brood has recognized that Malfean Spectres can wield relic weapons to great advantage, however. Any time Grandmother's forces enter an area of the Wasteland that was once populated, teams of brood Spectres search the local area for relics and, if possible, destroy them. If it is *not* possible to destroy them (and perfect steel is *very* strong, so that's entirely possible), the Spectres will feed the relics into one of Grandmother's maws. Where it goes after that is anyone's guess.

Claiming the Nameless City

Many are the secrets held in the halls, towers and tunnels beneath the Nameless City. The uncorrupted ghosts who held sway in that city for millennia were far more capable of teamwork than Spectres have ever been, and their efforts created works of incredible genius and power. Also, for whatever reason, the hive-mind does not work in the vicinity of the city. Grandmother's brood, by and large, is not made up of great strategists, so they can't make great use of it, but the threat of Malfean Spectres

planning strategy that the brood can't listen in on is a dire one, so that outcome must be avoided at all costs.

Spawning Better Monsters

Grandmother's brood has the advantage of power and, generally, size. And while her Spectres may have the equivalent of many Stains as well, they are not particularly powerful as far as Horrors and Spectral abilities go. Most have been in existence for only a few years at the most, and they may learn Horrors in time, but they are stuck learning such things like any other Spectre.

Grandmother would like to change that.

To that end, she intends to capture spooks and Spectres who have more advanced Horrors and bring them forcibly into her hive-mind where she can dissect their minds and discern just what is involved in using Horrors or more complex Spectral powers so that she can imbue her new children with those abilities from birth.

If she succeeds, of course, the Spectre Breed War will come to an end in the space of weeks, and the Stormwall (and the world the characters know) will come to an end shortly thereafter.

More New Hives

Grandmother's ultimate plan is to rip open the Stormwall and step across into the living lands and begin spawning a whole new brood. While the Spectre Breed War is far from over, Grandmother is still keeping an eye to that goal and, if given a chance, she will let her brood keep up appearances while she extends another hive into the breathing lands. Each additional hive in place in the living world will make her job of ripping open the Stormwall that much easier, and at the very least, she wants to replace the hive that she was forced to destroy.

GOALS OF THE MALFEANS

Destroying the Maws

After each battle, Spectres from Grandmother's brood gather the ichor and gauze of the fallen and transport it away to sharp-toothed mounds at the end of long runners leading to Grandmother. The brood Spectres drop in the bodies of the fallen, which are consumed and assimilated by Grandmother. A key goal for the Malfeans is to prevent Grandmother from absorbing more mass after battles. Finding and destroying these maws (or, better yet, poisoning them) before they can fulfill their function is key.

Labyrinth Cautery

Grandmother's use of the tunnels of the Labyrinth is highly effective. She has repeatedly shown an ability to move forces and extend her own mass rapidly through



the Labyrinth tunnels — a talent that has proven devastating to the Malfeans. Key to their current campaign is cutting off all tunnels that lead to Grandmother's strongholds in the deep Labyrinth. This is sometimes done by causing long lengths of these tunnels to collapse, and other times by “persuading” the semi-sentient tunnels to close of their own volition.

Finding Relic Weapons

Brood Spectres' sheer size and monstrousness gives them an edge in combat that is hard to offset. Many Malfean Spectres have come to realize that powerful old relic weapons can even up the odds — if not ensure victory outright — against a monstrous adversary. They have consequently taken to carefully looking through the armories of old Necropoli and even scavenging the Wasteland for weapons that are effective against Grandmother's spawn. Swords, gauntlets, chains and armor have all been found that can augment a Spectre's natural fighting ability to great benefit (as characters may discover the hard way).

Claiming the Nameless City

The lost city is the key territory to claim in the Spectre Breed War. Not only is it a trove of amazing weapons and other relics, but it also shuts down the Spectres' hive-mind. From a Spectral perspective, it's as though the city is the one place in the Underworld where Malfean Spectres can go where they are safe from the telepathic eavesdropping of Grandmother's spawn. Here, the Malfean's ability to write, to think and to strategize can be used to maximum effect. Claiming the Nameless City would be the kind of resource that could potentially turn the tide of battle.

Using the Living

A number of the Malfeans have cults in the living world that they hope to use to further their goals there. With Grandmother's aggressive push into the living world, though, the Malfeans are examining a need to push there more aggressively as well, possibly beating Grandmother to the punch. Many of them have already tried and failed. Others have found ways of possessing mortals, but the Jasons are too few to make the kind of radical changes the Malfeans want. Lacking Grandmother's raw force, however, many Malfeans are currently looking at ways of using the power of her hives to further their own ends. Some are hoping to create wave after wave of Jasons, while others are trying to swell their cults in hive-prone areas (i.e., Spectre Farms), and others are attempting to cross into the living world in altogether different ways. While these efforts aren't likely to bear fruit in time to affect Grandmother's plans in any way, some Malfeans believe that the *real* Spectre Breed War is going to unfold among the living.

Usurping the Brood

One of the Malfeans' few coups so far in the war against Grandmother occurred when Sulabik the Death Maker implanted a thought virus (or “meme”) into the hive-mind that freed formerly human Spectres from Grandmother's control. Sulabik and other Malfeans are seeking ways to corrupt or undermine Grandmother's control of her own brood. Any mind tuned in to the hive-mind is, in theory, subject to tampering. Some Malfeans who want to test this theory, are taking brood Spectres captive and separating them from the hive-mind and attempting to unshackle them from Grandmother's control. (The Nameless City would be the perfect laboratory for this experiment.) If the Malfeans can use hive-mind strategies to turn Grandmother's spawn against her within a few hours of their creation, Grandmother's key advantage will be lost.

MAJOR SKIRMISHES

The following accounts give an overview of major conflicts in the Spectre Breed War *as they unfold if the characters don't intercede*. Long story short: Grandmother's forces will slowly but surely win, Grandmother will devour the Malfeans one by one and fattened on their mass, she will rip her way into the living world, and then she'll begin spawning her monstrous young on our side of the Stormwall.

THE BATTLE OF THE HEAD

The Battle of the Head is so called because it takes place out in the Wasteland near the head of an enormous Buddha. The head itself is 30 feet tall, so the rest of the buried statue would be huge.

Most Spectral warfare takes place in the tunnels of the Labyrinth under the surface of the Wasteland, but the Battle of the Head takes place out in the open and uses what most people would think of as standard battle tactics. The battle is set here because it's where the Malfean Spectres begin their aboveground campaign. The Wasteland's surface must be secured before either side can make a serious drive for the Nameless City. While the Venous Stair would be the most direct route to get there, it's also monitored by Grandmother and her generals.

Statistics and Casualties: The Malfeans produce a large army of relatively young Spectres (around 5,000 “soldiers”). Grandmother sends in a swarm of monstrosities numbering just over 1,000. While her forces are outnumbered, each of her battle spawn are easily three times the size of the average Spectre.

The Goal: Securing the surface of the Wasteland near the Nameless City to begin the drive into the fallen city.



The Outcome: If the characters intervene and help the Malfeans, the Malfeans will win fairly effortlessly and subsequently will be well positioned to move into the Nameless City. If the characters do not help the Malfeans, the battle will be a draw. (While Grandmother's fighters are monstrous and powerful, sheer power doesn't cut it when pitted against battle-trained troops with access to a wide array of Horrors).

THE ASSAULT ON THE NAMELESS CITY

In an attempt to prevent the Malfean Spectres from gaining any further weapons to use against her forces, Grandmother mobilizes her brood to overrun the Nameless City. Fully knowing the potential dangers of losing the Nameless City, the Malfeans make an aggressive stand.

Grandmother is at a disadvantage in this conflict. The Nameless City was built with human-sized ghosts in mind. While her brood is large and powerful, the Malfean forces use guerilla tactics and looted relics against it to excellent effect.

Better yet, Malfean Spectres control the city and its environs after the combat, and they destroy Grandmother's maws, preventing her from absorbing her dead spawn back into her mass.

Statistics and Casualties: Hundreds of Grandmother's spawn are destroyed while relatively few Malfean troops are. Those Malfean Spectres that are killed are expendable (Lost Boys, Mortwights or the like).

The Goal: Help the Malfean Spectres defend the fallen Nameless City, destroy the maws and escape alive.

The Outcome: The last solid win for Malfean forces.

THE MIND WAR

Sulabik the Death Maker, finally believing he has achieved a way of wresting control of Grandmother's brood from her, leads a small army to engage brood forces. During the fighting, Grandmother's Spectres are distracted and Sulabik makes his move in the form of a psychic assault. He is successful. Taking control of a large division of Grandmother's spawn, Sulabik begins plotting his rise to power.

What he doesn't realize is that Grandmother's will is stronger than his. While he can take control of a few of her brood for short periods of time, the moment she turns her full attention to those individuals again, she'll expel Sulabik from their minds without so much as a struggle. The moment he tries to send his "reprogrammed" Spectres back at Grandmother, they're going to turn on him.

Statistics and Casualties: Much to the disappointment of all Oblivion-loving Spectres, very few are

destroyed on either side in this battle. The big conflict takes place if and when Sulabik tries to take "his" forces into battle against Grandmother.

The Goal: Either to help Sulabik against Grandmother's brood, to distract Grandmother from reasserting her control over her spawn or to convince Sulabik that he's not on the right track (good luck).

The Outcome: Sulabik comes away from this conflict thinking he's found a way to crush Grandmother. If he cannot be turned from that thinking, he launches an attack on Grandmother with a combined force of Malfean and brood Spectres — and he falls. Failing utterly but refusing to let Grandmother consume him, Sulabik takes a swan dive into the Well of Oblivion.

WRATH'S INSURGENCE

Zyras makes her move. If the characters can get even one other Malfean to help her, she'll win. Otherwise, she and all her forces are absorbed by Grandmother

Statistics and Casualties: Casualties are incredibly high on both sides in this assault. The balance tips in Zyras' favor if the characters use their abilities to assist the Malfean Spectres. If the characters don't help, Zyras and all her forces are defeated utterly (albeit at great cost to Grandmother).

The Goal: Help Zyras defeat Grandmother. At the very least, destroy the maws near the battlefield that might help Grandmother regenerate after the battle.

The Outcome: If the characters intercede or help Zyras, the Malfeans earn a narrow victory. Many of Zyras' forces are decimated and Zyras herself is weakened, but huge portions of Grandmother's brood, including several of her most powerful generals, are destroyed and Grandmother herself is wounded for the first time, though not critically.

If the characters do not or cannot assist Zyras, it is a complete defeat for the Malfean of Wrath and she and all her forces are absorbed by Grandmother.

THE LABYRINTH PURGE

If Zyras falls, this is the next likely move for Grandmother. Fortified on the mass of Zyras and her army, Grandmother launches a massive offensive on the sections of the Labyrinth controlled by the Malfeans. Her weaker forces enter first, followed by increasingly powerful waves of her spawn. The Malfeans have to rouse themselves fully and take aggressive action against Grandmother's forces. The dust has only a moment to settle before Grandmother herself comes surging through the tunnels attacking and devouring the Malfeans roughly in order from weakest to strongest.



Statistics and Casualties: Grandmother expends all of her forces to destroy the forces of the Malfeans. Both armies are destroyed utterly, for all intents and purposes. A few unaffiliated Spectres may still wander the Labyrinth, but fewer than a thousand Spectres remain from either side. And when Grandmother cuts into the Malfeans, she alone survives the violence.

The Goal: If things have gone this far out of control, the character's main goal needs to be to stay out of the way and save themselves. If several ancient Neverborn are going to be meeting their demise, there's nothing the characters can do at this point to stop it.

The Outcome: Grandmother is the sole survivor of this battle, and even she is gravely weakened, even after consuming the Malfeans. (She would have been destroyed several times over had she *not* been able to absorb the Malfeans during the course of battle.) If this is how things turn out, the characters will have a number of weeks to think of a plan of action, because Grandmother is lonely and she's going to want to create a new brood — and the living world is where she wants to do it.

NEW ALLIES

The following four characters are all capable of aiding your troupe's characters in some capacity, but don't let that fool you into thinking they're all altruists. While Mary Fern certainly has the best interests of the world at heart, at least, some of the other characters provided here have somewhat more complex motivations.

MARY FERN

Mary Fern is a survivor who reveals little of her past. She claims to have been the first to cross the Stormwall, the first to discover Vitality Emblems, the first to get into a Memory Tower and explore it... She does seem to have the experience and the skills to back up at least some of her claims, though. She has the uncomfortable habit of turning up at points when crucibles are looking for information, lessons in how to use Fourth-Tier Horrors, ways to cross the Maelstrom, the location of Necropoli or other such important things. She is willing to provide assistance in return for a favor, to be repaid later. She calls in favors under odd circumstances, such as saving a single Spectre from annihilation or rescuing a human (or a ghost) from imprisonment or even choosing to make a journey on one particular day rather than another. Nobody's sure what she's up to, but one particular rumor is that she's building an information network or army.

Mary Fern appears to be an elderly, straight-backed woman — or rather, the ghost of one — who carries herself with a simple and absolute confidence that can



be annoying to those around her. She appears to be genuinely concerned with the state of the Underworld and seems to be doing her best to get crucibles and individual ghosts and projectors trained and positioned according to some private scheme of hers. Mary Fern isn't all-powerful, but she does have a good sense of when to cut her losses and retreat from a situation.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Empathy 3, Enigmas 5, Etiquette 3, Expression 2, Firearms 2, Intrigue 3, Investigation 4, Leadership 2, Medicine 3, Melee 3, Occult 5, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Shade: Wisp

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Architect

Willpower: 9

Vitality: 9

Spite: 1

Offensive Abilities: Beckon Relic, Congeal, Consume, Forebode, Helter Skelter, Pandemonium, Storm-Wending, Unearthly Repose, Wail

RAJEEV MOHAN

Rajeev is a projector who found out how to traverse the Stormwall early on, and he has been exploring ever since. He privately views himself as the great explorer who will chart the further reaches of the Underworld, seeing things that no living human has ever seen before, stepping in places where no still-human ghost has ever



set foot. As such, he's arrogant, he's intelligent, he's reckless, and he appreciates allies. Even if he doesn't like the idea of other people getting there first, he knows the value of having competent people around the place whom he can turn to in case of trouble. He also likes the idea of competent spooks and projectors handling the Spectres, because personally he prefers to stay well away from them.

Rajeev is an Indian man in his 30s, dressed neatly and unobtrusively in a business suit, already going bald. He is softly spoken and polite, but once he starts talking about his travels to spooks or other projectors, he talks faster and begins to gesticulate, brimming over with enthusiasm. He's a good listener, too, and he's willing to hear other people's stories about where they've been in the Underworld and what they found there. While he isn't a coward, he decided a long time ago that his heroism was going to be in the exploring line rather than in the assaulting-Spectres line. He will cheerfully but firmly turn down any suggestions of mutual assaults on Spectre hives or requests for assistance in a fight. He has a very pronounced sense of personal debt, though, and he will go to great lengths to repay anyone who's helped him in need. He has friends across the world who can help him out if necessary, and he owns a wide variety of forged passports in different names, identity papers and similar useful things.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 3, Computer 2, Drive 4, Empathy 2, Etiquette 3, Finance 2, Firearms 3, Law 2, Linguistics 3,

Medicine 1, Melee 2, Politics 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Survival 3

Shade: Haunter

Lament: Skimmer

Nature: Explorer

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 8

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Bedlam, Broadband Ghost, Flesh-Flux, Hell on Wheels, Inhabit, Witch's Nimbus

DAMARIS MATTHEWS

Damaris Matthews sees herself as a builder of alliances and a future leader of armies. She once lost herself to her Spectre nature, but now she's been redeemed and is ready to kick ass for the sake of everyone currently in danger, whether living or dead. She's competent, she's skilled, she's talented, and she's dangerous. It's a pity she's such a bad leader and coordinator, as she manages to alienate more people than she allies. She travels across the USA and beyond, trying to rouse spooks and projectors to the dangers that face the world from Spectres, and trying to redeem Spectres where she can. Her lifestyle is near-suicidal, as she constantly puts herself in danger and has little sense of proportion when it comes to things that she considers important. From time to time, she serves as a courier, carrying letters or messages between crucibles or spooks, trying to build up the network she believes is necessary to save the world.



Damaris Matthews is a stocky young woman in her mid-30s, whose eyes are far too old for her face. She speaks briskly and doesn't mince her words. She is driven by so great a fear of Spectres, and so personal a



knowledge that anyone can join them, that she has discarded courtesy for urgency and desperation. Damaris will gladly share her talents, teach her Horrors or ally for an attack on a Spectre hive or something similar. Unfortunately, she's driven too much by her own fear to stay anywhere long, and she's more used to rejection than to acceptance. If a crucible can put up with her mood swings and rudeness, she can be a very useful friend, but she's unlikely to stay in a single place for more than a few weeks. Spectres are everywhere, after all.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Bureaucracy 2, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 3, Melee 4, Occult 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2

Shade: Orphan-Grinder

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Architect

Willpower: 8

Vitality: 7

Spite: 6

Offensive Abilities: Anathema, Congeal, Hellion, Helter Skelter, Oblivion's Husk, Salvation, Vector

WHITE DOG KEN

Before he was a Spectre, White Dog Ken was human. He takes great care to make sure that all his inferiors remembers that, as he considers that it puts him several steps above the "mass-production" creatures spat out by Grandmother. He was a petty tyrant of a businessman when he was human, and death has only increased his scope. He actively enjoys working with spooks or projectors, trying to bring them over to the Spectre side. This has led Sulabik, his master, to use him as a negotiator and facilitator. White Dog Ken customarily wears long robes and gloves that hide the worst of his deformities, showing only his mask-like, unnaturally handsome face. Without the robes, he is a creature of oozing slime and corruption, and his skeletal body is covered with open sores and coiled in his long tentacles.

White Dog Ken wants everyone to be happy Spectres, just like him, and preferably serving under him so that he can grind their faces into the mire. He will apparently leave his hive-mates behind in order to negotiate with crucibles, or to seem vulnerable, but they are never truly that far away, and are willing to come to his aid if he needs them. He's persuasive, oily tongued, flattering and lies easily. He'll gladly provide details on Grandmother's Spectres to the crucible while at the same time arranging for Spectres to possess any unprotected projector bodies of theirs and "go Jason" with them. On the other hand, he does give useful information, if it's in the interests of the



Malfean he serves — ignoring or disregarding him may mean losing some vital fact or clue. If he's working to gain a crucible's trust, then he will refrain from being a sadistic psychopath in the spooks' presence, as that sort of thing damages a relationship.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 4, Intrigue 2, Investigation 3, Melee 3, Occult 2, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 3

Nature: Caregiver

Willpower: 7

Spite: 9

Offensive Abilities: Flicker, Hive-Mind, Manifest, Tentacles, Virus

THE NAMELESS CITY

Once the glorious capital of an empire dominating much of the Underworld, this vast Necropolis has crumbled to a mere skeleton of that former splendor. Much of the city's ruins lie entombed in what passes for rock in the Labyrinth, and only the tallest structures pierce the looming cavern ceiling into the desert above. It is a dead city even for a city of the dead, an abandoned monument to an ancient dream lost in the cataclysm of the last Maelstrom. Only Spectres now dwell among the dusty and shattered relics, but even they do not come in hordes or without purpose. Inexplicably, their hive-mind quiets to a whisper as visitors draw near this city



and silences utterly within its broken walls. The ultimate source of this sanctuary remains unknown and perhaps unknowable, but the Malfeans covet the Nameless City as a stronghold where they may plan without fear of eavesdropping. It is an irony that the greatest bastion of the dead has become a citadel for the Neverborn, but no ghosts remain to appreciate that morbid jest.

HISTORY

Unlike most Necropoli, the Nameless City has no counterpart in the lands of the living. Or perhaps it is better to say that it has no *single* counterpart. Rather, it is the very archetype of the imperial City, haphazardly built in ascending strata of memory from the beginnings of civilization to the city's fall a scant few years ago. It is Alexandria and Rome, Babylon and Byzantium, Carthage and London. It is all of these and more, yet it is unique, for no city of the living ever piled so much detritus of epochs upon itself. At the height of its glory, the city was a jumble of mausoleums and monuments and mournful palaces, a place where the finest relics of grandeur came to their final rest, floated through screaming nihilism from lesser Necropoli in the upper reaches of the Underworld. All roads led here save one, and that path led down through the very bedrock of the city's foundation into the heart of the Labyrinth.

The Nameless City was founded on a dream, both literally and figuratively. Before it was a city, it was an island of stability in the sea of frothing dreams. Perhaps it was an extrusion of the Labyrinth or a place where hope pooled and congealed the formless wisps of gauze into a possibility. It is not certain whether ghosts found the island or created it in their restless search for a home, but these earliest settlers brought their memories of urban life. It was simpler then... crude walls enfolding cruder huts, but successive waves of civilizations and plagues and wars brought a steady influx of new ideas, architecture and citizenry. Layer upon layer piled toward the distant eternal night above.

And always there was the Emperor, overlooking and overseeing all, the grim tyrant whose hooded black robes and scythe became icons of death. Some said he was a visionary; others said that he was a lonely god or a redeemed Onceborn who strode from the caverns and directed the dead to build a citadel against his former peers. It is the nature of myth to grow in the telling. In the Underworld, where memory and myth have form and substance, the Emperor reigned unchallenged as god and king. His true origins did not matter. To his subjects, he was Anubis and Osiris, Hades and Charon, and a host of lesser-known chthonic deities, warlords and princes. It is whispered by those who have touched the hive-mind and probed its secrets that the Emperor fell in battle against an awakened Neverborn in the last

century, and still stranger accounts say he returned to witness the end of his empire and the coming of the Maelstrom. But these are apocryphal tales filtered through the lies and cacophony of ghosts fallen to Oblivion when the city fell. No ghosts remain who witnessed the last battle or saw the Emperor in person, leaving explorers to marvel in uncertain horror at the gaping rents in the city walls, the scorch marks and the signs of the terrible fighting that raged through the streets.

What shreds of intact records remain in the Nameless City's many libraries speak of a vast hierarchy of the dead, of the law and legions that held back the hordes of the Malfeans and weathered the fury of five Great Maelstroms. The City was a Rome that did not die and could not die so long as its Emperor ruled from his Onyx Tower. It was an echo of antiquity that endured beyond its time because there was nothing better and the dead always looked back wistfully instead of forward. Records speak with casual detachment of untold wretches chained to eternal slavery, of unimaginable torments inflicted on dissenters by the soulless bureaucracy of souls, of a ghostly society forbidden from interacting with the living by the iron decree of the Emperor. And yet the city was ever a marvel, an ideal preserving the best of human achievement as hope's bulwark against ultimate annihilation. For all its faults, the city endured and so the empire of the dead endured. Only at the last, when the assembled forces of Oblivion rose in black uncounted waves and the final Maelstrom exploded in the sky, only then did the city fall. The end of the city was the end of the empire, heralding the scouring of the Underworld. The rivers and seas boiled with Spite and the island sank to its doom, buried in fitting stillness between the desert and the Labyrinth.

GEOGRAPHY

Even buried in caverns and ravaged by war and storms, the Nameless City remains the grandest city ever conceived. Without the restrictions of gravity and natural laws of the living world, some towers reach more than a mile from their foundations... or they did before the entropy-laden Maelstrom whittled their peaks away. The tallest of these towers pierce the cavern ceiling to the bleak Wasteland above, but only barely as strange monuments strewn among the dunes. The black rock ceiling of the cavern approaches a mile at its domed peak, so the jutting towers appear as strange support struts or girders holding up the weight of the Underworld. From time to time, a great moan of shifting rock and stressed steel echoes in time to some far-off disturbance in the Labyrinth or Wasteland or erupts in booming cacophony from many buildings at once, yet the towers do not break or bend. The Nameless City was built to weather storms and sieges, and the city's endurance lingers well beyond its inhabitants. Titanic stalactites of



twisted stone hang like the teeth of a god, suspended in the spaces between the towers in mockery of symmetry. Below these looming monoliths and skyscrapers, lesser buildings rise to heights still considered impressive by living standards. Here stand the palaces and temple-tombs of the ancient past, and scattered among them the forums and plazas and streets paved in steel and stone.

As elsewhere in the Labyrinth, illumination is scant and coldly dim where it exists at all. In some places, pale blue bonfires burn without fuel. These pyres radiate a spectral chill instead of warmth and leave no scorch marks, but flare to new heights as they consume Vitality and blacken all they cannot destroy with creeping rot and rust. (Anyone within five feet of a bonfire loses from one to three Vitality a turn.) The placement of the bonfires has no discernible pattern, though scattered and broken relics around many suggest they mark sites of great slaughter. Some wall sconces still hold torches of indeterminate material ablaze with a white fire of fearful heat. Gauze softens near such pitiless flame and boils away under its touch. (Lose one Vitality within two feet of these sconces; suffer two levels of aggravated damage when touched by its flame.) Whether the torches burn without diminishment or burn so slowly as to last another age is unclear, but they remain for now as before. Other illumination comes from stranger sources still, from waterfalls of glowing plasm dripping from the overhanging stalactites to pool in courtyards and drain to the darkness below. Elsewhere, puddles and fountains of the same iridescent substance well up from beneath like suppurating wounds. Throughout the city, some crystals glow feebly or brilliantly, carved and set as artificial lights in the more ornate buildings or emerging jaggedly and wildly from the Labyrinth rock. In all places, the light is less than the omnipresent gloom, meager enough in the streets to reveal the dizzying heights and towers lost in darkness but for the star-like glitter of inset crystals or plasm dripping along their sides. The city's colors are drab, but hardly monotone. Grays, blacks, ivory and dull metal hues predominate, but this makes the occasional splashes of color all the more shocking. Very little looks painted, as the colors of relics grow deeper than paint. Bright and cheerful monuments and colorful crypt paintings intersperse with traditionally somber shades, almost as if in jest. Ghosts may stride into the darkness with torches and find the shadow parting to reveal unsuspected brilliance.

To all senses, the city feels maddening and indefinably *wrong* — abandoned but not quite. Moans and rattling pebbles break the silence with every shift and heave of the Underworld, but these are not the only sounds. Winds blow from fissures or without apparent source, rustling the dust and whistling in the tight spaces. The faint mustiness parts to reveal a perfumed

whiff of unguents and oils or the sharper bite of rot or even embalming fluid. Some visitors may spot the momentary outline of a robed figure in the dust or shadow, but only out of the edge of their vision. It is always gone instantly, a mirage easily explained away. Is it a drone or something even less than a drone, an echo imprinted on the very walls of the city? Is it an echo of the Emperor? Or is it merely a mirage spawned by the aura of disquiet? Visitors to the city feel haunted, a discomfort they are likely unaccustomed to receiving however much they inflict it on others.

LANDMARKS

The Onyx Tower: Rising from the very center of the city and easily the tallest building, this spire of black stone vanishes into the gloom above. It would pierce the cavern but for the slope of the domed ceiling, stopping scant yards from the highest point of the rock. This was the capital building of the Nameless City, home and final fortress of the Emperor. It is a monument to hubris surpassing any work of living hands, built of perfect steel and stone mined from the Underworld and not a single relic of mortal architecture. It stands defiant of the storm, defiant of everything, the eternal and indestructible tombstone of its Emperor. Those who approach the building feel the faint unease that permeates the city growing more potent, more purposeful, as if the entire attention of the city's presence now focuses on those who would dare defile the sanctum of a god.

Those who press further and enter may find relics lying where their original owners fell in the tower's defense. Most of the best of this gear has been looted, leaving only the broken and inconsequential — and the rare treasures missed by Spectres who are too agitated by their separation from the hive-mind to care. The tower comprises 18 stories separated by spans of winding spiral staircases intended to slow invaders. Should anyone brave their way to the topmost level, they find its ceiling pierced as by a pillar of fire hot enough to leave obsidian slag at the edge. A simple throne of polished rock sits on a rotating dais beneath to view the city through arched windows. The floor is streaked with ash and slick from melting and cooling to glass, but the throne itself is undamaged, and no force or power can so much as scratch it. The room is reverently silent without echoes, yet anyone sitting upon the throne can speak in the lowest whisper and be heard by all. The entire building resonates with power on a scale that should discomfit all who behold it.

The Machine: Many buildings here feature strange contraptions lacking mortal analogy, their purposes forgotten and lost with the destruction of their owners. One such device bears particular mention, both for its size and the sheer strangeness of its design. The machine sits in a cavernous basement room beneath a large but



unremarkable building along the widest street leading to the Onyx Tower. The machine has an organic, bulbous form reminiscent of a 60-foot cancerous lung, an impression made all the more disturbing in that the device appears to undulate slightly with the skittering and trembling of something in the very metal of its design. Worst of all, the machine lies cracked jaggedly in half like some obscene egg or overripe fruit. The machine assuredly contained *something* dangerous, but that something long ago escaped. Mostly. The room reeks of fear and sour sweat, of old sex, of chemicals and a century of mildew. It smells like death and more than death, it reeks of the utter perversion of life. Even being in the presence of this abominable thing grants unfortunate spooks one point of Spite per minute. This accretion increases to a rate of one point per turn for characters who are unfortunate and foolish enough to actually touch the machine. Storytellers do not need to inform players of this pollution directly until someone develops enough Spite to grow new Stains, though is it generally good form to allow Perception + Awareness rolls (difficulty 6) to sense the danger. Surprisingly Spectres have no use for this place or the machine. They are too saturated with Spite already, and the violent excess only hastens the decay of their tattered gauze (inflicting one level of unsoakable bashing damage for every point of Spite the pollution would yield). A number of tempting relics litters the floor around the machine for those unwise enough to retrieve them.

The Great Library: Astute and well-versed scholars of history may recognize this complex as the very likeness of the Library of Alexandria. It is indeed the relic of that lost wonder, lovingly tended and preserved to the last scroll as a trophy of the city's glory. But it is more, an unmatched repository of lore expanded to hold every book and scrap of learning in the empire. Befitting this glory, the complex sprawls in winding catacombs beneath and in adjacent towers, all filled in their time with records. But no longer. One of these towers lies smashed to the streets where storm winds or some attack eroded the foundation to dust. In the oldest part of the library, one entire wing is bisected by one of the largest perpetual bonfires burning throughout the city, though the conflagration has not spread further. In other places, the damage is lighter but no less depressing. Storm-tossed debris has pierced many halls like a hail of bullets, carving holes in those manuscripts caught in the path. Of the collection, well over half of the original works have been destroyed or ruined by assorted damage from battles, the Maelstrom and looters. If a visiting crucible contains any scholarly characters, the Storyteller may inflict the torment of seeing crude Spectres tossing books into a pyre and laughing as they warm themselves by its hellish light.





THE ARCHIVIST

Once a minor librarian employed by the bureaucracy of the city, the Archivist fell to Spite during the siege. He might have wandered off in the service of one Malfean or another, but the emergent sanctuary kept the hive-mind out and left him quite mad and very alone. He doesn't come across as imposing in the slightest, a gray-haired old man in a gray twill suit with a red bow tie and a crisp yet mild British accent. He



mutters to himself constantly, completely oblivious that his interior monologue spills out as whispered commentary. In one breath, he can offer to help a spook find a book and then say, "If they are reading they are not listening when the Masters come." But the Masters never come, and what he says openly is generally helpful or at least harmless, as he happily fulfills his librarian role for anyone who asks. Deface or try to steal a book in his presence, however, and he's suddenly all burning claws and fangs and tentacles, one of the most frightening-looking Spectres a crucible could be unfortunate enough to encounter.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2 (0*), Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics 4, Alertness 1, Awareness 1, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 3, Enigmas 3, Expression 2, Investigation 1, Law 2, Linguistics 5, Occult 4, Science 1

Nature: Pedagogue

Willpower: 6

Spite: 7

Offensive Abilities: Carapace (+3B/+3L soak)*, Claws*, Hive-Mind (currently unusable within the city), Immolate*, Maw*, Tentacles (barbed; multiple tongues) x 3*

Other Notes: The Archivist manifests traits marked * only when angered.

Unlike many locations in the Nameless City, the Great Library is never deserted. Spectres are always somewhere on the premises, usually on missions of memorizing useful lore to be "downloaded" into the hive-mind upon leaving the Nameless City. Careful spooks can avoid these researchers and their entourages, though all visitors eventually run across the Archivist. This lonely and mad Spectre roams with the unceasing and repetitious vigilance of a blip, the perfect librarian apart from his madness. Other Spectres may obtain his aid, as he aids everyone, but he is too useful to destroy in spite of belonging to no Malfean. He is more a feature of the library than a denizen, a living card catalogue who's all too easy to ignore. But woe betide the ghost or Spectre who tries to steal his books; the Archivist is considerably deadlier than his frail visage suggests.

The Venous Stair: As old as the city itself, perhaps older, the Venous Stair remains a frightening mystery in a city filled with frightening mysteries. In the time before the last storm, it was a carved staircase leading down a fissure into the rock. All along its length, pulsing threads of bloody pink stone moved and twisted as if to escape. The staircase is not quite a spiral, but it turns and twists maddeningly, winding like a coiled serpent from

the Underworld to the Labyrinth — once so very far and safely below. It is wide enough for three men to stand abreast and carved steeply, even uncomfortably, as if intended to accommodate proportions and aesthetics other than human. It may be so. Once, it was the only certain path connecting the city with the maze of the Neverborn, but the city's sinking changed everything. Now it is simply the most direct path to reach the lost capital. Its top is fixed in the caves beneath the city, but the bottom opens anywhere. Upon the Venous Stair, it is always a day away from anywhere in the dark maze and a day back upon its steps for those who can retrace their paths. Descending less deeply reveals only signs of heavy mining, where ghosts once brought ore and odder minerals of the depths to work upon their forges.

STORYTELLING IN THE NAMELESS CITY

At its heart, the city is a bastion of regret that has survived itself to linger forgotten in the twilight depths between worlds. In a very real sense, the city is itself a ghost, embodying the very principles that define what it



means to be dead and yet go on. As such, it is a location steeped in symbolism that canny Storytellers can easily mine. Once upon a time, this place was the center of a bustling empire that controlled most of the Underworld. Upon these streets and in these empty buildings strode ancient and powerful spirits the likes of which may never exist again. The death of this place was more than the fall of a city, it was the death of an empire and the dying of a dream. Like Camelot or the glory that was Rome, this half-fictional city will be forever grander in memory than it could possibly have been. What this means for visitors depends on how they choose to look at it. Spooks can gaze upon the Nameless City and despair, knowing that so much is lost forever. Or they can take the city as an inspiration of what is possible, imagining a new empire of the dead and a new capital. But all that is distant past or distant future. In the present, the Spectre Breed War and Grandmother's encroaching malice present more immediate concerns. Whatever it was or could be again, the city remains important now.

SANCTUARY

Within the walls, some unknown power cuts off every Spectre from the hive-mind. Even Malfeans and presumably Grandmother are not immune to this ward. Consider the significance of that for a moment. Something exists in the city that can infallibly thwart the most powerful and intrinsic weapon in the Spectre arsenal. While the Malfeans can use the city as a place to plan without being overheard by their rivals, that is assuredly a perversion of the sanctuary's intent. What if the dampening effect could be harnessed and used as a more direct weapon or defense against the hive-mind as a whole? The actual truth and origins of the sanctuary are left to Storytellers to decide based on the needs and direction of their own chronicle, but a few possibilities include:

Final Weapon: The sanctuary is the result of a relic created by the bygone empire near the end. The Storyteller will have to decide whether the device is portable and where it is located, as it is almost certainly well hidden or immovable. After all, if the relic were easy to find and take, one of the Malfeans would certainly have done so before now. If the device is small, a crystal or a mask — perhaps the Emperor's fabled skull mask — or some other bauble, then a story could involve discovering the object's existence and racing to obtain it before it falls into the wrong hands. The initial search for evidence might be conducted in the Great Library, where a crucible must find the details in a book before a group of Spectres can do the same. The Archivist might even know where to look, if he asked the right question. After the bookwork, the actual race begins, hopefully with the characters getting a head start on their rivals. Of course, even if they get to the device first, what then?

A confrontation can ensue with the device as the prize, or a more desperate rearguard chase to smuggle the device out of the city might develop. After all, a weapon that thwarts the hive-mind could prove devastating in the presence of Grandmother. If the device is large or immovable, perhaps a feature of the Onyx Tower or the mysterious Machine or something else, the question becomes whether it has other more useful functions, such as taking over the hive-mind in a limited zone. In that case, the challenge is making it work before unpleasant company arrives in overwhelming numbers.

Echo of the Emperor: The Emperor reigned as the most powerful ghost of all time. Such a great and terrible spirit does not go quietly or gently, even in the face of overwhelming odds or Oblivion itself. With his city and legacy doomed and personal defeat certain, the Emperor poured all his Vitality into a Horror of unimaginable potency. His gauze scattered in unnatural fire and no longer contained him. Instead, his essence suffused his entire domain in a web of tethers. Now he is the last ghost of the Underworld, an Emperor without an empire. Without a replenishment of Vitality, he cannot act directly or take on more than a momentary mirage of form, but he can disrupt the hive-mind. Whether he could do more given Vitality is another question. Of course, that would require discovering him and figuring out what he wants and how to aid him, no easy feat for a crucible. This task may be complicated in any number of ways, such as requiring the crucible to repair the toxic Machine and use it to process captured Spectres into temporary gauze for the Emperor to inhabit.

As an alternative to the disembodied Emperor, the sanctuary and accompanying presence may be imprinted echoes of his power. This scenario assumes the Emperor transcended in the city's final hours, but not without leaving a psychic imprint of himself. Call it a final gift or perhaps a side effect, or maybe he couldn't let go of the city and move on unless he knew it would never fall into the clutches of the Malfeans. Whatever the case, the sanctuary is only a force without consciousness. But maybe the Emperor looked into the future and foresaw a time when new saviors would come to liberate the Underworld and his beloved city, so he left weapons and other aid for these champions to discover. Now it is another kind of race altogether from the "Final Weapon" scenario, a mystery to figure out the clues left by the echoes and presence before it is too late to save anything.

The Mysterious Other: Like the ultimate origin of Grandmother and so many other facets of the Underworld, the sanctuary may be unknowable. It just is, for whatever reason, and that is the way of things. This unsolvable mystery is perfectly fine for games in which the sanctuary is just another aspect of the setting rather than an important and interactive plot element. But



even if the sanctuary is important, its origins and full properties can remain unknown. The characters may discover that the warded zone focuses and warps with an expenditure of Vitality like a kind of ambient Horror. They can learn that an expenditure of five Vitality points and a moment's concentration can dissolve every Spectre in line of sight whose Spite rating is less than the character's starting Vitality, shutting off their tainted minds and souls like a light switch. But they don't have to know why or how. These questions may not be important. The answers simply may not exist, and that's fine. Some things are not meant to be known.

CAT AND MOUSE

The characters have grown careless after one mirage too many. They ignored the skitter and flicker of movement and walked right into a Reaper or pack of Lost Boys. Now the hunt is on in the great urban jungle of the empty Necropolis. The spooks can run, but can they hide? The Spectres appear to have the advantage in numbers and power, but they are obviously disconcerted and ill used to functioning as a team without the hive-mind. Clever spooks can exploit this advantage to turn the hunt back on their pursuers, picking them off one by one. This scenario might be a perfect vignette to introduce the sanctuary to characters who do not know of it. Certainly, it is a hell of a welcome to the ruins of the city. A slight variation has the spooks chased through the Labyrinth by Spectres. If they can just make it inside the walls of the city, they have a chance. Otherwise, the telepathically coordinated pack will certainly overrun and consume them all.

NECROARCHEOLOGY

The ruins offer limitless possibilities to uncover the glories and horrors of the past. Stories based on a simple treasure hunt model may seem trivial considering the impending annihilation wrought by Grandmother, but they don't have to be. Such tales can be as simple as hunting for a legendary relic or weapon or rooting for information more precious than perfect steel. Ghosts capable of seeing into the future may have hidden prophecies the Spectres don't want enterprising spooks to find. Or maybe answers lie in the bizarre technologies of the city's past, in the forging of perfect steel or the ghoulish Machine or some other mechanical contrivance invented by the Storyteller for just such a purpose. And what happens after the present apocalypse, if the crucible helps save the Underworld from Grandmother? The Malfeans might well remain a threat, but they were a threat known to the citizens of the city. The city may harbor the seeds of their unmaking, even if it has nothing to offer against Grandmother's brood. And finally, answers need not be immediately pertinent to conflict. A more idyllic aftermath could see the Spectres driven away for now, giving spooks a much-needed reprieve to rebuild

and raise the city as it once was and greater still, a fortress against Oblivion's inevitable return.

THE PRESENCE

While entire stories could revolve around the enigmatic presence haunting the city, this element works best in conjunction with other elements. Storytellers must decide for themselves whether the feeling of being watched is genuine or merely the paranoia of finding such a massive city without inhabitants. Even in the latter case, it is recommended that characters never be wholly certain they are alone, adding to the ambient tension.

Storytellers who wish to incorporate an actual presence or the impression of an actual presence can do so in any number of ways. Call for Perception + Awareness rolls at whatever difficulty and write down the results, but never reveal any information beyond the impression of being watched. Follow one of these rolls with a request to know exactly where characters are standing in relation to one another and players will grow uneasy, especially if nothing appears to happen. Do all this while playing by candlelight with appropriate mood music playing softly in the background, and characters (and players alike) will be jumping at their own shadows before long. The Nameless City affords a chance to turn the standard **Orpheus** ghost story on its head, haunting the dead with a horror they cannot understand or fight.

In a more direct rules-driven haunting, some characters sense something and others do not. For this option, require Awareness rolls against a difficulty of the sensing character's own Spite rating whenever the presence appears. Those who succeed see the peripheral blur of robes or hear the click of a staff on the street or the rasp of a blade dragged across a wall. Keep the descriptions brief and vague and move on just as quickly, never giving more than a sentence or even a fragment at a time. Assumptions will assuredly follow. Is it a Reaper stalking them? Something worse? But why are those with low Spite more likely to notice? It may occur to one of the players that the presence may be invisible to those with Spite in the way that high-Vitality characters are invisible to Spectres in the living world. But every spook has Spite, right? What could be so high in Vitality that normal spooks couldn't see it? Let speculation flow and simply smile or nod without affirmation. They may be right. Such musing may even provide a better explanation than originally planned, but the players don't know that. Don't be afraid to improvise and steal their ideas.

Ultimately, it might be useful to decide the actual identity of the presence even if the characters will never learn the truth, but especially if they may. Also, the presence should help add direction and mood to a story, not spark a tangent that utterly derails the plot only to end in frustrating uncertainty as a mystery. Some players frustrate more quickly than others, and mysteries of this caliber



require an especially fine touch. Push too hard and it stops being fun. Throw out the answers, and it stops being fun. That being said, here are the most likely explanations for the presence, any or none of which may be right:

Threads of the Hive: The presence is a side effect of the sanctuary. Whenever a Spectre enters the city, the abrupt disconnect from the hive-mind tears away a fractional mote of Spite. It isn't enough to really hurt the suddenly independent Spectre, but all that negative energy has to go somewhere. Whenever spooks spend enough Vitality that they would normally attract the attention of nearby Spectres, they instead empower wisps of floating Spite to congeal into momentary form. Such manifestations aren't actually beings, just harmless creepy leftovers. Of course, any player who channels Spite in the presence of a manifestation may give it just enough power to become real.

The Emperor: As suggested before, the presence is actually the disincorporate essence of the Emperor. He can be just that, an impotent presence never strong enough to communicate, let alone take action. He can be a ghost among ghosts, a phantom trapped invisible and incorporeal, helpless except perhaps as the source of the sanctuary. Or perhaps he has the potential to become more, to take on gauze again. Storytellers should carefully consider allowing the Emperor to do anything, let alone do anything that makes him a prominent character. The chronicle should remain focused on its protagonists, not an ancient spirit of ungodly prowess and learning who likely knows every possible Horror conceived and then some. The Emperor should not be used as a *deus ex machina* who steps in, defeats Grandmother, saves the day and steals the characters' collective thunder. Such an outcome runs counter to the very themes of this book and **Orpheus** as a whole. The best and simplest way to keep him firmly in the supporting cast is to keep him forever bound to the city. Assume it takes an expenditure of at least three Vitality points in a turn to attract his attention. This causes a manifestation that characters only notice with a Perception + Awareness roll against a difficulty of their own Spite rating. If a spook spends another three or more Vitality on the next turn, the manifestation gets clearer (though it still requires a roll to notice). After the third turn of this, the outline is unmistakable as a black-robed, masked figure carrying a gleaming scythe. Anyone with a Spite rating of four or less can perceive him clearly, while more tainted spooks must still roll each turn to hold onto the flickering phantom. He is still translucent and insubstantial and cannot speak above a whisper or use any of his Horrors, but the infusion of Vitality allows him to remain in this state until the end of the scene. He can sense anything going on in the city at will and teleport anywhere inside the walls for a cost of one Vitality point. If the circle

grants him a more potent jolt of Vitality (**Orpheus**, p. 190), the Emperor remains locked as an incorporeal phantom indefinitely but cannot set foot beyond the city's walls. Given form, he has whatever statistics and powers he needs and may use Horrors, but he has no quick way to recover Vitality and cannot receive further infusions. Remember that he is a plot device and nothing more. He exists to guide and counsel and convey vast, inhuman regret as the soul of the Nameless City. He is the hero that was, but it is no longer his time or his Underworld or even his city. It is not possible to resolve the Emperor's tethers. They are far too vast for any one spook to comprehend, let alone untangle.

NECROPOLIS: NEW YORK CITY

The Maelstrom destroyed most of the Underworld's cities, leaving only broken ruins half buried in the sand. New York City once boasted one of the largest Necropoli, fully as important to the Underworld as the mortal city is to the living world. The New York Necropolis remains unusually large and intact, though uniquely changed. It may also be the only spot in the Underworld where a crucible can find ghosts who endured the Maelstrom — though most of them would have preferred Oblivion. Characters can find plenty of danger in the New York Necropolis, as well as many opportunities to gain information, make contacts, buy cool stuff and deal with personal issues. Storytellers receive three locations where they can use the magic power of Plot Device to give the characters what they need to know or own to thwart Grandmother, if the characters are willing to face the dangers to gauze and soul. Like its mortal counterpart, you can get anything you want in the New York Necropolis... for a price.

HISTORY

New York's Necropolis came to prominence in the mid-19th century. As the mortal city grew with incredible speed, its population of the restless dead grew as well, tethered to the living by the immigrants' mix of hope, ambition and despair. The city's ghostly population grew as quickly as the mortal city's did. Fortunately, many of New York's buildings cast ectoplasmic shadows into the Underworld with equal speed, so the restless dead found plenty of places to dwell.

The decades from 1880 to 1930 brought drastic changes to both cities. The mortal city saw some of the most ambitious urban planning in the history of the world. Successive city governments ringed Manhattan Island with quays and bridges, veined it with subways, built Central Park and the huge tunnels that still supply the city's water and cleaned up the worst of the slums.



Companies raced to build every-higher skyscrapers, giving New York City its distinctive skyline.

The mighty civic transformation happened in the Underworld as well. Building the skyscrapers meant demolishing older buildings. These passed to the Underworld (if they did not exist there already). The new buildings gained a shadowy existence in the Underworld as well. The unusually rapid and complete turnover of buildings gave the Necropolis a dual character. The gleaming spires of the skyscrapers rose from, and often interpenetrated, a layer of wood and brick homes, factories, warehouses and tenements. New York's ghosts marveled along with its mortal population when they saw Lady Liberty's torch glowing over the dark waters of the city harbor.

Its huge population made the New York Necropolis a hub for the strange commerce of the Underworld. Some of New York's immigrants were already dead — ghosts of far lands, carried by tethers to their mortal kin or traveling from other Necropoli to seek their fortune in the Emporium of the Underworld. Ancient ghosts from deeper in the Underworld arrived to seize power in the name of their king, though they found themselves making unexpected compromises with the native spooks.

New York's ghosts boasted that they dwelled in a special city. Some ghosts saw a mystical geometry in the design and placement of skyscrapers, museums, mansions and government offices. Others suggested that the influx of foreign spirits made New York the Omphalos, the mystical center of the world. This theory became more popular (though only among New York ghosts) when the United Nations made the city its headquarters. Ghosts from other Necropoli usually thought the New York spirits were just bragging.

The middle decades of the 20th century saw a darkening of the mortal and ghostly cities. The mortal slums became poorer, grimmer and deadlier, while their inhabitants sank into rage and despair. When greedy mortal owners burned slum buildings to collect insurance money, these tenements appeared in the Necropolis as black piles of congealed hate and pain, where Spectres walked openly. The spirits that could influence the living did everything they could to encourage the destruction or gentrification of the slums, while the Necropolis militia demolished Spectre haunts one by one. The 1990s saw continuing improvement in the cities of the living and the dead.

Then the Maelstrom struck and Grandmother rose. As in other Necropoli, hordes of Spectres and the deadly storm overwhelmed the city's defenders... and then something strange happened. The ghost-storm circled round on itself, forming a mighty whirlwind within the wider Maelstrom. The

Necropolis swept in on itself. Ghostly skyscrapers, warehouses and tenements lifted in the storm and crushed into each other. Ghosts and Spectres tumbled helplessly in the whirlwind, crushed between and *into* the buildings. Only the Empire State Building stood firm in the eye of the storm.

The whirlwind subsided as Grandmother pushed the Maelstrom into what is now the Stormwall. A new wave of Spectres invaded the ruined Necropolis. They found that many ghosts survived the Maelstrom — but they were fused with the spiritual substance of the Necropolis, and thus impossible to harvest. The Necropolis gained a new monarch shortly thereafter. Vidod the Monger, one of the least of the Malfeans, saw unusual possibilities in the wrecked Necropolis. When the Malfeans rebelled against Grandmother, Vidod gained its freedom as well. It did not throw in its lot with the other Malfeans, however. Instead, it declared its domain a neutral ground in the war, where any spirit or Spectre could visit or dwell.

A few spooks have crossed from the living world to the ruined Necropolis. Vidod has kept its word: Every Spectre knew Vidod's absolute readiness to destroy anyone who attacked non-Spectres, so they left the spooks alone. They also knew that Vidod would withdraw its protection from any ghost who refused to acknowledge its suzerainty or broke its laws, however, so its subjects remain hopeful that they may someday torment and destroy other spirits.

So far, the other Malfeans do not consider Vidod worth attacking — not until they defeat Grandmother. For her part, Grandmother does not comprehend commerce, so she ignores the Monger. Some of her more astute minions understand trade, however, and take advantage of Vidod's willingness to do business with anyone or anything.

GEOGRAPHY

The New York Necropolis now consists of three concentric zones, with the Empire State Building at the center. The Spectres call the inmost zone the Jumble. It consists of a chaotic tangle of broken skyscrapers, bridges, old brick factories, warehouses and tenements, private homes and naked, twisted iron frameworks. These are the remnants of the Necropolis. In every other Necropolis, the Maelstrom destroyed the Underworld shadows of buildings that still exist. In New York, at least some of these shadow-buildings still exist, though broken and displaced from their mortal counterparts. For instance, the spire of the Chrysler Building pokes from a thicket of twisted ironwork about half a mile from the empire State Building. Next to it lies the relic of the Old Brewery, the 19th century city's most notorious and hellish tenement. The Jumble slowly spins clockwise around the Empire State Building. The wrecked buildings



jostle against each other and break apart. Some ghosts and Spectres take the trouble to repair sections of buildings or construct ramshackle homes out of the fragments.

Contorted subway tunnels and storm drains connect the Jumble to the Labyrinth. These are not the current subway tunnels. Instead, these brick-lined tunnels are the relics of long-forgotten private subways. Some of the tunnels connect to entire subway stations that the mortal city sealed off and forgot. The black stone of the Labyrinth gradually consumes and replaces the ectoplasmic brick, stone and concrete of the relic subways.

Beyond the Jumble lies the Palisade, a perpetual Maelstrom-wind that circles the Jumble. More fragments of the Necropolis rise and sink within the storm-blown sands. Outside the Palisade lie a few wrecked buildings sunken into the sand. These ruins constitute the Outer Boroughs. They include the only Spectre hives that lead from the mortal world to this part of the Underworld.

THE HUB: EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

The Necropolis' copy of the Empire State Building looks a bit different than its material counterpart. Most obviously, it has Cleopatra's Needle wedged into the central tower, and the great Coney Island Ferris wheel impaled on its pinnacle. The Ferris wheel slowly turns along with the Jumble. Sparks of silver light and ebon darkness — Vitality and Spite — race up and down the building's art deco metalwork. More lights flicker in the myriad windows.

No force bars anyone from entering the Empire State Building, but few ghosts or Spectres venture inside or stay there long. A constant low moan, like many voices howling in the distance, echoes through the interior. A spook's imaginary skin prickles, and his Stains spontaneously appear, one by one, until he leaves this place.

As a character heads deeper and higher into the buildings, gaps appear in the walls, floors and ceilings and grow larger without weakening the structure. The core of the building is a huge, vertical shaft more than 200 feet wide and 1,000 feet tall, surrounded by scraps of wall, floor and ceiling that hang, disconnected but immobile, in midair. The shaft holds an ectoplasmic tornado. Wailing faces, thrashing arms and other body parts of ghosts and Spectres constantly emerge from and vanish back into the tornado. By jumping between fragments of floor, a spook can approach within 20 feet of the vortex. Some Horrors may permit an even closer approach — or a foolhardy spook could simply jump into it.

Anyone crazy enough to enter the soul-vortex is carried by the storm. The character also suffers an immediate hive-mind linkage to all the ghosts and Spectres within it. That's not especially useful, since the component spirits





are conscious of very little except their own torment. Indeed, they are so damaged that they lack distinct egos. Their Vitality and Spite spins out from their tattered gauze to flicker through the storm.

Characters can use the vortex to gain Vitality or Spite, or they can try to glean useful memories from the component spirits. For spooks who try to absorb Vitality, treat this as Thievery against an effective Willpower of 7. The vortex has the blended Vitality of hundreds of ghosts — maybe thousands — but the character still gains Spite points from the deed. Spectres can attempt to steal Spite points from the vortex in the same way, but they cannot avoid gaining one point of Vitality from the deed (a strange condition for Spectres, which offsets one point of their Spite for one scene). A spook could also deliberately steal Spite points from the vortex, or a Spectre could suck Vitality, if for some reason they wanted to do this.

While within the soul-vortex, Spectres are also disconnected from the hive-mind. Botching the Willpower roll for Thievery causes the Spectre's permanent expulsion from the hive-mind and transformation into an Orphan-Grinder.

A character can try to pull memories out of the vortex. Doing so requires a contested roll of the character's Wits + Empathy (to sift through the fleeting mental impressions and resist the onslaught of pain) against the soul-vortex's Willpower of 7. For each success, the character can ask one question and receive a brief answer that is at least somewhat relevant. The Storyteller should remember that the ghosts and Spectres in the vortex are not omniscient. "Don't know" is an acceptable, relevant answer if the character seeks information about something that a pre-Maelstrom New Yorker ghost or Spectre could not know.

When the character wants to leave the vortex, the player attempts another contested Willpower roll against the vortex. If the player succeeds, the vortex hurls the character out with considerable force. The player then attempts a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 7) to have his character grab one of the floating bits of building and avoid falling down the shaft. If the player fails the roll, the Storyteller rolls one die: The result gives the number of dice of damage that the character suffers from what might be a very long fall before he smacks into something large enough to stop him. Of course, other characters can try to catch the character using their Horrors.

Each failure in a contested roll causes the character to lose a point of Willpower from the mental strain of resisting the mad agony of the trapped, tattered

spirits. If a character loses all Willpower, he joins the soul-vortex forever.

Players may imagine other creative uses for the spiritual vortex. If their plan sounds plausible, Storytellers should let it work (though it may endanger the characters). The soul-vortex is a unique and awesome phenomenon. It *ought* to do things that are not normally possible, such as turning one of Grandmother's never-human Spectres into an Orphan-Grinder or permanently separating a ghost from his evil twin. (Indeed, Vidod claimed the New York Necropolis precisely because it seeks to master the vortex.)

VIDOD'S EMPORIUM OF SOUL'S DESIRE: GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL

From the outside, Grand Central Terminal seems battered but intact. This is, of course, a Necropolis version of the famous station, so its colors are darkened and less intense than the version in the living world.

Inside, the interior is encrusted with bones, though the dark blue dome of the ceiling still bears the gilded constellations of the zodiac. Several man-sized icicles of black glass hang down from the ceiling around the dome. Down below, two levels of brick subway tunnels lead into the Labyrinth. Doors made of bones cleverly fitted together and bound in black glass turn concession stands and ticket offices into locked vaults. Web-cables contact each door. Chandeliers of black-glazed human figures hang from the ceiling. Their heads burn with a pale violet flame and drip an oily fluid that reeks like long-overripe garbage.

The Malfean keeps its nest high up against one wall, where no one could reach it except by flight (or using Horrors). The nest is a patchwork of ornately carved doors and panels and brass rails and balustrades, glued together with black glass into a rough box. When anyone calls out or touches its maze, Vidod pops open a door and swiftly flies over to its visitor. Sometimes, the Malfean may be found inventorying the contents of one of its vaults instead. The Malfean is always eager to deal. Several miscellaneous Spectres also stay within the terminal, serving as Vidod's personal staff and answering questions about what the Malfean offers and expects from visitors. (Storytellers can design Vidod's staff for themselves. The Malfean chooses moderately powerful, intelligent breeds such as Frighteners.)

Vidod propounds a simple law. Everyone in the Necropolis must tell it they accept its absolute rule. No one may attack anyone who has offered submission or who desires to offer his submission right away. Anyone can sell anything, to anyone, for anything else. All records from the Necropolis belong to Vidod. No one may steal anything from anyone else. Anyone caught



breaking these rules becomes the prey of any Spectre willing and able to kill him.

The Malfean itself is the Necropolis' premier merchant. Its vaults hold an incredible farrago of trash and treasure, from relic kitchen knives to small Memory Towers (rent for a time or buy outright) to crystal orbs filled with children's dreams. Several vaults hold the books and civic records salvaged from the Necropolis. Through the hive-mind, it knows every secret of the Malfeans and Grandmother (or at least anything not locked in a Memory Tower — and Vidod finds most of

Grandmother's mind incomprehensible). Vidod will barter any of it, but characters must offer something the Malfean considers of greater value.

Most importantly, Vidod can barter for intangibles. Characters can pay with their knowledge of Horrors, or with a cherished memory. The Malfean can also act as a middleman, exchanging bodies, skills, Stains, destinies or anything else in return for some payment to itself. Through its deal-making, Vidod strives to accumulate power and influence, and so rise in the chaotic ranks of the Malfeans.

VIDOD THE MONGER

This minor Malfean looks like a fusion of man and beetle, with four slender arms and a body covered in green chitin. Vidod's eyes are small golden skulls whose jaws move in time with its speech, and many faces of golden filigree silently wail and gnash on the back of its carapace. The Monger stands seven feet tall, with a slender build. It speaks in a high, lilting voice.

The Monger is every bit as vile as any other Spectre. It loathes the characters and wants to destroy them. It lusts for power and profit at the expense of other beings more than it wants to slaughter creatures that are not Spectres, however, so it makes deals. The Malfean bargains without mercy to extort as much as it can from the characters. Its prices range from the metaphysically disturbing (such as honor, reputation or true love) to the disgusting and dangerous (such as the preserved entrails of an Irrumo). Vidod gloats and rubs its long, slender

hands together when it completes a deal. When playing Vidod, the Storyteller should try to convey the impression that the Malfean has gotten the better of them even more than they may have thought already.

Vidod has traits chiefly for purposes of resisted rolls, such as when characters dicker with the Malfean but the players feel their characters' Abilities outstrip their own competence to roleplay the negotiation. If the characters attack Vidod, the Malfean probably slaughters them. It may be a weak Malfean, but it's still more powerful than any Spectre except Grandmother's most potent monstrosities.

Most importantly, perhaps, Vidod has Vitality and Horrors as well as normal Spectre powers. It gained Vitality from meddling with the soul-vortex, and it bought Horrors from desperate or intimidated spooks. The Monger doesn't have much of either Trait — but it has more than any other Spectre or Malfean.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 8, Stamina 8, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Awareness 8, Brawl 3, Enigmas 7, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 4, Intrigue 5, Investigation 3, Occult 6, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 4

Nature: Conniver

Willpower: 10

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Absorb, Carapace (+10B/10L soak), Claws x4, Flit, Forebode, Gossamer Webs (as per the Stain; takes the form of black syrup spat from Vidod's mouth that instantly hardens into black glass; fueled by Spite), Hive-Mind, Manifest, Puppetry, Regeneration (Level 4, effectively, or eight Spite per turn), Rend, Unearthly Repose, Virus (affects any Spectre less powerful than a Reaper), anything needed to fulfill a deal





THE PALISADE

The Jumble is about two miles in radius. Around it blows the constant storm wind that the Necropolis' inhabitants call the Palisade. This local Maelstrom protects the Necropolis from other storms that lash the Underworld. The Palisade's winds constitute a Force-One Maelstrom, inflicting four dice of lethal damage to any creature that enters the storm. The Palisade is half a mile wide.

The Palisade constantly exposes wreckage from the Necropolis. Smaller flotsam lifts into the howling winds to join the rains of iron needles, boiling blood, petrified toads and other strange or gruesome detritus. Larger chunks remain lodged in the sand. Sometimes the storm exposes an old haunt, though the Maelstrom winds often wear away the less sturdy structures before the sands have a chance to bury them again.

Some of the tougher and stronger breeds of Spectres can endure the Palisade. So can spooks with Juggernaut or a Vitality Emblem of Protection, at least for short times. A few spirits dare to enter the Palisade in hopes of finding something valuable before the winds destroy it. An exposed haunt near the inner or outer boundary always attracts treasure-hunters. The would-be looters often fight each other too, since the Palisade falls outside Vidod's law.

The Brooklyn Bridge offers the only safe way to cross the Palisade. Thousands of workers suffered years of unspeakable torture just to build the foundations of its towers, and many died in agony from caisson sickness. The bridge killed its architect, engineer John O. Roebling, and maimed his son but did not quell their drive to see the bridge completed. When the bridge was finished, however, New Yorkers and Brooklynites hailed it as the Eighth Wonder of the World. Torment, death, obsession and pride cast a shadow of the bridge into the Underworld and gave it the spiritual strength to resist the Maelstrom.

The Palisade's winds do not harm anyone who walks across the Underworld's Brooklyn Bridge. The winds remain strong as they scream in Roebling's revolutionary web of steel cables, but a person who crosses the bridge does not feel their full, deadly force. Vidod stations Spectre guards at the Jumble end of the bridge, to inform visitors of the Malfean's laws.

OUTER BOROUGHS

The Outer Boroughs have no distinct boundary from the rest of the Wasteland. The Maelstrom destroyed most of the haunts in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island, or swept them into the Jumble. A few of the sturdier haunts might remain, but we leave this choice to Storytellers.

At least two Spectre hives reach between the Outer Boroughs and the mortal world. Malfean forces have commandeered one, and Grandmother has not yet chosen to withdraw it. The other remains held by Grandmother's forces. Spectres from both hives occasionally venture into the Necropolis to trade with Vidod. They seek ghost-weapons salvaged from the Jumble or try to hire spooks as mercenaries who can attack the enemy without the hive-mind broadcasting their plans. The Malfean hive's Spectres are led by a Reaper loyal to Zyras the All-Consuming. (Use the stats for Grimm, on p. 272 of *Orpheus*, or use some other Reaper or powerful Spectre who has become an ongoing enemy to the crucible.) An Omophagia or Irrumo of comparable power leads Grandmother's loyalists.

The lone spot in the Outer Boroughs where characters might find safety is the Green Head. This is the Statue of Liberty's head, ripped from its Underworld analogue and half-buried in the Wasteland. The Maelstrom broke out the windows in Liberty's crown, so characters can climb inside. The rest of the ghost-statue is gone. The Green Head is one of the toughest structures in the Underworld, metaphysically speaking, because of the incredible numbers of people who have esteemed the Statue of Liberty. The Stormwall rating within the Green Head (and the actual Statue of Liberty) is 10, however. Spectres don't like to come near the Green Head because it's about everything they aren't: hope and freedom.

NEW YORK PURGATORY: THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 came after the Maelstrom. When the twin towers fell in the mortal world, they rose in a storm of fire and dust in the Underworld. The imploded Necropolis, however, had no place for the World Trade Center. The relic skyscraper became one more unique aberration of the New York Necropolis. The World Trade Center exists *outside* the Jumble, but can only be seen and reached from *inside*. It doesn't manifest in the Outer Boroughs.

Now and then, the Palisade storm becomes clear enough that a spook in the Jumble can see through it. The view always includes the World Trade Center. The relic towers are caught forever in the first second of their collapse, as windows slid from their frames while the vast billows of smoke still poured from their burning upper stories.

The Spectres who pushed through the storm to loot the relic towers never came back. The hive-mind transmitted their destruction to all the other Spectres. The few spooks who dwell in the New York Necropolis say the World Trade Center has become a holy place, but one that destroys any spirit who enters. None of them can cite anyone who's tested that theory, though. They



INHABIT AND THE JUMBLE

A spook that uses *Inhabit* to merge with *anything* in the Jumble encounters a cacophony of trapped ghosts. Such a character can try to glean information from the babble just as if he tried to pull information from the soul-vortex, and with the same Willpower penalty if they fail. In the Jumble, however, a spook can also try to attune to a single voice instead of asking a specific question, which costs the character one Vitality. Success means the character has performed *Sense Lifeline* on a spirit and can converse with it for the rest of the scene. Finding a ghost that knows something useful may require several tries.

A character may snag a Spectre instead of a ghost. The Spectres and ghosts trapped within the Jumble's substance have no power to harm each other or anyone else. At most, they can try to expel an Inhabiting spook. Perhaps more importantly, a spook can use *Inhabit* to free a spirit from the Jumble, the same way two spooks can battle to possess the same object. This costs five Vitality (the two spooks are spread through sizeable sections of the Jumble) and the resisted Willpower roll uses an adversary's Willpower of 9. Few of the trapped spirits actually *have* Willpower that high; this rating merely represents the force that holds the trapped spirits within the Jumble.

heard it from someone who knew a ghost who set out for the Towers and never returned, or some similar legend.

If they choose, and possess some way to resist the Palisade, characters can explore the relic World Trade Center. They discover a place almost as strange as the soul-vortex in the Empire State Building.

The Twin Towers fell in one of the most incredible acts of malice — of *spite* — in modern times. Thousands died in pain and terror when they fell, but they also became the focus of pity and outrage for the hundreds of millions who watched them fall on live television. Their relics absorbed this outpouring of emotion to become a place of sacred horror. Characters who enter the World Trade Center step into an outpost of Purgatory.

The lobby and other entrances to the World Trade Center are vacant. A few minutes after the characters enter the building and move out of sight of the doors, however, they find fire, smoke and a Harrowing for each of them. See Chapter Two for a description of Harrowings and how to run them.

At the Storyteller's option, the World Trade Center grants special rewards to characters who embrace the chance to confront their fears, hatreds, obsessions and other personal traumas and flaws. The Twin Towers are

a special place, accessible only through special effort, and encountered near the climax of the chronicle: Normal rules don't need to apply. Storytellers can use the Harrowing as a plot device to help the crucible toward its climactic confrontation with Grandmother. For instance, a spook's visionary conflict might include clues about Grandmother or about where the weapon against her may be found. For another example, the Harrowing might be a chance for a spirit character finally to eliminate that evil twin whom the player now finds extremely tiresome. Since the chronicle ends soon anyway, the Storyteller can grant any gift that would seem cool and help the plot, without worrying about its long-term consequences for the chronicle.

HOOKS

The Spectre hive-mind knows a fair bit about the New York Necropolis. Vidod wants other Spectres to know where they may obtain whatever they lack. Once characters reach the New York Necropolis, they can find many interesting things to do.

LET'S MAKE A DEAL

The Monger is his own greatest commodity. Vidod can do nearly anything to facilitate an exchange or fulfill a contract. The Storyteller doesn't have to worry about rules for Vidod's power to barter: All that matters is not making it too easy for the characters. Vidod can do anything the Storyteller wants in order to move the characters one step closer to their goal, but the Malfean exists to help the characters solve their own problems — not to remove those problems outright.

Vidod always pushes the boundaries of what the characters feel willing to pay. Since the characters seek to save the world from destruction, Vidod presumes they will pay it just about anything. The Monger's typical deal works like this: In return for what the character *wants* most, Vidod takes what the character *loves* most. For instance, a skimmer who has made great efforts to keep a corporeal body throughout the chronicle might have to pay Vidod with his life. He becomes a spirit, and Vidod gains his still-living, soulless body. A character motivated by love might pay with her memories of her husband and her memories of him. A character that takes great pride in his intellect might pay with his genius (Mental traits drop to 2, two highest Knowledges vanish completely). The Storyteller should try to pick something that the character would never, ever sacrifice... except the world depends on her doing so. If the crucible could plausibly gain what they seek somewhere else, the Monger reduces its price somewhat. For instance, in exchange for crucial information about Grandmother, it might strip a character of a Horror (though not one essential to the character's Shade) or a supernatural Background such as Reincarnate or Artifact.



Other spirits in the Necropolis may also make deals, if the characters think to ask. A few ghosts and intelligent Spectres sift the Jumble and the Palisade for relics they might sell or trade. In this way, characters might purchase working relic devices, or item made of the Underworld's indestructible black steel. In return, ghosts may want Vitality, tethers resolved or simply passage out of the Underworld. Spectres always want something nasty, such as a spook trussed up in the Outer Boroughs for them to torture, rend and devour.

NEUTRAL GROUND

If other Malfeans want to recruit/exploit the crucible, where can the Malfean Emissary possibly meet the characters where neither side expects a trap? Why, in the New York Necropolis. Vidod won't sell either side out, since neither the crucible nor the most powerful Malfean has anything it values as much the Necropolis itself. Indeed, if Chorgorbizog or other sapient servants of Grandmother believes the characters could be turned against the Malfeans, they too might try to arrange a meeting in New York. By now, few spooks can match the crucible's power, but if the characters find they need to negotiate with former enemies, the Necropolis offers them a neutral ground as well.

Of course, if one side can trick the other into breaking Vidod's law, those characters can place their enemy in a great deal of danger. New York may be neutral ground, but that doesn't actually make it safe. Enemies simply need to battle through guile instead of open violence.

THE TOWERS

No one knows where urban legends come from or how they spread. Therefore, the Storyteller need not trouble herself too much about how the characters might hear a rumor about the World Trade Center relic and its purgatorial power. If any character has a ghostly contact, that spirit merely has to pass on a story he heard from another spook, who swore it actually happened to a hue of his acquaintance... The prospect of a chance to rid oneself of a psychic burden or character flaw may be enough to draw the crucible to the Necropolis.

LOOT

Since the **End Game** story arc presumes a certain amount of treasure-hunting in the Underworld, why not give the crucible a chance to prospect in the ruins of New York? Vidod doesn't mind.

Salvage-hunting characters face a number of perils despite Vidod's ban on violence. The Jumble itself can be dangerous from collapsing walls and masonry blocks grinding together. To reach a location, characters may have to jump from building to building or climb along a tangle of twisted girders. Every few minutes, the Jumble shudders and moves. If characters are climbing,

jumping, walking along a steeply tilted floor or otherwise with uncertain footing, the Storyteller may ask for Dexterity + Athletics rolls (difficulty 6 or 7) for the characters to avoid falling and perhaps suffering minor injuries to their gauze.

GHOST STORIES

This section of the book attempts to provide Storytellers with story seeds that provide both enjoyable and interesting play, while allowing the Storytellers to introduce or use some of the major plot points mentioned elsewhere in the book. Characters should be involved in the discoveries that were mentioned earlier. These pieces of information should be *their* horrific findings, *their* illuminating realizations and *their* final conclusions.

Unlike the original **Orpheus**, where the information was presented as a mission briefing, this is purely for the Storyteller. After all, there isn't any more Orpheus, so there are no mission briefings.

THE WAY, THE DOOR, THE PASSAGE

This story takes place after "Breach" in Chapter One. By now, the characters have discovered that the Stormwall can be breached, and they want to investigate what's on the other side. The next step is for them to attempt to create a minor breach themselves, so that they can cross the Stormwall into the Underworlds. Mary Fern (p. 122) can serve as trainer and guide to the characters as they make their first willing crossing across the Stormwall.

LOCATION

This adventure takes place wherever Mary Fern is currently staying or (if she isn't involved) wherever the characters decide to investigate ways of breaching the Stormwall. If they're looking for a place where the Stormwall is naturally weak, then they're probably using somewhere like a graveyard, a murder site, a voodoo temple, a house that's been used for frequent séances or something similar. On the other hand, they may be trying to work in a place that's well away from Spectre infestations and won't endanger innocent members of the public. In that case, the characters may be out in the countryside, or in a nice quiet apartment somewhere out of the way. The gains in privacy and general safety, however, are traded off against the increased difficulty of breaching the Stormwall in such a place. Either way, it won't stop the main antagonists of the piece from taking an interest in them.

What's on the other side of the Stormwall depends, to some extent, on where the characters are trying to break through. If they're attempting to go through next to one of Grandmother's hives, then they're going to walk into the middle of Spectre territory. If they're out



in the middle of nowhere and experimenting in the countryside, then they may walk through into the Wasteland and find themselves surrounded by reaches of barren ground and lonely sky. If Mary Fern's in charge, then she'll want to have the crucible's exit point be a relatively safe, lonely spot — or at least, as safe as any place in the Underworld can be.

HOOKS

The crucible knows by now that *something* lies beyond the Stormwall. Hopefully they want to find a way to cross the Stormwall to investigate further, and plunge into this story of their own accord. Other potential hooks include the following:

Mary Fern seeks out the characters, wanting help dealing with what's on the other side, and she finds that she has to teach them how to breach the Stormwall so that they'll be able to get across and help her.

One of the crucible's spooks has given way to Spite and become a Spectre, and is now the other side of the Stormwall. If the crucible want to get him back, they'll have to go after him. (Also applicable for a friend of the crucible.)

An important ghost has been kidnapped by Spectres and dragged through a hive to the other side of the Stormwall. She may be important because of something she knows — nuclear missile launching codes, perhaps, or the location of the crucible's bodies, or the whereabouts of evidence that can clear the crucible of criminal charges — or she may simply be someone that the crucible cares about. Or perhaps she's an innocent who simply doesn't *deserve* the attentions of Spectres for the rest of eternity. Since trying to go through an alerted hive is an incredibly dangerous and foolhardy proceeding, the crucible needs to find some other way to cross the Stormwall.

INTEL

In this case, it's not so much a case of who the characters ask as of getting reliable information out of them. Spectres have no reason to give reliable information about the Underworld — unless, of course, it serves their own ends to do so. Other spooks are unlikely to have crossed the Stormwall much, so they can't offer a great deal of help as to how to do it. (This is because the characters are the heroes and protagonists of the story. If crossing the Stormwall were easy, and if many other spooks had done it, there'd be nothing particularly special in the crucible doing it.)

Basically, only a spook who has actually learned a Fourth-Tier Horror reliably knows about the existence of Horrors that can breach the Stormwall. Other spooks suspect that it can be done, but don't know how. Spectres know that Grandmother can breach the Stormwall or open a hive through it. They also know

that some of the most powerful Malfeans can breach it, but they don't know what spooks may be capable of. (Why should they, after all?) Spectres *do* know about what's on the other side, but they will tell characters only what suits their needs. If they're trying to talk the characters into a strike on Spectres on the opposing side in the Breed War, then they'll give reliable information on the Underworld. (Why torpedo their own efforts?) If they're setting the characters up for an ambush, or for capture as future converts, then they not only lie, but they also have a reception waiting.

THE OPPOSITION

No significant opposition is detailed for this story. It's more concerned with gaining Mary Fern as an ally and crossing the Stormwall than it is with opposing a particular enemy. The real danger is the Stormwall itself, and that's detailed on p. 35.

THE BRASS RING

The reward in this scenario is that the characters not only crosses over to the Underworld, but finds a reasonably reliable way of doing so, which they can repeat later at will. If Mary Fern is involved, they may also have a future ally and a future plot hook.

TO STAND AGAINST THE CATACLYSM

Pushed by desperation or trained by a helpful spook or projector (such as Rajeev Mohan), the characters discover how to access their Fourth-Tier powers. By now, they already know how to travel into the Underworld. Chapter One has covered this point very thoroughly indeed.

Rajeev Mohan was attempting to locate the Nameless City, leaving his body hidden on an abandoned housing estate previously owned by the Orpheus Group. Unfortunately, he stumbled upon a group of competent Spectres owing allegiance to the Malfean Fiamandains. They're hunting him back to where he left his body and will follow after him through the Stormwall. The crucible should arrive in time to save him, or to rescue him — as the Spectres want to take him alive.

LOCATION

Alpen Meadows Housing Estate was a nice little place in the suburbs of some large American town, with lawn committees, white fences, regular bake sales and all the usual impedimenta of suburbia. After a particularly bloody murder and resultant haunting, however, a holding corporation owned by the Orpheus Group bought it out, and almost all the residents moved out a year or more ago. It's now the hiding place for Rajeev Mohan's body, the haunting grounds of a near-insane Poltergeist, and the target for a Malfean's forces. Lawns are overgrown, drains are clogged with dead leaves, litter lies



here and there on the roads, and once-fresh paint is now dirtied and scarred.

HOOKS

The first potential hook has Rajeev Mohan already aware of the characters and looking for allies to help him locate the Nameless City again (or just to protect him). Being a projector on his own is dangerous. Alternatively, the crucible has heard of him, and is looking for him in particular. Once contact is established, from either side, Mohan sends a message to the characters, asking them to meet him at Alpen Meadows. Naturally, he expects to have safely returned and to be present in his body to meet them when they turn up. Naturally, this goes wrong.

The second potential hook involves the characters investigating Alpen Meadows for their own reasons, while not yet having fully developed their Fourth-Tier Horrors. Alpen Meadows was the property of the Orpheus Group — perhaps this fact comes into the characters' possession, and they decide that it's worth investigating. Maybe the reported hauntings and strange occurrences cover a hive, or a spook or Spectre could provide useful information. In this case, the crucible walks in on the Mohan situation unwarned and must assess the situation quickly and accurately.

Finally, there's the possibility that the characters are actively looking for someone who can help them expand their powers, without particularly looking for Rajeev Mohan or investigating the goings-on at Alpen Meadows. In that case, the Storyteller can pass them Mohan's name and segue into the story as it stands. Alternatively, it can be a simple case of meeting Mohan and getting training, if the Storyteller doesn't want more Spectre encounters and fight scenes.

INTEL

Given the thrust of this story, the characters are likely to research three things: Rajeev Mohan, Alpen Meadows and how to develop their powers.

For details on Rajeev Mohan, see p. 122, where he is more fully described. The characters can find out about him from contacts or investigation, depending on who they know and how they do research. Unfortunately, the most they're likely to find out is that he's a projector, an independent and extremely competent, but prone to working solo. (No doubt some of their contacts would be prepared to pay for any further information that the crucible can provide.)

Alpen Meadows is owned by Home State Recorporations, a holding company that financial investigation can fairly easily trace back to the Orpheus Group. (This would have been more difficult if the Orpheus Group hadn't been destroyed.) Looking at the Home State Recorporation records shows that the housing estate is

deserted by now, though there are airy plans for "building and reconfiguration" work. Checking public records or newspapers for details on anything happening there reveals the violent rape and murder of Hannah Mirtens two years ago (no arrest was ever made), followed by a few reports of strange events, near car-crashes, fires and other potential evidence of a Poltergeist. Home State Recorporations also owns some other properties, which may serve as future plot seeds if the Storyteller so desires. They're all haunting sites or potential haunting sites that the Orpheus Group acquired cheap for further investigations or areas where Orpheus could store dubious and illegal goods.

It's harder for the characters to investigate the possibility of developing their powers. After all, it's not as if there's a convenient list of such things to check against. All that a projector or spook knows is that others of his Shade can do similar things. Finding out exactly how they differ and getting a directed target for his own training requires the free and full exchange of information — rarer than one might think, in the paranoid setting where the Orpheus Group has already been destroyed. The crucible may hear occasional examples of the use of Fourth-Tier Horrors ("She turned into a big car and drove off with the others inside her!") but then have to try to work out how to duplicate the effect. It's actually more common for a spook or projector to make the mental leap to understanding and use of a Fourth-Tier Horror on her own initiative, when forced by necessity and danger and desperation, than for her to be deliberately taught by another person who's already mastered it.

THE OPPOSITION

The Spectres are competent but average. The Storyteller should tailor them to his players, in order to make them a realistic threat and an appropriate challenge.

HANNAH MIRTENS, DESPERATE POLTERGEIST

Hannah Mirtens is a lonely Poltergeist whose only friendly contact with the supernatural so far has been Rajeev Mohan, and she is teetering on the edge of insanity from the violence of her murder and her current insecurity. She's had to flee Spectres more than once, and she will flee or attack strangers unless she can be reassured that they are friends. She knows the estate inside and out, and she can easily move around it without being seen.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Empathy 3, Finance 4, Law 3, Medicine 2, Melee 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 3

Shade: Poltergeist



Lament: Spirit
Nature: Loner
Willpower: 7
Vitality: 6
Spite: 6
Offensive Abilities: Anathema, Congeal, Helter Skelter

THE BRASS RING

The characters can come out of this very comfortably indeed. They've gained an ally in Rajeev Mohan, new skills in accessing their Fourth-Tier Horrors and even some clues as to the location of the Nameless City.

WAR AMONG THE DEAD

This story deals with the characters actually discovering the Spectre Breed War in such a way that they find out who's on which side (Grandmother vs. the Malfeans), and they can no longer assume that it's a minor squabble between groups of competing Spectres. While investigating a Malfean Spectre's attempts to convert some of Grandmother's followers, the crucible has the opportunity to assist or prevent a rescue attempt by others of Grandmother's Spectres. This may result in new allies and new enemies, or the chance to wipe out both sides in this particular minor battle, and in either case, leaves the crucible better informed about current events. The Malfean follower in question, Dr. Nishien, was murdered a couple of weeks ago by a lover who stabbed him and then fled in a panic, leaving his body in his apartment. When Nishien returned as a Spectre he possessed his dead body, and is currently keeping it presentable with perfumes, cosmetics, and disinfectant.

LOCATION

Dr. Nishien's laboratory was already a vile place before his death, as a center for cosmetic testing on animals run by a corporation that was prepared to ignore the law if he could provide results. The lab is set in an otherwise professional tower block that has little else to distinguish it. Now that he's returned by possessing his corpse, the menial lab workers are even more certain that there's something unhealthy about him — but they're prepared to ignore it, given the wages he's paying. By day, the lab is neatly scrubbed and sterile, with animals caged along the walls, and it smells abhorrently of disinfectant. A nihil howls at the center of the laboratory, directly over the main experimental table. (Dr. Nishien's been doing some private nighttime work with captured vagrants and disposing of the corpses in the industrial-grade lab incinerators.) For those who have the vision, Spectres are chained in the corners with fetters of perfect steel, and by night, Dr. Nishien summons up his Malfean-serving kindred to torment them — or, rather, to find a way to persuade them to join him.

HOOKS

If the characters are investigating local Spectres in the hopes of finding information — either because they already have suspicions about the Breed War or because they just want to know more generally — then it's easy for them to come across something that will draw them in. They might surprise those of Nishien's hive-mates they find out prowling for prey, or actually see them assaulting a Spectre loyal to Grandmother. Alternatively, a Spectre of Grandmother's might be prepared to talk with them if they'll do it the favor of disposing of Nishien's group.

There's also the possibility that the characters are trying to locate and investigate local nihil. In this case, they may end up finding their way to the one in Nishien's laboratory, and the situation can degenerate from there. (It seems fair to say that any situation involving a crucible and two opposed groups of Spectres is going to degenerate, and rapidly at that.)

Alternatively, the crucible approaches from a wholly human angle. Possibly one of the characters is acquainted with one of Nishien's lab workers, or even with the lover who stabbed him. Said lover is Ms. June Gamens, a postgraduate medical student who mistakenly believed Nishien when he threatened to keep her chained in his rooms as a slave. Nishien liked playing psychological games. June Gamens is currently in a state of mild hysteria, alternating between assuming that she couldn't have killed Nishien, and being sure that he's returned from death as a vampire. She might well look for help from someone she knows or someone who's supposed to be an expert in the supernatural. If not



prevented, Nishien eventually turns his attention to her and tries to drive her insane before killing her.

INTEL

Investigation of Dr. Nishien shows that he did extremely well in college, joined a high-paying corporation, then completely dropped out of sight, rarely publishing or even attending conferences. (He couldn't reveal where he got his best experimental data without revealing *how* he got it.) People who know of him agree that he's brilliant and cold-blooded, and that they'd rather watch his career from a long distance away. If the characters are approaching from the June Gamens end of the investigation, then they can find out that after the date on which she claims to have stabbed him, nobody in his apartment block or at work saw him for several days. (He'd booked leave beforehand, so nobody tried looking.) He was apparently fine when he showed up again, and no hospital or doctor had treated him.

On the Spectral end of things, locals loyal to Grandmother or to the Malfeans know that Nishien's a Spectre possessing his own corpse, and that there's a nihil in his lab. They're unlikely to tell the characters this, however. Nishien hasn't come to the attention of any local spooks or projectors yet, though he may in the future.

DR NISHIEN, SADISTIC SPECTRE

Dr. Nishien was an intelligent sadist before his death, and hasn't changed much since then. He's having fun trying to convert other Spectres via torture, and while he hopes for success before too long, he doesn't mind taking his time about the process. He's a dangerous opponent who is expecting possible intervention and will react swiftly once it happens. His hive-mates are regular, average Spectres. He is





by far the most intelligent, and the one who will make plans and take command.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 1, Bureaucracy 3, Computer 3, Drive 3, Empathy 4, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 3, Law 1, Leadership 3, Medicine 4, Melee 3, Performance 2, Science 4, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 2

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 8

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Chill, Flicker, Flit, Hive-Mind, Immolate, Rend, Virus

THE BRASS RING

Assuming that they pay attention to what's going on around them during this adventure, the characters learn that Grandmother and the Malfeans are opposing each other, as well as something of the nature of the Spectres working for each side.

THE MEMORY TOWERS AND RELICS

Seeing an easy way to enrich themselves, the crucible investigates rumors of a hoard of ancient relics. Unfortunately, said hoard turns out to be located near a Memory Tower. Even more unfortunately, Spectres are out to collect the relics for their own use, as the spook who sold the crucible the information stole it from them in the first place. The characters may find themselves taking cover in the Memory Tower as the least likely hiding place, while squadrons of Malfean Spectres scour the area. The spook in question — Emma Simmons, Phantasm, thief and con artist — may be with the characters as a guide, with the Spectres as a prisoner or trying to get out of the area before people can catch up with her and ask pointed questions.

LOCATION

The Memory Tower in question is set among concealing desert valleys and hills. The cave where the cache of relics is hidden can be located via some triangulation on local landmarks. ("The hill shaped like a bear to the north, the three-forked valley to the south...") The Memory Tower is much like other Memory Towers — huge, dark, full of strange sparking crystals, screaming trapped ghosts and roaming Spectres. On the positive side, it's busy and confused enough that a motivated crucible might well be able to hide there for a while and avoid hunters, especially if attention has been focused outside. The Storyteller may wish to affiliate the Memory Tower with a Malfean or group of Spectres who have already entered the campaign, if doing so would make things more interesting.

HOOKS

What crucible wouldn't like a nice matched set of relics, guaranteed to be useful in the Underworld? The characters are almost certain to be looking out for such things as soon as they discover that they exist. If they're proactively hunting for them, then it's easy enough for them to come into contact with Emma Simmons, who's selling the location of a cache. If they're merely cognizant of the existence of relics but looking for information on other matters, Emma (who is also an information dealer) might mention the cache while providing other data as well.

Alternatively, the characters are looking for Memory Towers, and Emma (or someone else) tells them roughly where they can find one. On their expedition into the Underworld, the crucible runs across the roaming Spectre party who are hunting for the relics, or happens to set up camp in order to observe the Memory Tower and by sheer bad luck chooses the site where the relics are hidden. Or maybe the characters are wandering in the Underworld, looking for a Memory Tower, and spot a Spectre group together with the chained Emma, and they decide to follow them on the grounds that they're clearly going somewhere. Or, if they're generous types, they decide to rescue Emma on general principles.

Perhaps the characters might even be looking for the Memory Tower in order to find a friend, a colleague or someone whom they need to rescue, and all that they know was that she was taken there. Maybe they've even been hired (or blackmailed) by a Malfean to destroy this particular Memory Tower, and the payment is the relics, or the location of where the relics have been cached.

INTEL

Emma Simmons was a failed author during her lifetime, whose countless attempts to write the Great American Romance bored her local writing circle to tears. As a Phantasm, she's more competent, if nothing else, and is now an effective thief and courier, always on the lookout for a way to shave percentages in her favor. A lot of people know her, though few of them trust her much. (She's sold "secret" information to multiple buyers before.)

Memory Towers are apparently vitally important to the Spectres, but at this point, the characters probably know very little about them. The only reliable sources of information would be Orphan-Grinders, but they're few and far between. Spectres — assuming they could be interrogated in the first place — couldn't be trusted to tell the truth, or to give the crucible information of such importance.

Such relics are both incredibly useful and very hard to find out anything definite about. Anyone who has them isn't handing them over, and is probably keeping them secret to avoid theft or forcible requisitioning.



While it's not hard to find out that they're tools that work in the Underworld, nobody seems certain about where they come from or who makes them. The most popular theory is that they were left behind by some vast pre-Spectre civilization — the word "Atlantis" has been mentioned. Again, the Spectres aren't willing to discuss the matter.

EMMA SIMMONS, COURIER AND THIEF

Emma Simmons isn't a fighter, and she knows it. She'll try to avoid fights by talking her way out of them, using illusions to divert her opponents or masking her trail and fleeing. While she is intelligent, she has an overly high opinion of her own wits, resulting in her selling information to multiple buyers — and dangerous ones — simultaneously.



Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 4, Brawl 1, Empathy 2, Enigmas 3, Firearms 1, Intrigue 4, Intuition 2, Investigation 3, Melee 2, Occult 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Shade: Phantasm

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Architect

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 7

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Bedlam, Dream-Walker, Sandman

HENRY THE THIRSTER

The group of Spectres hunting for the relics is led by Henry the Thirster, a powerful young Spectre looking for ways to advance in service to the Malfeans. As failure to bring back any relics, or anything valuable, will demonstrate his incompetence to his superiors, he's desperate to find something. A set of prisoners for questioning and conversion might fit the bill.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Firearms 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Leadership 2, Melee 4, Occult 3, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 2

Nature: Conniver

Willpower: 8

Spite: 8

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Flit, Hive-Mind, Maw

THE BRASS RING

If the characters are lucky and intelligent, they may come out of the affair with a few relics (the Storyteller is invited to pick some items for the cache that will be useful to the group), an ally who owes them a favor (Emma), and some knowledge of what Memory Towers are. If they spent some time in the Memory Tower, they might even have managed to save some Orphan-Grinders or captured ghosts, depending on what occurred.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

The Nameless City lies buried between the Desert and the Labyrinth, in a great cavern where Spectres flit between the buildings. While discovering and investigating the place's connections to the Labyrinth, the characters encounter a Spectre who has been separated from his hive-mind and is rediscovering his original nature (one who has the potential to become an Orphan-Grinder). Will they help him, or will they consider their original mission of research to be more important?

LOCATION

The city itself is detailed elsewhere in this book (p. 124). The actual suggested events aren't linked to any particular location in the Nameless City. The Storyteller should feel free to use whatever parts she finds interesting or germane to her chronicle.

HOOKS

The chance to investigate the city, with the concomitant bait of "finding out what's really going on," will probably intrigue most characters. Of course, the



problem of high Spectre background count and insane levels of danger may prejudice more intelligent characters against unresearched expeditions into the unknown — but then again, by now the crucible will be a powerful, skilled, well-tested team. They desperately need to know what’s down there, and if they can’t handle it, nobody can. Rajeev Mohan may come into this as a pathfinder and explorer. They’ll need to *locate* the Nameless City before exploring it.

Alternatively, rather than purely investigating the city, the characters are investigating the Spectre hive-mind phenomenon, and they find information about a location where the hive-mind is disabled. They will no doubt be surprised to find that they have discovered the city itself. The realization that they are in probably the most dangerous place in the Underworld, bar none, will be an excellent motivator.

Failing all else, there’s always the classic trope of the crucible accidentally stumbling across the city while crossing the Underworld for some other reason. Whether exploring, being chased by Spectres, hunting for a particular person or thing or trying to find a place to rest before going further, they find themselves within a strange, ancient city. The question now becomes how to leave it.

INTEL

As described in the section on the Nameless City, actual information on the city is extremely sparse. Rumor has it that it is the founding city of the Underworld, that all Spectres originally come from there, that Grandmother herself was born from the navel stone at the center, that all Malfeans have their hearts hidden there (and if you find those hearts you can kill them), that it’s guarded by an eternal whirlwind of flame and blood, that it was utterly destroyed in some great disaster years or decades or centuries ago, and that a group of spooks and projectors is hiding there while working on a great plan to save the world.

Rumor is not always accurate.

Equally, little is known about the Labyrinth other than that it’s insanely dangerous and full of Spectres. The most useful source of information here would be Orphan-Grinders, who can tell the crucible about it from personal experience. Of course, this depends upon finding an Orphan-Grinder.

THE OPPOSITION

A wide variety of Spectres infest the city and the surrounding Underworld and Labyrinth; see p. 124 for details.



JONATHAN PARRETS, SPECTRE

The unfortunate Spectre who is potential Orphan-Grinder material is Jonathan Parrets, who died at 18 as a drug addict on the streets of London, and who is just beginning to realize that the hive-mind is merely another drug, and that he may be capable of breaking the addiction. He wants to talk with non-Spectres, but is aware they have no reason to trust him, and will offer to trade information about the Nameless City or the Labyrinth in an attempt to find out more from them about existence as a ghost.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 2, Computer 2, Drive 2, Empathy 2, Firearms 3, Intuition 2, Medicine 1, Melee 3, Stealth 2

Nature: Martyr

Willpower: 6

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Flicker, Hive-Mind

THE BRASS RING

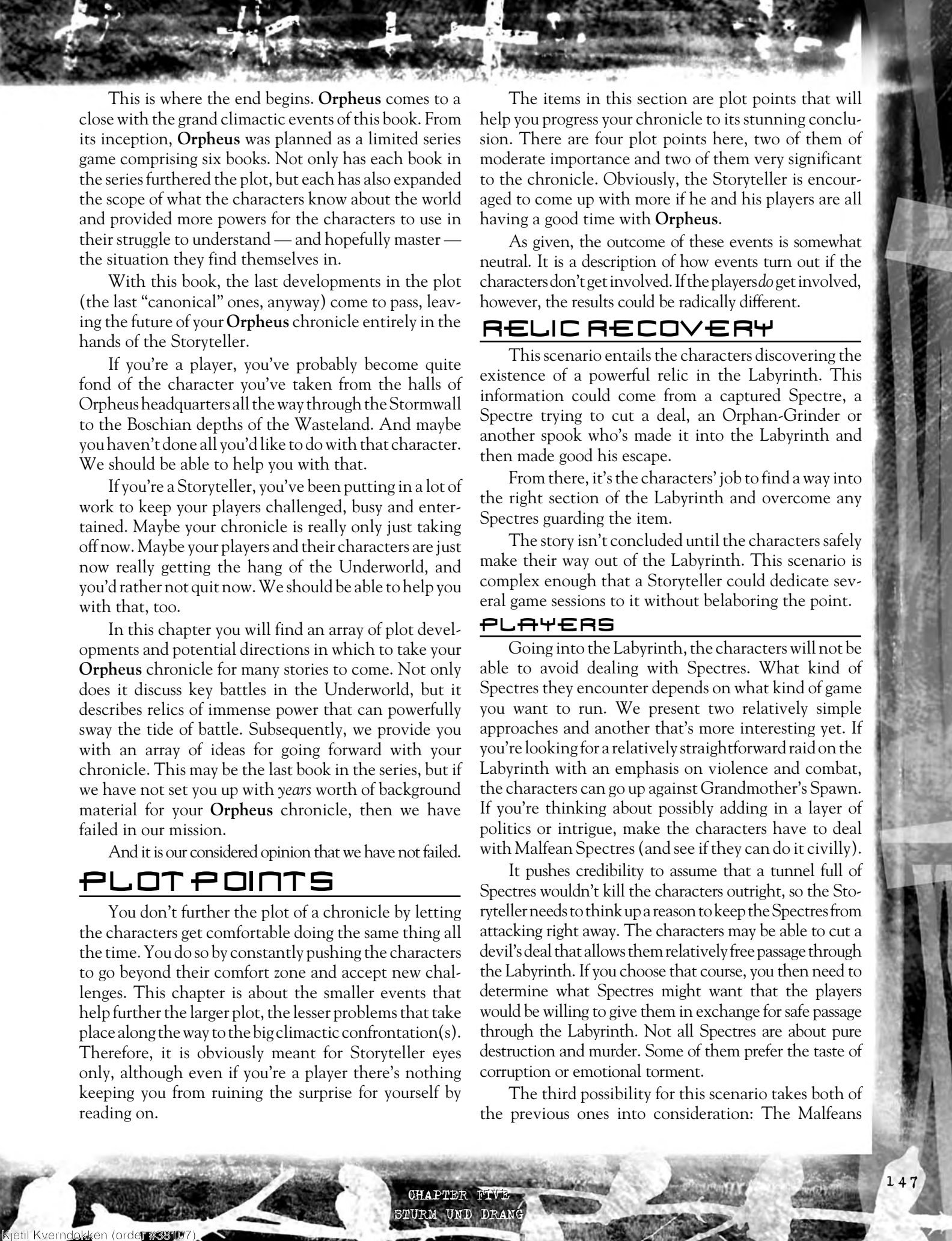
Hopefully the characters now know where the Necropolis is, and where some of the entry-points between the Necropolis and the Labyrinth are. They may also have made contacts with some of the Spectres in the Necropolis, both good and bad, and they have a new Orphan-Grinder ally.

CHAPTER FIVE: STURM UND DRANG



Roman Strauss: What I believe, Mr. Baker,
is that this is all far from over.
—Dead Again

The moment between the last trick and when the curtain falls...
it's a million years long.
—John "Blink" Carruthers



This is where the end begins. **Orpheus** comes to a close with the grand climactic events of this book. From its inception, **Orpheus** was planned as a limited series game comprising six books. Not only has each book in the series furthered the plot, but each has also expanded the scope of what the characters know about the world and provided more powers for the characters to use in their struggle to understand — and hopefully master — the situation they find themselves in.

With this book, the last developments in the plot (the last “canonical” ones, anyway) come to pass, leaving the future of your **Orpheus** chronicle entirely in the hands of the Storyteller.

If you’re a player, you’ve probably become quite fond of the character you’ve taken from the halls of **Orpheus** headquarters all the way through the Stormwall to the Boschian depths of the Wasteland. And maybe you haven’t done all you’d like to do with that character. We should be able to help you with that.

If you’re a Storyteller, you’ve been putting in a lot of work to keep your players challenged, busy and entertained. Maybe your chronicle is really only just taking off now. Maybe your players and their characters are just now really getting the hang of the Underworld, and you’d rather not quit now. We should be able to help you with that, too.

In this chapter you will find an array of plot developments and potential directions in which to take your **Orpheus** chronicle for many stories to come. Not only does it discuss key battles in the Underworld, but it describes relics of immense power that can powerfully sway the tide of battle. Subsequently, we provide you with an array of ideas for going forward with your chronicle. This may be the last book in the series, but if we have not set you up with *years* worth of background material for your **Orpheus** chronicle, then we have failed in our mission.

And it is our considered opinion that we have not failed.

PLOT POINTS

You don’t further the plot of a chronicle by letting the characters get comfortable doing the same thing all the time. You do so by constantly pushing the characters to go beyond their comfort zone and accept new challenges. This chapter is about the smaller events that help further the larger plot, the lesser problems that take place along the way to the big climactic confrontation(s). Therefore, it is obviously meant for Storyteller eyes only, although even if you’re a player there’s nothing keeping you from ruining the surprise for yourself by reading on.

The items in this section are plot points that will help you progress your chronicle to its stunning conclusion. There are four plot points here, two of them of moderate importance and two of them very significant to the chronicle. Obviously, the Storyteller is encouraged to come up with more if he and his players are all having a good time with **Orpheus**.

As given, the outcome of these events is somewhat neutral. It is a description of how events turn out if the characters don’t get involved. If the players *do* get involved, however, the results could be radically different.

RELIC RECOVERY

This scenario entails the characters discovering the existence of a powerful relic in the Labyrinth. This information could come from a captured Spectre, a Spectre trying to cut a deal, an Orphan-Grinder or another spook who’s made it into the Labyrinth and then made good his escape.

From there, it’s the characters’ job to find a way into the right section of the Labyrinth and overcome any Spectres guarding the item.


The story isn’t concluded until the characters safely make their way out of the Labyrinth. This scenario is complex enough that a Storyteller could dedicate several game sessions to it without belaboring the point.

PLAYERS

Going into the Labyrinth, the characters will not be able to avoid dealing with Spectres. What kind of Spectres they encounter depends on what kind of game you want to run. We present two relatively simple approaches and another that’s more interesting yet. If you’re looking for a relatively straightforward raid on the Labyrinth with an emphasis on violence and combat, the characters can go up against Grandmother’s Spawn. If you’re thinking about possibly adding in a layer of politics or intrigue, make the characters have to deal with Malfean Spectres (and see if they can do it civilly).

It pushes credibility to assume that a tunnel full of Spectres wouldn’t kill the characters outright, so the Storyteller needs to think up a reason to keep the Spectres from attacking right away. The characters may be able to cut a devil’s deal that allows them relatively free passage through the Labyrinth. If you choose that course, you then need to determine what Spectres might want that the players would be willing to give them in exchange for safe passage through the Labyrinth. Not all Spectres are about pure destruction and murder. Some of them prefer the taste of corruption or emotional torment.

The third possibility for this scenario takes both of the previous ones into consideration: The Malfeans



aren't stupid; they realize that if Grandmother has a powerful relic, the balance of power tips even more precariously in her favor. They may find it in their best interest to parley with the characters, to have the characters act as their agents in the recovery of the relic in question.

OPPOSITION

Items of this magnitude are not just lying around. Something undoubtedly lies in wait for the characters when they come to abscond with this dangerous item. It could be one of Grandmother's brood making sure that a Malfean Spectre can't use the item, or it could be a Malfean Spectre hoping to waylay the unwary. Or it could be something entirely different if that works well for your story. The essential point here is that items of enormous power are *never* left unattended.

THE CHARACTERS

Nothing gets characters (and players) motivated like the opportunity to gain a potent new weapon. This scenario presents them with the opportunity to claim a very powerful relic — as long as they don't mind entering the Labyrinth to get it.

The Storyteller is free to determine just what is needed to get the characters into the Labyrinth. If desire for the relic is enough, that's fine; if it's not, the Storyteller will have to provide further motivation. The Malfeans might kidnap a member of the crucible and insist that the characters recover a powerful weapon that they fear Grandmother is about to use against them. Or they might offer information about the Underworld or Memory Towers.

ORDER OF BATTLE

The first step in obtaining the relic is to hear about it. As Storyteller, you have to decide how you want the characters to find out about the relic around which the rest of this scenario revolves.

The characters then need to enter the Underworld and find their way into the Labyrinth. That can be the tricky part because the tunnels of the Labyrinth do not remain in the same place for long. They move, change and reroute themselves, sometimes while occupied.

If the characters have a very clear idea of where this alleged relic is (and it's hard to have a *very* clear idea when the tunnels are shifting around so much), they can proceed to its whereabouts. Otherwise they will need to interact with the denizens of the Labyrinth to determine its whereabouts, assuming Spectres care to share what they know with the characters.

This is where forming some sort of loose alliance with Malfean Spectres might work to the crucible's advantage. Mr. Jigsaw or a Malfean emissary might make

a suitable interlocutor or representative between the two sides.

The characters will get to interact with the Spectres a great deal, possibly even taking their hospitality. The interaction will likely be tense. Spectres, as a general rule, lie any time it's in their best interest. They are not creatures of honor. If they appear to comport themselves honorably in their dealings with the characters, that shows only how desperate they are to get the item they want the characters to recover. It may also be difficult for some Spectres to restrain their sadistic impulses around the characters, even if the crucible is under the protection of a Malfean.

One or more Spectres will probably serve as a guide for the characters, at least part of the way. Once the characters enter the section of the Labyrinth controlled by Grandmother, the Malfean Spectres are likely to retreat, unless they've been ordered to stay with the characters the entire way (which is a distinct possibility, because the Malfeans aren't likely to trust others any more than they would expect to be trusted).

Once the characters find the object, they have to get out with it. And if the relic is something Grandmother (or, more likely, one of her minions) was fond of or had plans for, that will likely be the most difficult part (although certain Horrors that aid in transportation may make this the easiest part of all if they work properly in the Labyrinth).

LOCATION

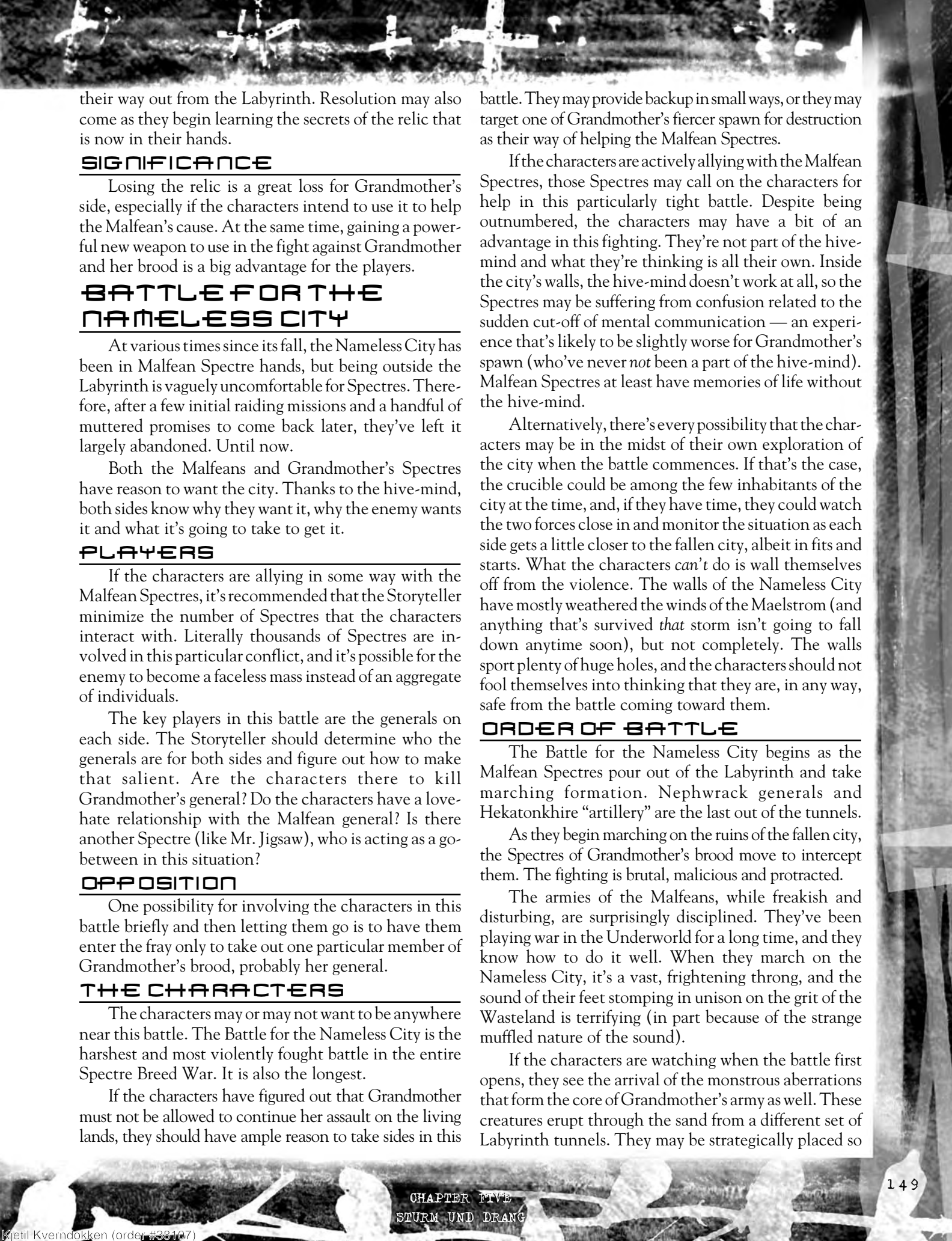
The Labyrinth is the name of the shifting tunnels through black rock that extend, some say, infinitely far beneath the surface of the Wasteland. (See the section on the Labyrinth on p. 40 of Chapter Two.)

Descent into the Labyrinth is simple. Its entrances can be found anywhere, sometimes appearing as a dark hole in the remotest corners of the Underworld, other times as a vast fissure in the middle of a path taken through the Wasteland. The tunnels of the Labyrinth teem with Spectres of all types going about the business of the hive-mind, and they are always eager to goad, cajole or misdirect the hapless wretches who wander in ever farther downward toward destruction.

In some places in the Labyrinth, the tunnels widen. In the lesser of these open places, Spectres have established cities of a sort. In the larger widened spaces, the Malfeans have erected palaces, with the most lavish overlooking the Well of Oblivion — the utter blackness that is death, decay and entropy in their purest forms.

RESOLUTION

Players should feel a sense of resolution from this scenario once they've defeated the guardian and made



their way out from the Labyrinth. Resolution may also come as they begin learning the secrets of the relic that is now in their hands.

SIGNIFICANCE

Losing the relic is a great loss for Grandmother's side, especially if the characters intend to use it to help the Malfean's cause. At the same time, gaining a powerful new weapon to use in the fight against Grandmother and her brood is a big advantage for the players.

BATTLE FOR THE NAMELESS CITY

At various times since its fall, the Nameless City has been in Malfean Spectre hands, but being outside the Labyrinth is vaguely uncomfortable for Spectres. Therefore, after a few initial raiding missions and a handful of muttered promises to come back later, they've left it largely abandoned. Until now.

Both the Malfeans and Grandmother's Spectres have reason to want the city. Thanks to the hive-mind, both sides know why they want it, why the enemy wants it and what it's going to take to get it.

PLAYERS

If the characters are allying in some way with the Malfean Spectres, it's recommended that the Storyteller minimize the number of Spectres that the characters interact with. Literally thousands of Spectres are involved in this particular conflict, and it's possible for the enemy to become a faceless mass instead of an aggregate of individuals.

The key players in this battle are the generals on each side. The Storyteller should determine who the generals are for both sides and figure out how to make that salient. Are the characters there to kill Grandmother's general? Do the characters have a love-hate relationship with the Malfean general? Is there another Spectre (like Mr. Jigsaw), who is acting as a go-between in this situation?

OPPOSITION

One possibility for involving the characters in this battle briefly and then letting them go is to have them enter the fray only to take out one particular member of Grandmother's brood, probably her general.

THE CHARACTERS

The characters may or may not want to be anywhere near this battle. The Battle for the Nameless City is the harshest and most violently fought battle in the entire Spectre Breed War. It is also the longest.

If the characters have figured out that Grandmother must not be allowed to continue her assault on the living lands, they should have ample reason to take sides in this

battle. They may provide backup in small ways, or they may target one of Grandmother's fiercer spawn for destruction as their way of helping the Malfean Spectres.

If the characters are actively allying with the Malfean Spectres, those Spectres may call on the characters for help in this particularly tight battle. Despite being outnumbered, the characters may have a bit of an advantage in this fighting. They're not part of the hive-mind and what they're thinking is all their own. Inside the city's walls, the hive-mind doesn't work at all, so the Spectres may be suffering from confusion related to the sudden cut-off of mental communication — an experience that's likely to be slightly worse for Grandmother's spawn (who've never *not* been a part of the hive-mind). Malfean Spectres at least have memories of life without the hive-mind.

Alternatively, there's every possibility that the characters may be in the midst of their own exploration of the city when the battle commences. If that's the case, the crucible could be among the few inhabitants of the city at the time, and, if they have time, they could watch the two forces close in and monitor the situation as each side gets a little closer to the fallen city, albeit in fits and starts. What the characters *can't* do is wall themselves off from the violence. The walls of the Nameless City have mostly weathered the winds of the Maelstrom (and anything that's survived *that* storm isn't going to fall down anytime soon), but not completely. The walls sport plenty of huge holes, and the characters should not fool themselves into thinking that they are, in any way, safe from the battle coming toward them.

ORDER OF BATTLE

The Battle for the Nameless City begins as the Malfean Spectres pour out of the Labyrinth and take marching formation. Nephwrack generals and Hekatonkhire "artillery" are the last out of the tunnels.

As they begin marching on the ruins of the fallen city, the Spectres of Grandmother's brood move to intercept them. The fighting is brutal, malicious and protracted.

The armies of the Malfeans, while freakish and disturbing, are surprisingly disciplined. They've been playing war in the Underworld for a long time, and they know how to do it well. When they march on the Nameless City, it's a vast, frightening throng, and the sound of their feet stomping in unison on the grit of the Wasteland is terrifying (in part because of the strange muffled nature of the sound).

If the characters are watching when the battle first opens, they see the arrival of the monstrous aberrations that form the core of Grandmother's army as well. These creatures erupt through the sand from a different set of Labyrinth tunnels. They may be strategically placed so



as to interpose themselves between the Malfean army and the city, or they may simply have to cover some significant ground to put themselves in place.

The battle that follows is drawn out and hellish. Both sides descend to the foulest tactics applicable. Whatever causes the most pain to the enemy is the preferred strategy for most of these encounters. Both sides find themselves battled to a standstill, especially outside the city where the hive-mind allows both sides to know what the other is planning.

After weeks or months of this vicious stalemate, a freak event of some sort gives the Malfean Spectres an opportunity to break for the city, followed closely by Grandmother's brood. The Storyteller should determine exactly what allows for this break and make much of it, because it's one of the few crucial moments in this battle. (The event may include the fall of a distant Memory Tower that unveils a terrible weakness in the enemy's lines. It could be the destruction of a potent general or Spectre group on either side, or even a Malfean-sided Orphan-Grinder who manages a massive, momentary disruption in the hive-mind). After both sides have entered the city, the battle continues to unfold, albeit through guerilla tactics instead of outright warfare.

This joint occupation of the Nameless City is likely to last until either the Malfeans or Grandmother decisively wins the Spectre Breed War.

LOCATION

A significant portion of this battle takes place in the Wasteland around the ruins of the Nameless City. The fortress-city lies in a cavern now, hollowed out by years of the Maelstrom winds and digging Spectres. Once, it sat on an island, but the Sunless Sea was swept away in the winds of the Maelstrom.

Given a decent sized force, the city is remarkably easy to defend, but the crucible probably has nowhere near the numbers to make use of that benefit.

After many days, possibly weeks, of vicious combat, Malfean Spectres and Grandmother's spawn both reach the city at the same time. This is not to say that there aren't Spectres in the city already... merely that the war requires the hive-mind to coordinate troop movements, and the Spectres prefer fighting where they can benefit from Grandmother's and the Malfeans' direction. For the rest of the war, the city will be torn by yet another battle. The protracted urban guerilla-style war is slightly less violent, but far more nerve-wracking because one can never be certain of the enemy's location. Which side controls which sections of the city fluctuates a great deal, but each side also controls certain core locations within the city that remain theirs for the duration of the conflict.



RESOLUTION

This battle has no real resolution. It reaches a punctuation mark of sorts when the two sides both enter the city and the combat ceases to be quite as bloody, but the guerilla warfare that unfolds within the city's walls remains as vicious as ever. The only resolution the characters are likely to find to this battle is their own, if and when they make good their escape.

SIGNIFICANCE

With the Battle for the Nameless City, the war is truly joined in earnest. While neither side's Spectres are particularly fond of being outside the tunnels of the Labyrinth, the city holds enormous potential for both sides — potential to find relics and plan the war without hive-mind eavesdropping for the Malfeans, and potential to prevent the enemy from gaining a powerful base for Grandmother.

DEATH OF A MALFEAN

The characters have the dubious pleasure of watching one of the ancient evils of the Underworld die in front of them at the hands of the one creature they fear even more. If you want to take some light liberties with the timeline involved with the story, the characters can watch the demise of Mulhcturous the Filth Goddess. If you're using this situation as a lead up to the final conclusion, then it is more likely that the characters watch the demise of Zyras. Both deaths are quite ominous, but the death of Zyras is a much more serious event because of the Malfeans, she and only she had any hope of defeating Grandmother in a battle of this sort.

PLAYERS

Getting the characters to a place where they can watch this battle with some degree of safety may be the hardest part of running this scenario. The magnitude of the violence taking place in a battle like this is along the lines of a violently erupting volcano, and the characters won't live long if they're just sitting there watching.

Some ways of letting the characters experience this event and survive to tell the tale might include watching the events unfold through a scrying device of some kind (or even a relic telescope), or being behind some kind of highly fortified transparent barrier.

OPPOSITION

Any of Grandmother's Spectres, her generals in particular (see p. 108), would make perfect opposition for the characters in this scenario.

THE CHARACTERS

The characters might find themselves in a position to see this event if they've allied themselves with the

Malfeans on some level (for example, if they've agreed to steal a relic from the Labyrinth for one of the Malfeans).

Even if they've not allied themselves with the Malfeans to that degree, much of what the characters need to do is likely to put them in the Labyrinth where they could get caught in hostilities between Grandmother and the Malfeans.

The Storyteller might give the characters a way to get more involved with this scenario as well. Maybe they see Grandmother's brood massing while deep in the Labyrinth and try to warn the Malfean. Maybe they get caught up in the fighting as Grandmother's brood surges in.

While there's little the characters can do to save the Malfean once Grandmother enters the picture, the characters *might* be able to take steps that weaken Grandmother so she can't do this again. Destroying the maws that help her "recycle" the casualties of battle will prevent her from growing stronger from this battle. The characters might also take advantage of the chaos of the battle to destroy one of Grandmother's generals while she is engaged with the Malfean and unable to do anything about it.

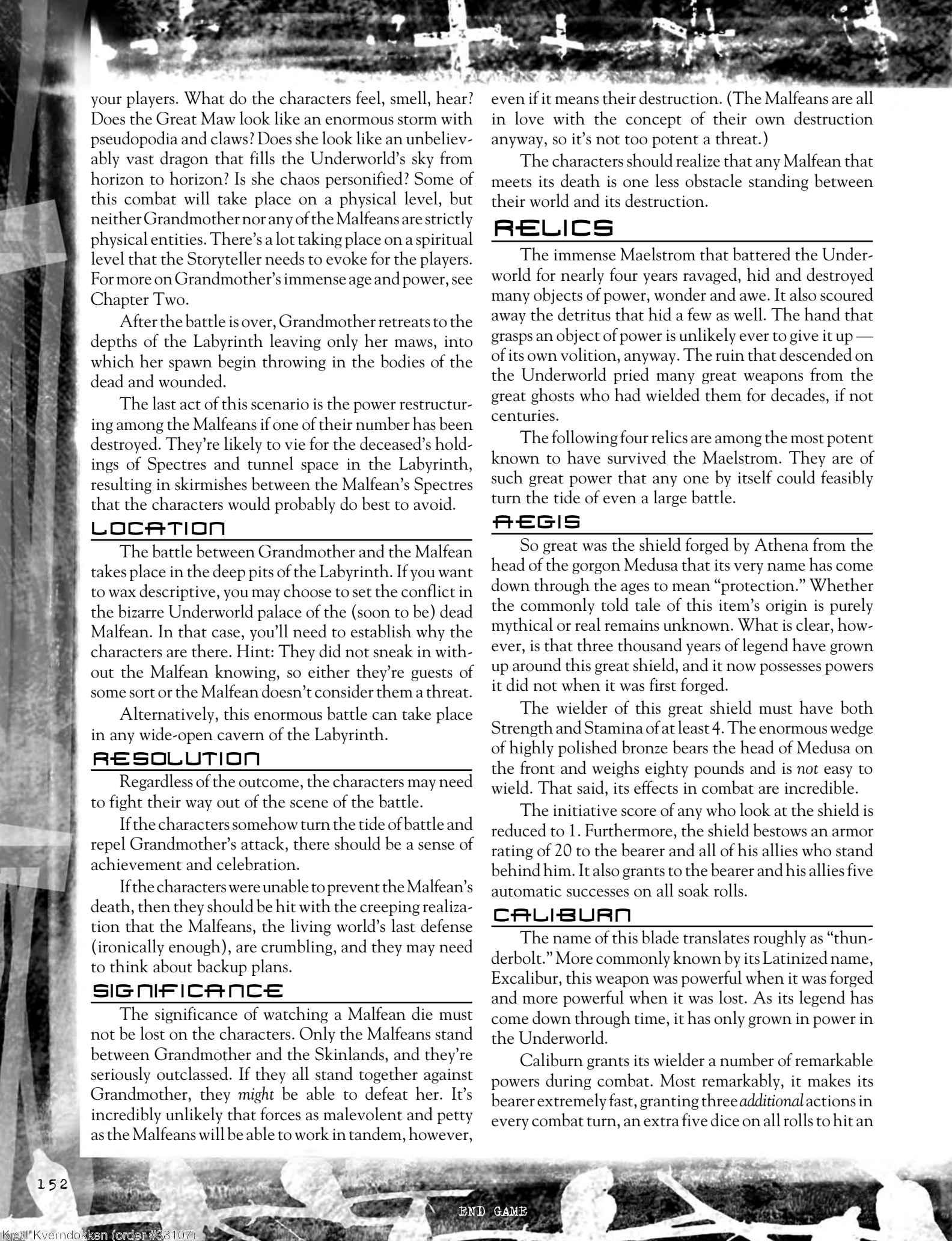
ORDER OF BATTLE

The characters are likely to already be down in the Labyrinth when Grandmother's attack takes place. The first wave of the attack is made up of "foot soldiers," basically suicide forces sent in to soften up the Malfean's forces. After that Grandmother sends in shock troops, the big guns who pound their way through the Nephwracks and Frighteners and leave the Malfean unguarded. Depending on the Malfean in question, this part of combat alone could take several days and provide the characters with many opportunities to assist the Malfean.

If the characters are able to fight effectively next to the Malfean's guards, they may even help enough to prevent Grandmother's forces from leaving the Malfean unguarded, effectively routing the attack. In such a case, the characters have stalled Grandmother's thrust into the Skinlands, temporarily at least.

If the characters can't make a dent in Grandmother's forces and the Malfean's Spectres are wiped out, that's the point at which Grandmother herself surges through the Labyrinth tunnels with a shrieking, rushing sound to engage the embattled Malfean.

To make this the dramatic point it needs to be in the story, the Storyteller is encouraged to describe the battle between Grandmother and the Malfean as vividly as possible, and given the participants and the many planes they'll be fighting the battle on, that won't be easy. It's up to you to imagine what it looks like and describe it to



your players. What do the characters feel, smell, hear? Does the Great Maw look like an enormous storm with pseudopodia and claws? Does she look like an unbelievably vast dragon that fills the Underworld's sky from horizon to horizon? Is she chaos personified? Some of this combat will take place on a physical level, but neither Grandmother nor any of the Malfeans are strictly physical entities. There's a lot taking place on a spiritual level that the Storyteller needs to evoke for the players. For more on Grandmother's immense age and power, see Chapter Two.

After the battle is over, Grandmother retreats to the depths of the Labyrinth leaving only her maws, into which her spawn begin throwing in the bodies of the dead and wounded.

The last act of this scenario is the power restructuring among the Malfeans if one of their number has been destroyed. They're likely to vie for the deceased's holdings of Spectres and tunnel space in the Labyrinth, resulting in skirmishes between the Malfean's Spectres that the characters would probably do best to avoid.

LOCATION

The battle between Grandmother and the Malfean takes place in the deep pits of the Labyrinth. If you want to wax descriptive, you may choose to set the conflict in the bizarre Underworld palace of the (soon to be) dead Malfean. In that case, you'll need to establish why the characters are there. Hint: They did not sneak in without the Malfean knowing, so either they're guests of some sort or the Malfean doesn't consider them a threat.

Alternatively, this enormous battle can take place in any wide-open cavern of the Labyrinth.

RESOLUTION

Regardless of the outcome, the characters may need to fight their way out of the scene of the battle.

If the characters somehow turn the tide of battle and repel Grandmother's attack, there should be a sense of achievement and celebration.

If the characters were unable to prevent the Malfean's death, then they should be hit with the creeping realization that the Malfeans, the living world's last defense (ironically enough), are crumbling, and they may need to think about backup plans.

SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of watching a Malfean die must not be lost on the characters. Only the Malfeans stand between Grandmother and the Skinlands, and they're seriously outclassed. If they all stand together against Grandmother, they *might* be able to defeat her. It's incredibly unlikely that forces as malevolent and petty as the Malfeans will be able to work in tandem, however,

even if it means their destruction. (The Malfeans are all in love with the concept of their own destruction anyway, so it's not too potent a threat.)

The characters should realize that any Malfean that meets its death is one less obstacle standing between their world and its destruction.

RÆLICS

The immense Maelstrom that battered the Underworld for nearly four years ravaged, hid and destroyed many objects of power, wonder and awe. It also scoured away the detritus that hid a few as well. The hand that grasps an object of power is unlikely ever to give it up — of its own volition, anyway. The ruin that descended on the Underworld pried many great weapons from the great ghosts who had wielded them for decades, if not centuries.

The following four relics are among the most potent known to have survived the Maelstrom. They are of such great power that any one by itself could feasibly turn the tide of even a large battle.

AEGIS

So great was the shield forged by Athena from the head of the gorgon Medusa that its very name has come down through the ages to mean "protection." Whether the commonly told tale of this item's origin is purely mythical or real remains unknown. What is clear, however, is that three thousand years of legend have grown up around this great shield, and it now possesses powers it did not when it was first forged.

The wielder of this great shield must have both Strength and Stamina of at least 4. The enormous wedge of highly polished bronze bears the head of Medusa on the front and weighs eighty pounds and is *not* easy to wield. That said, its effects in combat are incredible.

The initiative score of any who look at the shield is reduced to 1. Furthermore, the shield bestows an armor rating of 20 to the bearer and all of his allies who stand behind him. It also grants to the bearer and his allies five automatic successes on all soak rolls.

CALIBURN

The name of this blade translates roughly as "thunderbolt." More commonly known by its Latinized name, Excalibur, this weapon was powerful when it was forged and more powerful when it was lost. As its legend has come down through time, it has only grown in power in the Underworld.

Caliburn grants its wielder a number of remarkable powers during combat. Most remarkably, it makes its bearer extremely fast, granting three *additional* actions in every combat turn, an extra five dice on all rolls to hit an

opponent, and, because he moves like lightning, attacks launched at Caliburn's wielder incur a difficulty penalty of +2. Caliburn and its scabbard have been separated and reunited repeatedly, so there's no assurance that the sword will be in its scabbard, but if it is, the scabbard also conveys the ability to regenerate one point of Vitality every hour as long as Caliburn is safely sheathed inside.

MONITOR

The *USS Monitor* was one of the "ironsides," the name given to the two iron-covered ships first used in the American Civil War. Because of its low design, the *Monitor* was largely below the surface of the water except for its single gun turret. The Union's *Monitor* fought the Confederacy's ironside ship, the *Merrimack*, for four hours with neither side being able to damage the other. When the *Monitor* foundered in rough seas a few months later, she immediately became a powerful relic. As the years have passed and tellers have embellished the performance of the *Monitor*, the relic itself has shown some potent abilities of its own.

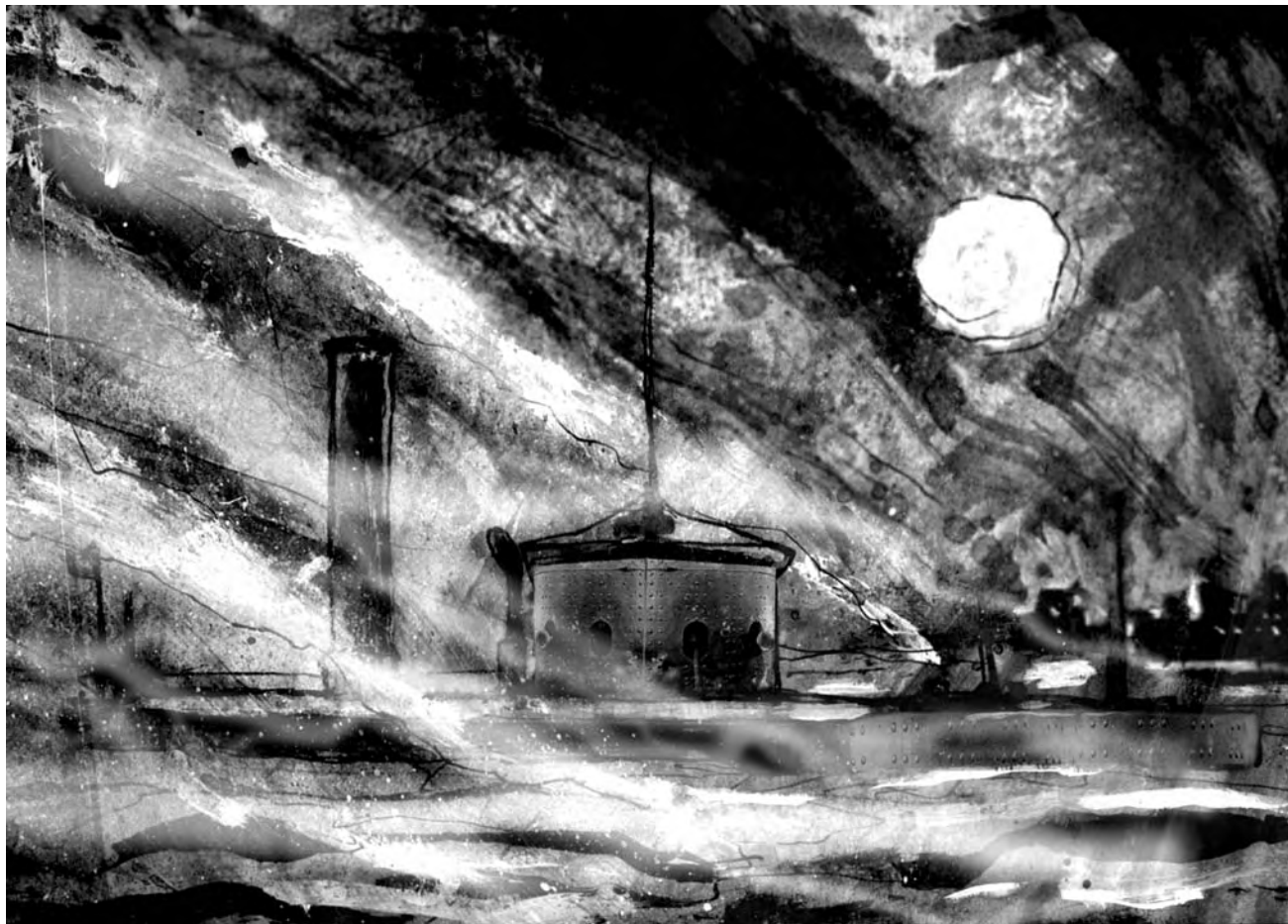
While the *Monitor* is not a particularly complex piece of machinery, players must roll Intelligence + Technology (difficulty 7) to activate it. Once activated, the *Monitor* has a cruising speed of 20 mph. The ship's

key feature is that it can cruise through the sandy surface of the Wasteland (though this won't work in the tunnels of the Labyrinth). Since most of *Monitor*'s volume is under her waterline, she's extremely difficult for siege engines to hit (an additional +1 difficulty penalty when she's still; an additional +2 when she's moving). The heavy metal plates on her outside give the *Monitor* an armor rating of 10. The only drawback to the *Monitor* is that, since she's not remembered as being particularly devastating in battle, her single gun inflicts only four dice of damage. Hitting an opponent with the *Monitor*'s gun requires a successful Perception + Firearms roll.

THE ASSASSIN'S GUN

This is not a particular assassin's gun, it's every unseen assassin's gun. It's the gun that killed JFK, the gun that killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the gun that killed Abraham Lincoln all rolled up in one. As the focus of innumerable conspiracy theories, it has gained power far and above what it would normally have.

The Assassin's Gun, deceptive weapon that it is, does not need to be held in the character's hand to function as long as it is somewhere on her person. The gun can fire two rounds per turn and can hit any target



in the characters unbroken line of sight. (Hitting a target with this weapon requires the player to roll Wits + Firearms against a difficulty of 6.) The target of this gun may not dodge, and soak rolls incur a difficulty penalty of +1. Each bullet inflicts eight dice of lethal damage. The report of the Assassin's Gun is extremely loud — louder than it ought to be in any given context — but the sound seems to come from a source 50 feet away from the character.

NOW WHAT?

As players reach the game's climax and, hopefully, change the outcome of the battle between Grandmother and the Malfeans, you may begin to ask, "Okay, what are we supposed to do now?"

Your **Orpheus** chronicle doesn't need to come to an end just because you've reached the last book. We've packed enough material into these books to keep you and your players busy for years.

We've presented two possibilities on how the chronicle could end, two possible solutions for the chthonic horror that is Grandmother. Any of them can be easily tweaked to fit your chronicle's needs. You can combine them into a more fitting scenario, or you may feel free to ignore them entirely.

GOD'S ARROW

"God's Arrow" is a skeleton of events, waiting for you — the Storyteller — to drape it with glorious meat. Some work has been left for individual Storytellers — primarily in the area of setting the stats for the antagonists and determining how many of them there are. Troupes vary tremendously, and a challenge that's easy for some is too hard for others. Most Storytellers wind up altering these factors for their specific groups, so there's no real reason to include more than guidance.

THE SETUP

The core of "God's Arrow" is an Achilles Heel/Macguffin/Holy Grail doodad. If it can only be seized from Grandmother's Memory Tower, it could be the key to her swift downfall. But who can brave the dangers that stand between all comers and this Make-it-All-Better Button?

We know, don't we?

Of course, it's not quite so simple. The item that threatens Grandmother so much that she guards even the knowledge of it so fiercely can essentially act as a one-way valve between the physical world and the Underworld. Let in too much vital energy at once, and Grandmother might choke, fall back into slumber or

even *die*. But the problem of sucking that much life force out of the living lands is not an ethically neutral one.

Before confronting that moral dilemma, of course, the characters have to wade through a veritable Vietnam of Spectres to get the thing. Before doing *that*, they must find out about it in the first place.

MR. JIGSAW MAKES A PROPOSAL

Mr. Jigsaw, the Spectral emissary first encountered in **Orphan-Grinders**, kicks this story off by approaching the characters. The form his contact takes depends on the circumstances in which the characters find themselves. If they're in the living world, he could call them on the phone or speak to them through a mutual acquaintance. Alternatively, if they're in some bad fix, he could show up leading Spectral cavalry to bail them out. All he asks in return is that they let him help them help themselves.

Initially, the characters are likely to be dubious, but Jigsaw insists that he's on the level. He even comes bearing a gift (Moirra), which he intends to hand over if the characters just hear him out.

If they agree to hear his spiel, he explains what Memory Towers are (see p. 46). In brief, building a Memory Tower and stocking it with lots of goons is the only way that Malfeans — or Grandmother — can keep a secret from the hive-mind.

"Grandmother has not put up many of these," he explains. "A few small ones to keep tactical plans inviolate when she expects some Spectre-on-Spectre violence. Mini-towers inside the hives, containing the defense strategies in case of attack. But in the last few days, she's built a *huge* one. And that thing is as tough and dangerous as she can make it.

"What's she protecting? No one knows. But from the little bits her rebel children gleaned from her Spectres' hive-mind broadcasts — before she destroyed them to keep them from thinking more — it's something that can *harm her*. So she's put it in the tower, along with all knowledge of what it is.

"My client has no chance of even getting close. If he mobilized sufficient forces to make a meaningful attack, Grandmother would anticipate it while he was still marshalling them. She'd hear the hive-mind commands and send her own troops, which we'd instantly know about, so we'd have to send more, and... well, you see how it bogs down.

"But a small team that isn't hooked into the hive-mind... a small team with disproportionately powerful force... a team like you lot... You might be able to get in,

find it — whatever it is — and use it before the defenders get their act together.”

(If the characters don't want to listen to his pitch, he follows them around trying to get their attention and explain. If they attack him, he runs, then tries some other way to get their attention and compliance, such as kidnapping their loved ones.)

If the characters seem interested, Jigsaw offers them the goodies. First off, if any stresses remain on the relationship between him and them (if, for example, he has one of their children kidnapped) he makes it right. This way, Mr. Jigsaw can offer to return one of the characters' bodies, if the Malfeans stole them. Second, he provides detailed directions for getting to the new Memory Tower.

It's his third gift that's really something special.

“Meet Moira,” he says, herding forth a very unfortunate-looking female Spectre. She's terribly thin and washed out, but those are the least of her appearance problems. Her mouth is sealed shut with a hinged metal plate that appears to be bolted through the skin of her cheek. It has a latch on it, closed when the characters first meet her, but with a hook-and-chain arrangement so that, when open, her mouth is revealed and the metal plate is held back by her ear, out of the way. Her hands both seem to be behind her back, until one looks behind her and sees that her wrists and part of her forearms are *fused* into her back. The fingers stick out of the small of her back, like candles from a birthday cake.

“Moira is a Spectre who is very close to being nothing whatsoever,” Jigsaw says, fiddling the latch and revealing her mouth. As soon as her mouth is freed, she begins to speak in perfect tandem with Jigsaw, producing an odd stereo effect.

“Not just conscienceless (like so many of us), Moira is also devoid of *consciousness*. She does not, in a word, *think*. But she is nevertheless hooked firmly into the hive-mind. She cannot broadcast anything into it, but she is a superb passive receiver.”

As he finishes speaking, she continues to mutter. “Take the bait, you breathing bastards, otherwise Grandmo—” At that point, Jigsaw kicks her hard and she starts muttering something else, something about how the emissary has made contact and is being watched by Squad Seven (a group of Spectres discussed later).

“Physical abuse changes the channel, kind of like an old broadcast TV,” he says. “By and large, she tunes in to the closest Spectre, or the most powerful. She can't answer questions, poor pet, but she does serve nicely as an audible bug for you... living tourists here in our beleaguered Underworld.”

As she mutters about Squad Seven getting reinforcements, he asks if the characters have any questions. If they do, he answers (to the best of his ability). If not, he bugs out fast.

Characters who try to shake him down can elicit promises of the following.

- Gauze-powered relic firearms or flame-throwers.
- A gauze-powered airplane or APC.
- A distraction in the form of a Spectre attack on the Tower while they're sneaking in.

Don't *offer* any of the above goodies, but Jigsaw can be talked into them if the characters propose them.

As he departs, Jigsaw pauses to add one more thing.

“I hope you won't take this amiss or hold it against me, but due to the nature of the hive-mind, Grandmother and all her minions now know that you're aware of the Memory Tower. Since you're mindless (so to speak) they have no idea how you're going to react to this knowledge but, if I was her, I'd take no chances. Which means that, if I was you, I'd get there quick and exploit whatever weakness she's gone to such lengths to conceal. Sorry. Ta!”

If, as he's leaving, one of the characters slaps or kicks Moira, she can tune him in again. His thoughts indicate that he was telling the truth... and that he genuinely believes this could be the secret weapon that stops Grandmother from wrecking the world.

MOIRA

Moira has 7 Spite, minus one point for bashing damage from Jigsaw's kick when the game begins. Any blow hard enough to cause a level of bashing damage is sufficient to get her to “change channels.” She heals (and can be healed) through the normal means.

No traits are provided because she doesn't do anything. She can't fight, can't dodge and registers as “neutral” to the hive-mind not a threat, not an asset, not really much of anything. Spectres who see her register that she's a Spectre and may choose to deny her to the enemy, but by and large, they're more likely to want to deal with the fire-spitting characters than with the sad wretch who's doing nothing more dangerous than muttering the stuff all Spectres can hear anyhow. The exception to this rule (of course) is if they're ordered to take her out, which should happen only if Grandmother's forces decide she's too useful to the characters (meaning, you as Storyteller decide that hive-mind spying is making things too easy).

After talking to Jigsaw, the characters can fight or flee from Squad Seven. Make Squad Seven a light challenge — equal in number to the characters and about half as tough.

This could also be a chance for them to get a sense of Moira's potential, as she broadcasts all the Spectres' thoughts to the crucible. Decide beforehand how useful you want her to be, with the following options.

1) Real-Time Moira. Moira speaks each Spectre's thought as it's thought, giving characters who pay attention a bonus to dodging or to striking.

2) Time-Lapse Moira. Moira's speech occupies an area that's roughly in the middle of the initiative queue — good for help against those Spectres who are slower than she is, but not against the quick ones.

3) Slowpoke Moira. Her speech is so low, garbled and lethargic that it comes out a half-second after the actions described. It's no help at all in combat, ever.

ANOTHER BIDDER

After the characters deal with Squad Seven, give them a pause to plan their next move, and then herald the next encounter by having Moira mutter something like the following.

“—stupid lousy goddamn mortals, last chance only hope, fuck Jigsaw and Grandmother and the living and the dead, gotta use them all against each other and get some peace and quiet, hope they do it, hope they kill Jigsaw, hope they kill Grandmother, hope we kill hope, not far now there they are—”

Over a sand dune (or into the body of a nearby mortal) comes a *second* Spectral emissary. This one looks like a woman in her 30s who's been chopped in half from head to heels, right down the side, and then stitched back together with some sort of smooth, thick white cord. When she sees the characters, she puts on a big smile and says, “Greetings, heroes of the Underworld.” She blinks and falters when she realizes Moira is repeating everything she thinks, which at that moment is, “Oh, fuck, who's *that*, some burnt-out case as a hive-mind spy so they must have heard me, they're hearing me now, don't think about killing them and betrayal, don't gross them out, no, not that don't think about dog-fucking I see Mr. Jigsaw has given you a gift.”

“I see Mr. Jigsaw has given you a gift,” the new emissary says out loud, overlapping Moira. “My, my, how embarrassing for me! I represent great Aluchtarch the Onceborn. Since I can't keep any secrets from you, I'll get right to the point.

“Jigsaw's master is one of the Neverborn and it wants Grandmother stopped because it's jealous of her usurpation of power. Aluchtarch wants her stopped

because the Onceborn will have it harder than the Neverborn if she succeeds. But the Onceborn hate the Neverborn, too. No one knows exactly how Jigsaw plans to capitalize on your success, but our intel from the hive-mind indicates that he's hoping you die taking down Grandmother. That, or get so badly weakened that he can make you *his* slaves and Spectres. Rather than see that happen, Aluchtarch would prefer it if you survived and were the living world's problem for a while. There is information — which I don't have, it's in a Tower, ha, ha! — which can make it much easier for you to survive your assault. All you have to do to get it is make a gesture of good faith, to wit, kill Mr. Jigsaw.

“I'm on the hive-mind, he's on the hive-mind, the burnout here is on the hive-mind — though the information you get through her won't be perfect. Of course, Jigsaw didn't tell you *that* did he? Any more than my information was *perfect*, this is the realm of misrule, et cetera, and that's why I was unpleasantly surprised to see her here, voila. Regardless, Jigsaw may now know I've made this offer, so don't tell me your decision in case he's listening in. If you are, Jigsaw, *fuck you!*”

“No, we'll just monitor him and, if he dies by your hands in the next few hours, I'll be back to give you our pearl of wisdom. If his forces try to stop me from giving you information that will protect you, well, you'll know where they *really* stand, won't you?”

She answers any questions they have, but she's eager to be gone. As she leaves, she occupies her mind with some distracting, annoying song from the 1970s to keep Moira from revealing much. Little bits of thought slip out between the verses, indicating that she, too, was telling the truth.

Now the characters can decide whether they want to destroy Jigsaw in return for this nebulous “helpful hint” or if they want to trust him and his master more than this Aluchtarch stranger.

If they whack Jigsaw, one thing happens and one thing *doesn't* happen. What happens is that the second emissary comes back and instructs them in the art of Obscurantism (see sidebar). What *doesn't* happen? Jigsaw's master doesn't turn on them, doesn't call off his distraction assault on Grandmother's Tower and doesn't warn Grandmother that they're coming. Losing Mr. Jigsaw means about as much to it as losing that plastic tip on your shoelace would to you.

PENETRATION AND ACQUISITION

The antagonists for this section of “God's Arrow” are broken into three levels: the scrubs, the döppelgangs, and Rorrim, their leader.

OBSCURANTISM

If the characters are in a Memory Tower, or anywhere in the Labyrinth, really, Grandmother (or any Malfean who takes time and expends effort) can track them. Spectres can't read their minds, but sneaking around is no cinch when every wall is a combined eye/ear/pressure pad.

Obscurantism is a trick that can shake off even *that* observation... for a while.

Here's how it works. Throughout Memory Towers are load-bearing struts that look like black crystal columns. If a spook touches one, it re-creates one of her worst memories (as described on p. 48). It's possible to make it through these re-creations (called "Harrowings") by acting more wisely than in the past, or by following the script in order to survive (if that was the outcome). But there's also a third option.

The third option is to act like an entirely different person. The third option is to disguise your personality, maybe even your *soul*. You disguise features with makeup and a wig. You disguise a soul with behavior.

If someone getting Harrowed acts *completely contrary* to her Nature, and survives, the hive-mind loses track of her for a while when she emerges. The hive-mind operates on an

abstract level, it doesn't track physical bodies (which don't exist in the Underworld) but self-images. Alter that, or act contrary to it, and the hive-mind gets confused. This puzzlement lasts until a Spectre sees or hears the character, or until the character gains or uses Willpower.

Example: *Jacob Miller's Nature is Mediator, and when he falls into a Harrowing, he goes back to a police situation gone wrong. He was trying to talk down a hopped-up liquor store robber, Jacob's partner got twitchy, gunfire was exchanged, and Jacob went down alongside the perp. In a normal Harrowing, he might try to keep his partner calm so that the guns would never go off, or he might try to use the advantage of hindsight to take a more protected position. Neither one of those is fundamentally contrary to his Nature, so they wouldn't obscure him upon emergence. Now, if he told his partner, "Let's just grease this punk," or better yet, if he shot his partner in the back, he'd come out of the Harrowing with the hive-mind confused about his identity.*

Note that going against your Nature does *not* snap you out of a Harrowing. The Harrowing continues until resolved, except that you now must contend with the consequences of your altered behavior.

Scrubs are low-tier, bottom-feeding Spectres who are mostly an annoyance to powerful folks like the characters. They harass, but mostly they're there to soak up attacks that the characters would otherwise use on serious opponents, and to slow them down so that environmental hazards can hinder them. It's up to you, the Storyteller, to decide how many scrubs to toss at the characters at any one time. Five is a good low end, and more than 15 is probably a hassle to track. We strongly recommend against giving solid numbers, since they're always moving and fighting anyhow. "It looks like there's seven of them, wait, no, maybe ten, more are coming..." is much better than telling the characters that there are exactly eight opponents. If you don't have a map or miniatures, keeping the number of attackers vague can give you some wiggle room to throttle back if the players roll a string of botches. Even if you do use a map, you can stress that the Spectres on the table are only the ones the characters *perceive*. In any event, definitely give the impression that there are *always* more on the way. (Moirra is great for that.)

The **döppelgangs** are groups of Spectres called "Evil Twins." Their appearances mimic a particular

character. Each character gets his own squad of Evil Twins. Each squad contains a number of Evil Twins equal to the number of characters.

Example: *Kate, Chet and Ben are assaulting the Memory Tower. At the Moat, they encounter the first döppelgang. There are three characters, so there are three Evil Twins. In this case, they all look like Kate. Once the characters whack the fake Kates, there are two döppelgangs left — one set of three Chets and one set of three Bens.*

If they'd brought their friend Annie along, there would be four döppelgangs — one with four Kates, one with four Annies, one with four Bens and one with four Chets.

The notes provided assume a five-member crucible. If your crucible is smaller, place the döppelgangs wherever it seems most dramatic or challenging.

Döppelgang tactics are pretty straightforward. On the first turn, they use their Smokeout power to try to get around the person they're mimicking. One of them starts fighting that person, while the others Fake Hit each other *and* concentrate their attacks on one other party member. If enough of them are involved, one holds back and pretends to fight the two who are ganging up, just to sow confusion.

EVIL TWINS

Anywhere an “X” appears instead of a number in the traits given, X is equal to the trait of the duplicated person. If Henry has Strength 1 and Dexterity 3, his Evil Twins have Strength 1 and Dexterity 3.

Attributes: Strength X, Dexterity X, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 4, Appearance X, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl X, Firearms 2, Intimidation X, Intrigue 5, Melee X, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 5

Nature: Conformist

Willpower: 3

Spite: 7

Offensive Abilities: Evil Twins have the copied individual’s most frequently used Horror (Storyteller’s call on what that is, but be honest). They cannot combine this Horror or use its benefit on each other. They also possess the following Horrors:

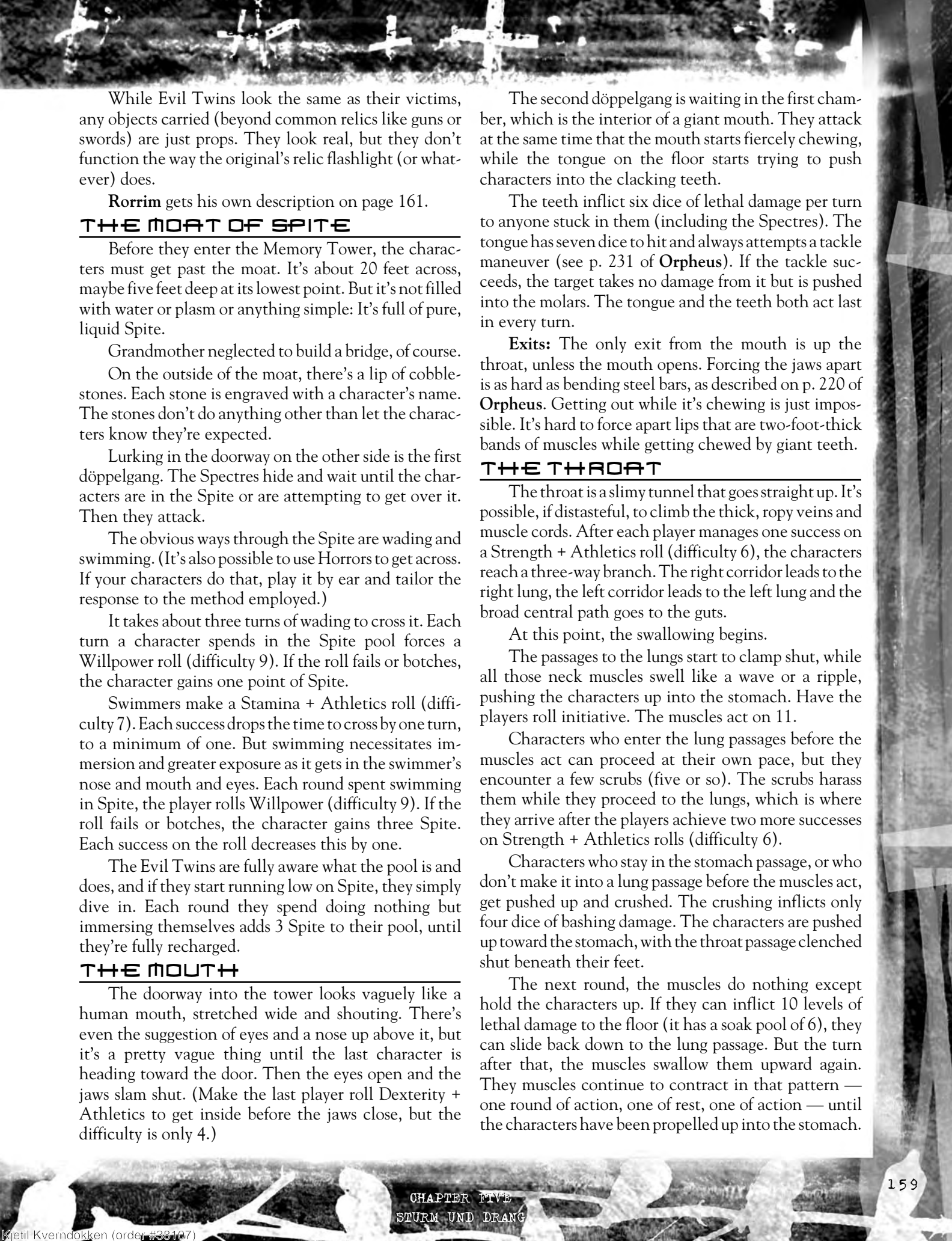
Fake Hit: Once per turn, an Evil Twin can automatically hit another Evil Twin. No

roll is needed, the attack doesn’t affect any other actions the Twin takes and (as it’s coordinated through the hive-mind) it inflicts no damage. But it’s great for making it look like two Twins are fighting when they really aren’t. It’s confusing.

Smokeout: As a full action, an Evil Twin can produce a thick cloud of smoke. It’s about enough gas to fill a sphere roughly 10 feet in diameter. It dissipates after one full turn, but until it does, no one can see through it. No roll is required to use Smokeout, but it can’t be combined with any other action.

Static: All of the Evil Twins think exactly the same thoughts, but at slightly different frequencies. This prevents Moira (or an Orphan-Grinder using the Oblivion’s Husk Horror) from listening to their thoughts. All such eavesdroppers hear is a burst of mental noise. The characters *can* use Moira or Oblivion’s Husk to detect an Evil Twin ambush, however, if they learn what to listen for.





While Evil Twins look the same as their victims, any objects carried (beyond common relics like guns or swords) are just props. They look real, but they don't function the way the original's relic flashlight (or whatever) does.

Rorrim gets his own description on page 161.

THE MOAT OF SPITE

Before they enter the Memory Tower, the characters must get past the moat. It's about 20 feet across, maybe five feet deep at its lowest point. But it's not filled with water or plasm or anything simple: It's full of pure, liquid Spite.

Grandmother neglected to build a bridge, of course.

On the outside of the moat, there's a lip of cobblestones. Each stone is engraved with a character's name. The stones don't do anything other than let the characters know they're expected.

Lurking in the doorway on the other side is the first döppelgang. The Spectres hide and wait until the characters are in the Spite or are attempting to get over it. Then they attack.

The obvious ways through the Spite are wading and swimming. (It's also possible to use Horrors to get across. If your characters do that, play it by ear and tailor the response to the method employed.)

It takes about three turns of wading to cross it. Each turn a character spends in the Spite pool forces a Willpower roll (difficulty 9). If the roll fails or botches, the character gains one point of Spite.

Swimmers make a Stamina + Athletics roll (difficulty 7). Each success drops the time to cross by one turn, to a minimum of one. But swimming necessitates immersion and greater exposure as it gets in the swimmer's nose and mouth and eyes. Each round spent swimming in Spite, the player rolls Willpower (difficulty 9). If the roll fails or botches, the character gains three Spite. Each success on the roll decreases this by one.

The Evil Twins are fully aware what the pool is and does, and if they start running low on Spite, they simply dive in. Each round they spend doing nothing but immersing themselves adds 3 Spite to their pool, until they're fully recharged.

THE MOUTH

The doorway into the tower looks vaguely like a human mouth, stretched wide and shouting. There's even the suggestion of eyes and a nose up above it, but it's a pretty vague thing until the last character is heading toward the door. Then the eyes open and the jaws slam shut. (Make the last player roll Dexterity + Athletics to get inside before the jaws close, but the difficulty is only 4.)

The second döppelgang is waiting in the first chamber, which is the interior of a giant mouth. They attack at the same time that the mouth starts fiercely chewing, while the tongue on the floor starts trying to push characters into the clacking teeth.

The teeth inflict six dice of lethal damage per turn to anyone stuck in them (including the Spectres). The tongue has seven dice to hit and always attempts a tackle maneuver (see p. 231 of *Orpheus*). If the tackle succeeds, the target takes no damage from it but is pushed into the molars. The tongue and the teeth both act last in every turn.

Exits: The only exit from the mouth is up the throat, unless the mouth opens. Forcing the jaws apart is as hard as bending steel bars, as described on p. 220 of *Orpheus*. Getting out while it's chewing is just impossible. It's hard to force apart lips that are two-foot-thick bands of muscles while getting chewed by giant teeth.

THE THROAT

The throat is a slimy tunnel that goes straight up. It's possible, if distasteful, to climb the thick, ropy veins and muscle cords. After each player manages one success on a Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 6), the characters reach a three-way branch. The right corridor leads to the right lung, the left corridor leads to the left lung and the broad central path goes to the guts.

At this point, the swallowing begins.

The passages to the lungs start to clamp shut, while all those neck muscles swell like a wave or a ripple, pushing the characters up into the stomach. Have the players roll initiative. The muscles act on 11.

Characters who enter the lung passages before the muscles act can proceed at their own pace, but they encounter a few scrubs (five or so). The scrubs harass them while they proceed to the lungs, which is where they arrive after the players achieve two more successes on Strength + Athletics rolls (difficulty 6).

Characters who stay in the stomach passage, or who don't make it into a lung passage before the muscles act, get pushed up and crushed. The crushing inflicts only four dice of bashing damage. The characters are pushed up toward the stomach, with the throat passage clenched shut beneath their feet.

The next round, the muscles do nothing except hold the characters up. If they can inflict 10 levels of lethal damage to the floor (it has a soak pool of 6), they can slide back down to the lung passage. But the turn after that, the muscles swallow them upward again. They muscles continue to contract in that pattern — one round of action, one of rest, one of action — until the characters have been propelled up into the stomach.

If they get pushed twice with no drop, that's enough to land them in the stomach.

Exits: To the lungs, the stomach or back to the mouth.

THE LUNGS

The lungs are 30 feet tall, football-shaped chambers with pink walls. They flex in and out, gently. When the characters arrive, a few scrubs await them, in addition to those who were in the lung passage. Moira mutters updates about the positions of the characters and relays orders for reinforcements from the other lung and from the bloodstream.

The first round they're in a lung, the characters must deal with any leftover scrubs from the passage and those who were in the lung. They can also see several more scrubs pushing into the lungs through transparent membranes over narrow red passageways. Those are the entries to the bloodstream, of course.

The second turn, no more Spectres arrive. But on the third turn, all the scrubs from the other lung (eight to 15 of them) start pouring in.

The most obvious exit is through the membranes into the bloodstream. A long column stands in the middle of each lung — black, crystal and glossy. It's a memory strut (as described on p. 48). Any character who touches it is whisked away for a Harrowing.

The Spectres avoid the strut like fire, and if they're thrown into it, they vanish, reappearing three rounds later, unchanged.

If all the characters touch it and vanish at once, the scrubs simply wait for them to return.

Exits: The bloodstream or back into the throat.

THE STOMACH

No Spectres are lurking here, just a pool of acid. Every round the characters spend in the stomach, they face two dice of aggravated damage. Getting up out of the acid and into an exit takes a Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 7).

Exits: The bloodstream, or up to the intestine.

HARROWINGS IN THE MEMORY TOWER

Even if the characters touch the strut together, their Harrowings are individual. (Harrowings are described on p. 48.)

In addition to the normal effects of a Harrowing (changes in Spite and Willpower), characters who know about Obscurantism (see p. 157) can shake off hive-mind observation here. It won't last long, though, unless they wiped out a lot of scrubs, or unless their buddies are keeping the area clear.

THE BLOODSTREAM

The bloodstream is a series of tangled passages about six feet high, with a two-foot-deep stream of plasm rushing around the characters' ankles. While these passages are claustrophobic, they're not bad places to fight. Sure, the characters may quickly get flanked, but no more than two scrubs are going to mess with them at a time — one in front, one in back.

Periodically, the bloodstream passages wind around Memory Struts. If the characters cause a single level of lethal damage to the passage wall, they can tear through and Harrow.

If they consistently travel upstream or downstream, they eventually wind up at the heart. Otherwise, with enough wandering, they can get to the lungs or stomach. (Don't bother trying to make their wanderings in this network make sense. It's like trying to map a tangled fishing net.)

The fourth döppelgang waits here.

Exits: Stomach, lungs, heart.

THE INTESTINE

This is a 10-foot-tall, round corridor that drips with fecal matter. It's a foot deep on the floor. It gradually coils and folds upward until, by forcing through a puckered ring of muscle, the characters find themselves at the top of the tower. From there, they can try to rappel down the side, they can go back in, or they can stand there and admire the clash of two Spectre armies.

One of the döppelgangs ambushes the characters after a few turns of intestine.

Exits: The top of the tower or the stomach.

THE HEART

Bloodstream passages merge and widen here, and the flow of bloody plasm grows deeper and swifter. The characters see a pumping aperture in the floor that's either pulling the plasm in or pushing it out (depending on whether they went downstream or upstream). Getting through that aperture requires no roll, they just time it, duck under the surface and swim for it. That done, they arrive in the heart.

Think of it as a swimming pool, with blood instead of water, and a strong current. A ledge runs around one side of the pool, about 30 feet deep. The characters can climb out of the blood pool to see two individuals waiting for them.

One is a plain-looking black man in a white shroud. He's chained to a Memory Strut, so he vanishes and reappears every three rounds.

The other is a Spectre, 20 feet tall, with no facial features and a swirling silver mirror glinting out of the gauze of his chest.

RORRIM

Rorrim's name is "mirror" spelled backward, and his unique power relates. He has captured the souls of important dead people from the characters' pasts, and as he fights them, they simultaneously face their dead loved ones... and enemies.

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 5, Intimidation 5, Melee 4

Nature: Autocrat

Willpower: 5

Spite: 25 (or 5 per character; this is a unique variant of Absorb that gives Rorrim all his available Spite in one shot, per turn)



The Spectre is Rorrim, and if Moira is with the characters they hear, "The intruders have reached the heart. Converge there! Protect the memory!" The last doppelgang is here — the one that mimics the crucible's toughest fighter.

Rorrim isn't going to offer any chance to surrender. He just attacks. If the characters seem to be handling him too easily, more scrubs can show up sporadically. But don't drag things out too long — the real fun is just around the corner.

When the characters defeat Rorrim, all the scrubs are stunned for 10 rounds, giving the characters a chance to free and interrogate the man in the shroud.

"Greetings," he says. "My name is Abel."

Offensive Abilities: Rorrim knows all the First-, Second- and Third-Tier Horrors. He can't use their Benefits, but other than that, everything goes. He can use only one Horror per round, however.

Swallowed Souls: Every round, a new dead person appears in Rorrim's mirror. He holds one significant dead person (enemy or friend) per character. (Ideally, these are people who have died in the course of the chronicle.) These souls are imprisoned within him and are at his mercy. Their actions depend on whether they love or hate the characters.

If it's a dead enemy, Rorrim can make use of any Ability or Horror that the enemy knew before he died. (This, in fact, is why Rorrim knows so many Horrors.)

If it's a dead friend, she tells the characters that if they keep fighting, Rorrim will consume her for sustenance. It's no joke. By eating an ally soul, Rorrim regains four points of Spite (Regeneration: Level 2). This consumption takes only a turn. If a character continues to attack after this warning, have her player make a Willpower roll (difficulty 9). If it fails, she gains a point of Spite and loses a point of Willpower. (Allies who bravely say, "Continue to attack! Ignore my destruction!" reduce that difficulty to 8.)

Swallowed Soul attacks, pleas or consumptions do not affect Rorrim's other actions. He can eat a soul and act normally without splitting his pool.

Rorrim has to switch souls every round. If he destroys a soul, he may switch to a blank spot where that soul once was, in which case he gets no extra benefit. Swallowed souls can be attacked normally. Anything that inflicts damage to all the people in an area damages both Rorrim and the current soul.

FIRING THE ARROW

Abel (whose language can be understood, as all the dead speak the same tongue) introduces himself and explains that he was, in fact, the first murder victim ever.

"When I was alive, my name wasn't *really* Abel but, well, it fits. You know how people are."

He answers any questions the characters have. If they go off on bizarre historical or philosophical or religious tangents, he goes along. He has no sense of urgency unless they explain to him about Grandmother and the impending doom of humankind and so forth. If asked about his actual *nature* and why he's so dangerous to her, he explains to the best of his ability.

"I'm not sure what I am, now. What I've become. Perhaps I'm the quintessential *idea* of the murdered victim, the embodiment of the concept that's been around since I perished. The whole Underworld is really a realm of concepts, right? So over the centuries, I guess I've picked up that load. I've become the concept of life prematurely entering the land of death. In a sense, I'm a one-way valve. Used correctly, I allow things to pass directly from the mortal world into the dead one. Ulysses and Ishtar and Orpheus have used me in that fashion, though I don't know how they got out again."

Abel isn't completely clear on why Grandmother considers him a menace, but he does know what it is that he, uniquely, can do. He can open a gate, possibly a very wide gate, between the vitality of the living world and any part of the Underworld — even Grandmother herself.

If the characters can't think of a way to make that a weapon, Able hypothesizes that too large an influx of life force, unshielded by the Stormwall, might annihilate Grandmother. Alternately, she might be able to devour it all, but such a huge "meal" would sate her and let her sleep again.

Let the characters discuss this for a while. If they have Horrors that permit travel through the Stormwall — even if it's just Dream-Walker — Abel nods and says that he can hook into that to make his gate.

The questions the characters should discuss are: What constitutes an "area of high life-force"? And what happens to that area after its Vitality is sucked out into Grandmother?

Abel can explain that he's talking about more than just the kind of lively spot where the Stormwall is thick. He's not talking about a sunlit meadow where a couple of randy teens are conceiving a love child. His assessment of Grandmother is that for this to have any chance of working, it's necessary to denude of life an area measured in square miles. Even then, it'll only work if the area is supersaturated with vitality.

(After you explain that, give it a while to sink in.)

Abel won't suggest any such "supersaturated" areas; he hasn't been to the living lands since well before writing was invented. But two obvious sources are:

1) Cities. Human life is extra-special, right? Well, it isn't denser anywhere than it is in a big city such as London or Tokyo or Hong Kong. Sure, killing *every last person* in Los Angeles or Vancouver or Tehran is a big order. It's a big responsibility. Are your characters big enough (and driven enough) to take it on?

2) Rainforest. Yes, the rainforest is where you get the richest mix of biodiversity and biodiversity. Slaughtering the heart of the Amazon is going to make a lot of

Greenpeace people very sad, but this is the other cutting edge of the "human life is extra-special" argument. The dilemma here is... what if it's not enough? Parrots and newts and lemurs don't seem to possess concentrated Vitality the way human beings do. You only get one shot down Grandmother's gullet. Gambling on half-measures when the whole world is at stake is also a big responsibility.

3) Something Else. The genius of tabletop roleplaying is that the Storyteller can accommodate the weirdness that desperate players produce on the spur of the moment. Somewhere, some brilliant groups of **Orpheus** players are going to come up with compromises or alternatives that escape from the "murder a city" bind. Maybe they use Dream-Walker in a unique way, to link together every sleeping criminal on every death row in the world, hoping that's a sufficient sacrifice. Maybe they find some way (a crucible perversion of Familiar?) to link together every member of some pest species, and they sacrifice all the world's deer ticks to annihilate Grandmother. Maybe they somehow stretch the effect back in time so that, instead of wrecking a city, they just snuff one person a day for 20,000 years of human history. Or, as long as you're willing to let the game drift into some rather strange time manipulation, why not slaughter Hiroshima one minute before the A-bomb hit?

Firing Abel the Arrow isn't just the climax of the session, it's quite likely the climax of your entire **Orpheus** chronicle, so the only reason to hold back is to keep things from getting silly. But other than that, you should reward creativity instead of insisting that only a city sacrifice is going to cut it.

SLOWBACK

Whatever the characters choose, be ready with repercussions. And don't feel obligated to go for a happy ending either.

It may help to decide in advance, just in your own mind, how much is *enough*. If you think the rainforest dodge is a cop out, be ready to describe, in grotesque terms, how Grandmother sucks it all down, pauses, then surges through the opening and splits the world open. If the characters don't cut the mustard, don't flinch from letting the players know it. Thanks to their crucible, the world dies.

If you're not quite that hard-nosed, you may let them figure out that the rainforest put Grandmother to sleep, so they've bought mankind some time... but she'll be back. Maybe in ten years, or ten thousand, but the problem isn't solved just... delayed.

(Maybe she won't wake again until someone does something cataclysmic in the Underworld to wake her

again. If you wish, this could start your second plot arc — the surviving characters patrol the Underworld to prevent another noisy disaster.)

In that spirit, it can be fun to solve the problem, but imperfectly — especially if you're a sucker for a sequel. If they try some weird time-travel solution, you can have it work well enough to kill Grandmother... but maybe it changes history in the process. You can do a *Twilight Zone* twist ending where their well-meaning attempts to spread out the slaughter over thousands of years accidentally created SIDS. You could set it up that their little "two minutes before Nagasaki" shortcut produced such weird and *complete* casualties that the American observers decided there was some connection between atomic energy and the very forces of life and death — and they didn't stop until they'd delved deep into what was once necromancy. When they return to the living world, it's an alternate history where the forbidden science of "necrotomics" is an unseen driving force in the world.

Do whatever. Say yes to your players. Just remember to keep it fun, which in this case may mean being respectful of the situation enough to *not* permit an easy answer.

Or maybe easy answers are fun.

The decision is yours.

CHANGE OF HEART

In perhaps the strangest variant of the possible ways to win the day, the characters must enter the hive-mind and explore it, or allow Grandmother to absorb them directly. In either case, the characters must survive long enough with their wills intact to communicate with Grandmother in person. (And this means the crucible as a group, not just one heroic character who throws herself into danger and tries to save the world single-handed.)

Grandmother has heard snippets of human thoughts through spooks like Uriah Bishop, but she has yet to meet spooks who are willing to sacrifice themselves to save their world. The characters may be able to strike a resonant chord with Grandmother, making her aware of their presence as worthy, sentient beings. Perhaps she recognizes their unique natures as individuals. Maybe her maternal instincts kick in — she is, after all, primarily a *mother* — and she discovers the horrors that she has committed through the crucible's eyes.

In any case, the characters might manage to convince Grandmother to leave humanity alone. She can subsist on the renegade Spectres and Malfeans for a while (though this in itself might be less than pleasing to very ethical characters), and there's always the

"Distant Underworld" to explore. This doesn't mean that she won't eventually reenter the living world — only that the characters *can* potentially offset her temporarily, and maybe even permanently.

THE PLAYERS

Major players in this set of adventures — be they allies, enemies or neutrals — are as follows.

GRANDMOTHER

First and foremost, Grandmother is not human, not remotely human, and never was. She is a type of hive mentality. Her consciousness is not so much of herself as of herself-and-her-smaller-parts (her creations, children and followers). As far as she is concerned, the idea of a singular, isolated existence — such as a single human being — is something alien to her. It's not that she doesn't understand it, but rather that she doesn't even envision such a thing existing. Of course all minds are connected hive-minds, where every member is itself-and-the-others-in-the-hive. When she birthed creatures, they were also a part of her as well as being new things in themselves. When they separated from her, it was as part of other hive-mentalities, which she could comprehend.

Humanity means nothing to her. Little tiny squeaking individual souls are like grains of dust, devoid (to her) of sentience, things that couldn't possibly be individually conscious. After all, there is no such thing as individual consciousness. If humanity were a hive-mind, then she might recognize it and be able to communicate with it, as she does with Spectres. Unfortunately, humanity isn't. The crucible, however, *is* a collective through its Vitality. They characters may be able to reach Grandmother, have her perceive them and recognize them as a sentience, and be able to communicate with her.

A plausible question might be, how is it that Grandmother has failed to notice that individual consciousness can exist? Since players have a tendency to bring up points like this, let us address it. Grandmother is, after all, hugely powerful and utterly vast. She is capable of breaching the Stormwall, birthing hordes of Spectres — even the Malfeans, ancient and great as they are — and making the Underworld tremble with her very presence. How can it be that she doesn't realize that single-minded creatures can and do exist?

The answer, again, is that Grandmother has a profoundly different type of mind from any ordinary living thing. Humans don't usually spend their time wondering if $2 + 2$ could ever equal 3, or similar things that they know from experience and received fact are impossible. Grandmother doesn't waste her time considering whether anything singular could be sentient, when she *knows*

that all sentience is hive-mind sentience. Like herself, like the Malfeans, like the Spectres, like everything else she has ever given birth to. End of argument.

When she does interact with other collective consciousnesses, however, the primary keynote that can be understood by a mere human mind is *maternal*. Grandmother cares. She really does. She gave birth to the Malfeans and Spectres, forming them from her own body, conceiving them within her mind, and even if she must now strike them down or consume them in order to survive, she still regrets doing so with all the pain of maternal love driven to survive. This is the other keynote — Grandmother must survive. Her primal drive to stay “alive” *cannot* be bypassed or thwarted or denied. The crucible won’t be able to convince her to commit some sort of noble suicide, however much they play on her maternal instincts.

FIAMANDAINS

Fiamandains is an ancient Malfean, one of the Neverborn. He sees himself as both the great foundation and support who protects his faithful, and the rightful judge and ruler of the treacherous. While he is as insane and inhuman as any other Malfean, these facets of self-image give him some grounds on which he can communicate with Spectres and humans.

Fiamandains wants to destroy Grandmother. He realizes that he cannot do so alone, and that he cannot trust the other Malfeans to cooperate with him — or to serve under his direction — in such an endeavor. What he needs is an independent group that can be directed or lured into exciting Grandmother’s fury, and possibly even leading her into a vulnerable position. At such a point, he can easily join the charge of Neverborn, and maybe even dispose of a few of his rivals in the confusion. At the best, Grandmother is gone; at the worst, she is at least weakened, and none of his own forces are expended in the effort.

With this in mind, he and his minions attempt to show their more humanly comprehensible aspects to the crucible. Sure, Fiamandains is a Malfean from the depths of time, but he protects his servants and punishes the treacherous. (Horribly.) After constant battles with Spectres who seem to represent the darkest urges of the human soul, such an apparently straightforward approach may seem quite reasonable to the crucible.

As an ancient Malfean, it would be inappropriate to provide traits for Fiamandains. It is likely that the characters come in conflict with his minions, however. He has a wide array of Spectres at his service (any sort that the Storyteller finds convenient for a battle or chase). They are all loyal to him, because they know the

terrifying persistence and lunatic hatred with which he pursues traitors.

TENAHDIEN

Tenahdien is one of Grandmother’s most faithful servitors. While she is a comparatively young Spectre, her quickness to learn has made her powerful, and she has been lucky enough to survive several major battles when her superiors didn’t. This sudden series of promotions has left her in overall command of several hives and Memory Towers, and she is eager to show her devotion and prowess by guarding them against all intruders.


Tenahdien was never a living human. She has only ever known the constant whispering of murmuring Spectres and the embrace of tattered, twisted gauze. Grandmother is the dominant devouring mother that she always sought, and her hive-mates are her blissful fellow slaves and siblings, writhing in the dark with her. In some respects, she has affinities with humans who share such images, but in others, she has none whatever. (Even referring to her as “her” is a somewhat iffy proposition, but when Tenahdien manifests, she looks vaguely female.)

Tenahdien is aware that Grandmother doesn’t perceive spooks in the same way that she does Spectre hive-minds, but has never really considered the matter. To her, Spectrehood is the destiny of the worthy, a butterfly-stage born from larval humanity, and a hive-mind is a far better state than singular existence. As such, she is far more impressed with the crucible than she would be with single characters, viewing it as a primitive attempt at parallel evolution to the Spectral hive-mind. This may even cause her to give the characters a chance to communicate with Grandmother, assuming they are reasonably persuasive. Any sort of hive-mind must automatically be capable of better judgment than a poor lonely single mentality.

Tenahdien is an intelligent Spectre with wide responsibilities and command, and as such, won’t appear without a heavy escort of other Spectres, and without a good reason (such as opening a dialogue with the crucible). If the characters seriously threaten the Memory Tower, she flees. She is in charge of more than one, and word about the crucible has gotten around by now. She’s not going to risk her eternal existence for just one of her responsibilities.

THE CHARACTERS

This section deals with reasons the crucible might want to try to resolve the Grandmother problem, and ways in which the Storyteller can lead them into the action. Hopefully the characters will be proactive and vigorous, not to mention thoroughly panicked by current affairs and actively looking for a way to resolve the problem. We offer a few ways in which they can be



drawn into affairs, hooks that they might take or methods of handling their likely approaches to the situation.

They actively want to deal with Grandmother. Excellent. The Storyteller couldn't ask for better. The crucible is presumably looking for further information on Grandmother, trying to discover her weaknesses, planning to cross the Stormwall in order to confront her in the Underworld, seeking weapons that will affect her, interrogating Spectres, spooks or allies and generally trying to assemble a coherent plan. In this sort of situation, it falls to the Storyteller to tactfully drop hints (through the media of Storyteller characters, discovered documentation or simple statements of "You don't think your powers work that way.") that point the characters in the right direction.

A friend or ally is within Grandmother. Somewhere deep inside Grandmother, in the Underworld, in the process of being converted to a Spectre, is someone who was once a friend of the characters. Are they going to leave him there, if there's a chance of rescuing him? Or perhaps, if not a friend, it's someone who holds a vital piece of information, such as the whereabouts of their bodies or evidence that can clear them of causing the breach in Chapter One. The only way to find this person is to confront Grandmother. If the characters won't face her to save the world, perhaps they'll face her to save themselves. Of course, this requires that the characters have reason to think they could save their friend. If they know Orphan-Grinders, or know of them, then they may think that there's still a chance.

The Malfeans appeal for help. Or attempt to trick the characters into helping them by destroying Grandmother, or try to use the characters to weaken Grandmother, or simply present themselves as the lesser of two evils. Wouldn't the crucible rather deal with things that are — to some degree — closer to humanity? The Malfeans are prepared to accept human (well, Spectre) advisors, to work with spooks and humans, to come to some sort of arrangement; or, at least, they say they are. Whether or not they intend to keep their word is an entirely different matter. Whether the *crucible* would intend to keep their part of a deal is also a different matter; but, for the moment, they might see advantages to using the Malfeans to dispose of Grandmother. The Malfeans themselves can be dealt with later — can't they?

The government requests that the crucible try to stop Grandmother. The characters may have a criminal record by now, or remain in someone's gun sights after the FBI's botched attempts to take them down. The government may have custody of the bodies of any projectors in the crucible, either collected after the breakup of Orpheus or picked up during the events of

Chapter One, which is a major blackmailing chip. Then again, blackmail is such an unpleasant word — think of it as positive reinforcement. The government can provide any information that it's collected through assets like Operation: Black Mercury — potential sources, captured Spectres for interrogation, etc. — but it's the crucible who'll have to do the dirty work.


Grandmother cultists still exist. Even if the characters have disposed of Uriah Bishop and his followers, why should they have been the only group? There may be a network of cultists out there, still dealing pigment, still attempting to sacrifice to Grandmother in order to exalt themselves or to save themselves from inevitable destruction. The crucible may find the traces of this network — its drug-trafficking, its secret worship, the deaths and Spectres left in their trail... If the Storyteller feels that a degree of provocation is necessary, perhaps this group even comes after the crucible, seeing them as enemies of Grandmother's, and their failed assassination attempts provide a reason for the crucible to investigate.

Sympathy for Grandmother. When the characters find out that some vast mother-creature from the depths of time is advancing toward the Stormwall, they might feel that she just needs help and understanding. The Storyteller can tug on their heartstrings, pointing out that Grandmother is just misunderstood, that no doubt she'd be the first to agree that eating humans is wrong if it was properly explained to her, and that just because she nurtures armies of Spectres doesn't make her a *bad* supernatural entity and mother of Malfeans. Surely she needs rescuing from herself just as much as the world needs rescuing from her. As the primordial mother of the Underworld, perhaps saving her — should the characters choose to view it in those terms — will even set the Underworld to rights. (Storytellers using this hook should drop at least some clues that this is not the case. Unless they want it to be, of course.)

THE MAJOR EVENTS

This section quickly details the major stories involved in this arc, fleshing out the points listed in the overview with enough detail that the Storytellers can run the scenario. All major events are included except for the last one, the final act that resolves the plot.

Oncoming Apocalypse. Realizing by now that Grandmother is on the way, the characters try to decide how to deal with her. This is an occasion for them to try to gather information from all available sources, be they Spectre or human or spook, living or dead. Since this entire plot deals with the concept that they will attempt to communicate with Grandmother, the Storyteller should slant the information that they receive in such a way that communication seems a possible option —



and, indeed, the best possible option. This is a good chance to make the characters call in the favors that they have been owed by past contacts, to look up past acquaintances from what's left of the Orpheus Group, and generally cause them to work for the information that they receive. Rolls on Investigation and Contacts are appropriate. While the Storyteller should make the crucible work for the information they get, however, she shouldn't make it impossible to find out what's going on, or make the matter look hopeless. The heroes of a film have to find out the crucial bit of information they need — such as, “Yes, we *can* try to communicate with the mother-creature!” — or there isn't much of a film.

Fiamandains' plot. As mentioned under its character description, Fiamandains intends to use the characters as bait in order to lure Grandmother into a potential ambush. Since the characters probably have a reputation among Malfeans by now, he selects a Spectre from among his minions who won't antagonize them on sight — one who has a reasonable chance of convincing the crucible to attack Grandmother. Storytellers should design a personable and truthful-sounding Spectre, somewhat like Mr. Jigsaw, based on previous crucible encounters with the Malfeans and their servants. (If they've had no such encounters, the crucible may count themselves lucky.)

The chosen messenger explains how Grandmother is the mother of everything in the Underworld, the source of all evil, a vast and terrible force from beyond creation, and that the Malfeans are really only acting in self-defense. On the negative side, the Spectre is lying through his teeth when it comes to presenting Grandmother in the vilest possible terms; on the positive side, the crucible may still be able to learn something from him, especially if they spot the lies. This Spectre knows nothing of Fiamandains' planned treachery, so cannot give details of it.

If allowed to return and report to Fiamandains, the Spectre can provide information on Grandmother's current location, and suggest ways to bypass local Spectres who are loyal to Grandmother or to other Malfeans. Of course, this means that Fiamandains will know the route and methods that the crucible will be taking, if they follow his instructions.

Tenahdien and the Memory Towers. The crucible is likely to come up with the concept of using certain Memory Towers to reach Grandmother, since those under her domain are constructs of her memory. Now they need to locate a Memory Tower, and infiltrate or break into it. The first isn't hard. Grandmother's Memory Towers are well guarded, not unsurprisingly, to keep them safe from Malfean attacks, and as such, they can be located in the Maelstrom-

swept Underworld with a bit of research, questioning Spectres and ghosts, and similar investigations.

Getting into the Memory Towers is harder. Characters may try several different options. Possibilities include using a Phantasm's Horrors to conceal their identities or to disguise themselves as Spectres, having an Orphan-Grinder disguise himself as a Spectre and pretend to be bringing them in as victims for conversion, trying to identify the point in the living world where one can break through the Stormwall and enter the Tower (though this will hardly be quiet or secret), crashing through via a Haunter's Hell on Wheels and driving for the center, or some other innovative action. Alternatively, they may show up at the gate and ask to talk. After defeating a few of the Spectre guards, who naturally want to bring them in as prisoners, a more senior Spectre may try asking them what they want.


Locating Grandmother. Grandmother won't necessarily be easy to find, the characters may assume. After all, if she were closer to the Stormwall and the world of the living, surely things would be far, far more serious than they are. The Storyteller may wish to dramatize the situation when the crucible realizes that the hives are a part of Grandmother's substance, and that they have literally been passing through a part of her every single time they were inside a hive.

THE FINAL ACT

This is where the characters attempt to contact Grandmother, and must survive entering the hive-mind, using a Memory Tower or allowing Grandmother to absorb them directly, in an attempt to stop her. We suggest that the Storyteller run this as a single session, in order to maximize tension and sustain the sense of this being the final test in which the crucible — and the world — must succeed or fail.

Multiple possible ways to contact Grandmother exist, and no doubt the crucible conceives of other possibilities, but the most logical, plausible methods are through the hive-mind of the Spectres linked to her, through one of her Memory Towers (via a convenient Horror or Vitality expenditure), or by literally being absorbed into Grandmother, like a shoal of minnows swallowed up by the oncoming whale.

If the characters choose to try to contact Grandmother through one of the Memory Towers, then the Storyteller should consult the preceding section dealing with Tenahdien and the Memory Towers. Tenahdien can be persuaded to allow the crucible access to a Memory Tower, given sufficiently good roleplaying and successes on Charisma/Manipulation + Subterfuge (if they're trying to play on her sympathy for hive mentalities), or Charisma/Manipulation + Performance (if they



can convince her that it'll bring them to join Grandmother). Tenahdien is eager for more recruits — particularly strong, powerful ones like the crucible — and besides, there's no way they could possibly threaten Grandmother, is there?

If, however, they want to try merging with one of the Spectres around Grandmother and link into her hive-mind that way, that's also an option. Assuming that they've located Grandmother, the characters must subdue a Spectre and link into the hive-mind that it shares with Grandmother. They may use a Skinrider's Mob Rule, perhaps, a Phantasm's Terrible Madness, an Organ-Grinder's Salvation, or some other application of Horrors. Alternatively, they may simply *ask* to be allowed to join the hive-mind. Most Spectres believe that Grandmother will destroy the characters or cause them to join the Spectre ranks, so they might be prepared to agree — for a price, of course. (Really cunning characters might pretend that they have no idea what they're asking. Playing on a sadistic Spectre's lust to see the innocent destroy themselves is not unlike taking candy from a baby.)

Then again, there's always the option of the characters allowing themselves to be swallowed into Grandmother's devouring maw. They probably wish to protect themselves. Vitality Emblems of Protection, or Horrors like Hell on Wheels or Rend and Rake, will be necessary if they don't want to be digested immediately. Once inside Grandmother, according to the Storyteller's whim, they may need to travel through her "bloodstream" to her "brain," or they may simply need to reach whatever serves as her nervous system. Huge dendrites spark metaplasmic lightning, great chains of nerves are strung through her body like underwater cables, and the whole of it guarded by Grandmother's version of antibodies. Low-grade, unintelligent Spectres whose sole function is to watch for intruders and tear them to shreds. The God's Arrow (p. 154-163) section provides useful suggestions about Grandmother's interior, for the more aggressively minded.

At this point, we assume that the crucible has made contact of some sort with Grandmother. What then?

Characters who have failed to pay attention to evidence along the way, to observe Spectre hive-mind behavior or to listen to Tenahdien, may be in for an unpleasant surprise on encountering Grandmother's mentality. After all, she's called "Grandmother," isn't she? They might expect something recognizably human — a maternal figure whom they can appeal to on grounds of charity, affection and sympathy. When confronted with the huge mental darkness, sparking with links between its separate parts, which completely fails

to notice so tiny a group of separate sparks as them, and which boils and shudders with a vast and ancient hunger, they may be taken aback and at a loss for words.

Storytellers should emphasize the horror and shock of that first tiny brush with Grandmother's psyche. She is fundamentally alien. She doesn't even recognize them as existing, and they are less than dust to her. Spectres at least wanted to kill or corrupt them, and other humans at least saw them as real people. Grandmother is like the most insane sort of psychopath in that the crucible is *not real* to her, by virtue of her hive-mind nature. The characters should be allowed to realize the magnitude of their task before attempting it.

First, the characters need to get Grandmother's attention. To do so, they *must* be working together as a linked crucible. Grandmother simply does not perceive them if they are acting singly, and she views any disturbance which they might make as the product of an aggravating piece of metaphysical grit in her mental pathways. As such, she either rejects it or attempts to crush it out of existence. If the characters are a united crucible, however, and if they make some sort of mental "noise" that attracts her attention (the use of Fourth-Tier Horrors while in mental contact with Grandmother, or simply the expenditure of at least five points of Vitality while doing the mental equivalent of screaming at the top of their voices), then Grandmother perceives that some sort of hive mentality is trying to get her attention.

Now that they have Grandmother's attention, the characters need to communicate with her. This is more a question of concepts than language. Grandmother comprehends almost everything involving the Underworld, and she can describe Malfeans, Spectres and Underworld phenomena in a range of ways that goes far beyond any knowledge the crucible may have. The characters must communicate in a mixture of words, images and sheer emotion. Remember that Grandmother is currently in mental contact with them, and has mental referents for some emotions that they can feel. From Uriah Bishop she has learned to recognize the concepts of hatred, pride and contempt. From her own experience, she knows and lives maternal love, hunger and weariness.

The Storyteller should envisage Grandmother's communication in return as a mixture of waves of emotion (some identifiable, some less so), mental images and occasional fully verbalized statements. "You sense that she's curious about why you're here," is reasonable enough, as is, "She expresses curiosity about your offspring." Something complicated, such as carefully negotiated boundaries or organized prisoner exchange, couldn't be transmitted. The



best the crucible can hope to manage in either direction would be along the lines of, “You stay (here), we stay (there),” or, “Will you give us back all the beings-like-us who are within you?”

Part of the communication depends on what the characters want to communicate. The Storyteller must understand that the characters *cannot* lie to Grandmother. As it is, they’re trying to talk in a form of language that is completely new to them, to a form of mentality that is strange to them, while in direct emotional contact with her. Plus, Grandmother is comprehending a great deal more from that contact than the crucible possibly can. If the crucible tries to threaten Grandmother into leaving humanity alone, on pain of destruction, then unless they are sincerely convinced that they have a way to destroy her, *they will fail*. More than that, they will have impressed Grandmother that they are untrustworthy — or rather, “a hive-mind whose communication is not accurate” — which puts them already a step down in any further negotiations.

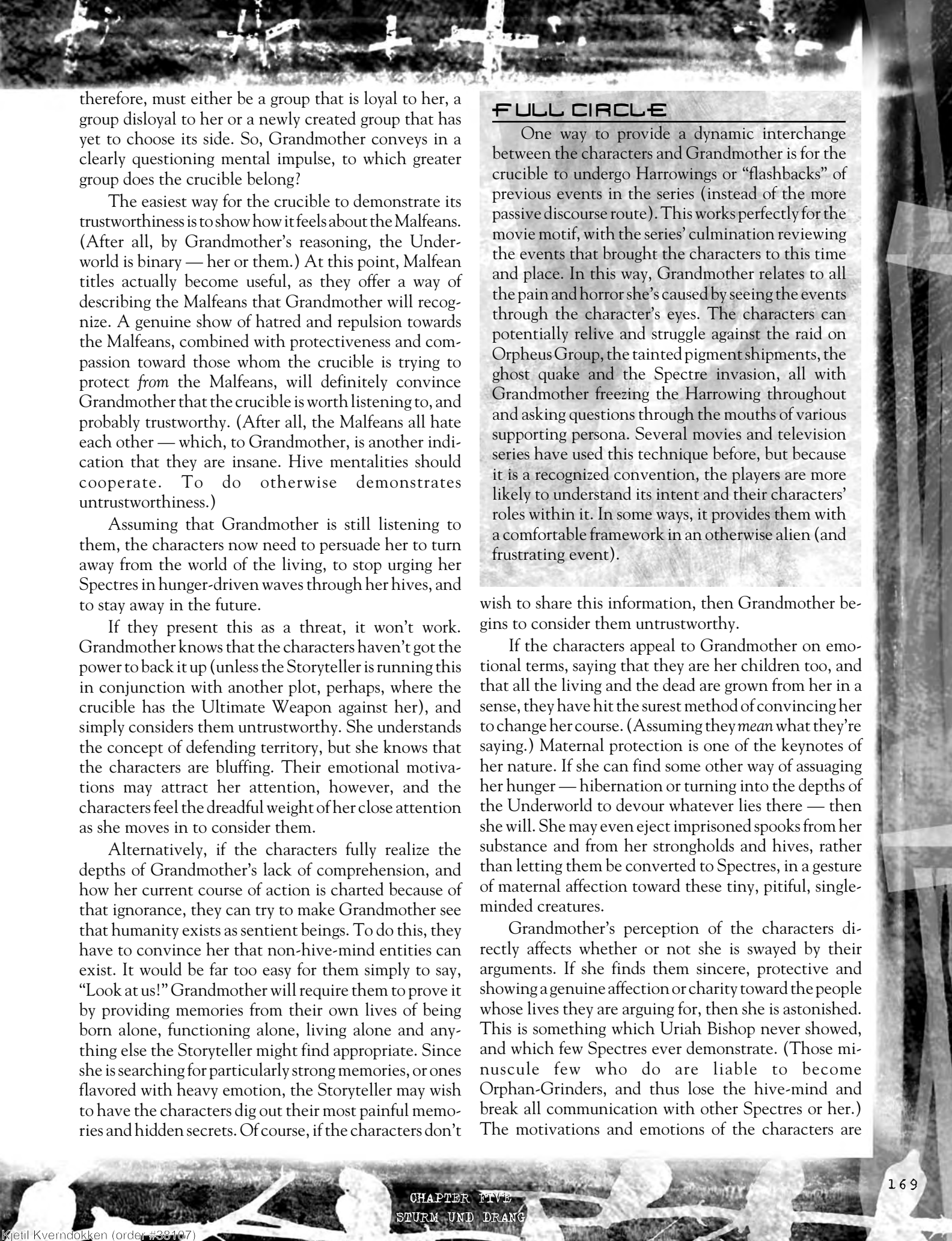
Fortunately for the characters, some reverse empathic backwash is going on. If they begin to prove themselves untrustworthy, or non-maternal, or other things of which Grandmother would disapprove, they begin to feel the distant perturbations of her hive-mind

as they assemble, focus and come to a decision. If the characters are quick and intelligent, they may manage to withdraw or qualify a statement before they permanently label themselves in Grandmother’s mind and destroy their hopes of persuading her.

Persuading Grandmother is a two-step process. Firstly, the characters must convince her that they can and should be trusted. Secondly, they need to convince her to do what they want.

The first step is already mostly achieved by communicating with her in the first place. As Grandmother *knows*, the world consists of sentient entities (hive-minds, of course), which are capable of communication, and everything else, which can best be described as features of the landscape and/or possible food. Since the crucible is communicating with her, they must logically be a sentient hive-mind. As Grandmother also knows, there are *her* sentient hive-minds, composed of loyal Spectres, and then the Malfean ones, which are untrustworthy and hostile.

Uriah Bishop has demonstrated to her that sentient hive-minds can arise of their own accord, not born to her, but then prove loyal to her. (Grandmother is capable of learning new things, if they are presented to her in terms that she comprehends.) The crucible,



therefore, must either be a group that is loyal to her, a group disloyal to her or a newly created group that has yet to choose its side. So, Grandmother conveys in a clearly questioning mental impulse, to which greater group does the crucible belong?

The easiest way for the crucible to demonstrate its trustworthiness is to show how it feels about the Malfeans. (After all, by Grandmother's reasoning, the Underworld is binary — her or them.) At this point, Malfean titles actually become useful, as they offer a way of describing the Malfeans that Grandmother will recognize. A genuine show of hatred and repulsion towards the Malfeans, combined with protectiveness and compassion toward those whom the crucible is trying to protect *from* the Malfeans, will definitely convince Grandmother that the crucible is worth listening to, and probably trustworthy. (After all, the Malfeans all hate each other — which, to Grandmother, is another indication that they are insane. Hive mentalities should cooperate. To do otherwise demonstrates untrustworthiness.)

Assuming that Grandmother is still listening to them, the characters now need to persuade her to turn away from the world of the living, to stop urging her Spectres in hunger-driven waves through her hives, and to stay away in the future.

If they present this as a threat, it won't work. Grandmother knows that the characters haven't got the power to back it up (unless the Storyteller is running this in conjunction with another plot, perhaps, where the crucible has the Ultimate Weapon against her), and simply considers them untrustworthy. She understands the concept of defending territory, but she knows that the characters are bluffing. Their emotional motivations may attract her attention, however, and the characters feel the dreadful weight of her close attention as she moves in to consider them.

Alternatively, if the characters fully realize the depths of Grandmother's lack of comprehension, and how her current course of action is charted because of that ignorance, they can try to make Grandmother see that humanity exists as sentient beings. To do this, they have to convince her that non-hive-mind entities can exist. It would be far too easy for them simply to say, "Look at us!" Grandmother will require them to prove it by providing memories from their own lives of being born alone, functioning alone, living alone and anything else the Storyteller might find appropriate. Since she is searching for particularly strong memories, or ones flavored with heavy emotion, the Storyteller may wish to have the characters dig out their most painful memories and hidden secrets. Of course, if the characters don't


FULL CIRCLE

One way to provide a dynamic interchange between the characters and Grandmother is for the crucible to undergo Harrowings or "flashbacks" of previous events in the series (instead of the more passive discourse route). This works perfectly for the movie motif, with the series' culmination reviewing the events that brought the characters to this time and place. In this way, Grandmother relates to all the pain and horror she's caused by seeing the events through the character's eyes. The characters can potentially relive and struggle against the raid on Orpheus Group, the tainted pigment shipments, the ghost quake and the Spectre invasion, all with Grandmother freezing the Harrowing throughout and asking questions through the mouths of various supporting persona. Several movies and television series have used this technique before, but because it is a recognized convention, the players are more likely to understand its intent and their characters' roles within it. In some ways, it provides them with a comfortable framework in an otherwise alien (and frustrating event).

wish to share this information, then Grandmother begins to consider them untrustworthy.

If the characters appeal to Grandmother on emotional terms, saying that they are her children too, and that all the living and the dead are grown from her in a sense, they have hit the surest method of convincing her to change her course. (Assuming they *mean* what they're saying.) Maternal protection is one of the keynotes of her nature. If she can find some other way of assuaging her hunger — hibernation or turning into the depths of the Underworld to devour whatever lies there — then she will. She may even eject imprisoned spooks from her substance and from her strongholds and hives, rather than letting them be converted to Spectres, in a gesture of maternal affection toward these tiny, pitiful, single-minded creatures.

Grandmother's perception of the characters directly affects whether or not she is swayed by their arguments. If she finds them sincere, protective and showing a genuine affection or charity toward the people whose lives they are arguing for, then she is astonished. This is something which Uriah Bishop never showed, and which few Spectres ever demonstrate. (Those minuscule few who do are liable to become Orphan-Grinders, and thus lose the hive-mind and break all communication with other Spectres or her.) The motivations and emotions of the characters are



literally the feather that tips the balance. The Storyteller can let the players go to the characters' roots. Grandmother knows what they're thinking and feeling, and finds her answer in them. And maybe, for some characters, they find an answer of sorts in Grandmother, too — that a creature can be so alien, so strange, so ancient, and still want to spare her children.

The conversation finished, Grandmother breaks the link and mentally ejects the characters from her hive-mind. She has a great deal to consider. If they are actually within Grandmother at the time, then she literally spits them out, propelling them away on a wave of Maelstrom dust. If they are in one of her Memory Towers, then the surrounding Spectres realize that the crucible conversed with Grandmother. They allow the characters to leave freely, though they will defend themselves if the characters do something stupid like attack the Spectres or steal something valuable.

Whatever the results of the communication with Grandmother, it's very unlikely to happen twice. Even if she does end up feeling vaguely maternal toward the characters and toward humanity in general — and all the more if she doesn't — she won't want to waste more time in conversation with them, any more than a human being would be interested in an insignificant shoal of minnows. The characters have one chance and one chance only. They'd better get it right.

RESOLUTION

If the characters have managed to convince Grandmother that they represent *worthy* sentience, or have succeeded in appealing to her maternal instincts, then Grandmother refrains from crossing the Stormwall, entering the world of the living and eventually devouring all that it contains. This is a victory, and the characters should realize it. They've managed to turn a vast and ancient being from her path; they were the twig that turned the avalanche, the pebble that founded the dam. Even if the world as a whole never realizes that it has been saved, the characters have managed to save it.

Of course, there's always the question of how long they've saved it for. Grandmother — and her spawn — must eat. She can subsist on the renegade Spectres and Malfeans for a while. Characters are unlikely to be quite so ethical that they'll object to seeing such despicable adversaries disposed of. (They may, however, have friends or know of innocents who are still trapped in Malfean strongholds, or who have become Spectres but can still be saved. Time's running out. Good luck.) There's also the "Distant Underworld" to explore, which will keep her busy for a while, perhaps even for thousands of years. She might even relapse back into a coma, eventually,

once she's fed full on the Malfeans and other traitors. Possibly. The crucible may sleep nervously, and never forget what sleeps at the heart of the Underworld.


Alternatively, the characters fail. It's possible. They may not make a convincing argument, they may not couch it in the right terms, or they may simply fail to convince Grandmother of their worthiness to exist, or even their sentience. If this happens, a quick exit is advisable. After all, the characters are no more than food to Grandmother, and Grandmother is constantly hungry. They had better run for their lives (or merely existences) if they want to avoid being the latest bit of plankton to appease her cosmic hunger. On the positive side, she is unlikely to pursue them once other pieces of nourishment become available. They need merely outrun the nearest Spectres and leave *them* to feed Grandmother.

But even if they save themselves, have they doomed their world? Possibly. Grandmother is still approaching, still hungry, and she is unlikely to listen to their pleas a second time. In the worst case, she is directly behind them, and she breaks through into the world of the living then and there, devouring and consuming. [The Storyteller may wish to offer an alternate ending at this point, such as *God's Arrow* (p. 154) as a last-ditch attempt to stop Grandmother.] She may retreat after sating herself, leaving the crucible to endure and rebuild in a ravaged, shattered world. Of course, in that case, Grandmother's Spectres — and any Malfean remnants — are rife, and the Stormwall may be permanently weakened or even breached.

For a slightly less immediate conclusion, Grandmother remains in the Underworld for a while, devouring Malfeans, Spectres, spooks and anything else that comes within her reach. She bursts through the Stormwall in time and breaks into the world of the living to feed there as well. The characters are able to watch events progress. The increasing Malfean desperation, the flow of Spectres through continually sprouting hives to seize newly dead spirits and carry them back for conversion or food, the growing strain on the Stormwall, the ruptures... It won't be pretty. Perhaps they'll find another way of resolving the situation, or perhaps they'll simply endure and try to save what they can of civilization.

FOREVER AFTER

Thus do we end the *Orpheus* saga — but *End Game* doesn't have to mean the end of your chronicle. A troupe might not want to bring the chronicle to a final resolution right away. Perhaps a Storyteller or players want to explore some aspects of the *Orpheus* setting in greater depth. Perhaps you're simply having so much fun with your characters that you don't want the chronicle to end.



We aim to please. Here are several ideas for continuing an **Orpheus** chronicle beyond the events of **End Game**. Some stories assume the characters won against Grandmother and the Spectres; other plots consider what might happen if the characters lose the struggle. Still other stories presume an indefinite delay in Grandmother's apocalyptic threat or remove it entirely. You can easily combine two or three of these scenarios, if you like.

ENDGAME IGNORED

The Storyteller can decide not to use the **End Game** climax. Grandmother is powerful, yes, but she can't destroy the living world. Magna Maw may be the only Spectre who can create hives as portals between the living world and the Underworld, but beyond that, she's just another Neverborn (even if she's the only one for whom the title is truly accurate). The Spectre Breed War becomes a background to other scenarios. If the characters pursue a goal related to the Spectre Breed War, it's probably to limit the damage or to destroy hives faster than Grandmother can create them. Destroying Grandmother or the Malfeans is a long-term goal, if it can be accomplished at all.

Instead, the crucible might concentrate on less apocalyptic goals. The characters might try to rebuild the Orpheus Group or something like it. Spectre outbreaks happen now and then, and the characters remain the people best able to stop them. New pigment cults might arise, too. A troupe might also want to explore how the world changes as the number of ghosts and projectors increases. The chronicle could take a more science-fiction tone, with post-life existence as the "science" whose implications are explored.

How does the widespread knowledge of ghosts and projectors affect law and politics? Do conscious post-life entities demand civil rights? Do some of them turn to terrorism or insurgency if mortal authorities don't meet their demands? Does Chicago's long tradition of keeping dead people voting turn out to be prophetic? How does the justice system react when an executed criminal continues his crimes as a ghost? Could terminally ill patients demand pigment doses or skimmer training, followed by euthanasia, as legitimate medical treatment? If the Underworld remains accessible, do governments try to lay claim to it?

A provable afterlife must surely provoke religious responses. Pigment cults might be only the first new religion sparked by spooks. Leaders of traditional religions face big challenges when people ask why the proven afterlife doesn't match the stories. Religious leaders must also decide whether they should try to

proselytize the dead, help them "move on" by resolving tethers or help them remain active as conscious and earthbound entities. Inevitably, some zealots will fight the new discoveries. They might agitate for banning projector technologies or attack well-known spooks and companies that offer ghostly services.

Intelligence agencies recruit ghosts and projectors as fast as they can (and agents are already called "spooks"). Militaries have already entered the field with Operation: Black Mercury, but who's to say Russia, China and Europe might not follow suit. Terrorist groups are, unfortunately, not far behind them. Public paranoia certainly increases at the thought of ghostly agents spying on everyone. Manufacturers of Kirlian goggles and other spook-sensing technology make fortunes. Agencies such as the FBI might expand their jurisdiction to hunting Spectres... and other agencies may try to exploit Spectres for their own use.


As some of the world's most powerful and experienced spooks, the characters are naturally drawn into the conflicts sparked by the social changes. Crazy fanatics try to destroy them; governments try to recruit or neutralize them; corporations offer them jobs. The characters might even become media stars, alternately feted and pilloried by the public.

DOOMSDAY DELAYED

Grandmother may devour the world someday... but not soon. The Spectre Breed War can continue for years before it reaches a crisis-point. If Grandmother decides she'd rather consume her rebellious "children" instead of pulling herself into the world of the living, the Malfeans could keep her busy (and sated) for quite a while. This option gives the characters years in which to explore the Underworld, study the Spectres and gather humanity's forces before they tackle Grandmother Death.

The Spectre Breed War probably remains the crucible's chief concern in this alternate timeline, but the war has no immediately foreseeable end. The chronicle derives its suspense and momentum from the new stratagems devised by the Spectres as they try to feed on humanity and gain advantage over each other. Spy movies and techno-thrillers provide a model for such a long-twilight struggle, with Spectres taking the place of mortal terrorists, enemy spies and military rivals. For instance, imagine a techno-thriller like *The Hunt for Red October*, with the submarine replaced by a powerful Spectre that might (or might not) be defecting to a different side.

To extend the analogy, Grandmother's power to destroy the world can serve the same role that nuclear holocaust did in Cold War thrillers. If any party miscalculates and lets a



conflict escalate too far, Grandmother might spasm and destroy everyone — mortals and Malfeans alike. The occasional megalomaniac might try to provoke such a holocaust out of belief he can survive it and rule the wreckage, or he might threaten to rouse Grandmother if his demands aren't met. Your characters, in turn, take the role of super-competent soldiers, spies and G-men like James Bond or Jack Ryan.

GRANDMOTHER WITHDRAWS

This scenario can arise in different ways. An exasperated Grandmother might devour all the Malfeans in one grand banquet, then sink back toward Oblivion to digest for a few millennia. The characters might convince her that humans are her children too, so she decides to feed the Malfeans from her own gauze for a few decades while she searches the Underworld for other sustenance, beyond the reach of the Maelstrom. Whatever the reason, she departs and she takes the Malfeans with her.

At this point, the chronicle can go in any of several directions, depending on the interests of the troupe. The technology of post-life existence could penetrate the world for the science-fictional chronicle of “Endgame Ignored.” The hordes of remaining Spectres provide adversaries for an espionage/thriller chronicle such as “Doomsday Delayed.” The crucible can work to set up a new Underworld society, as in “Psychopomp Pioneers.” In each case, however, Grandmother still casts a faint shadow over the chronicle, because she might be back. After all, she might find that Earth is her only possible source of spiritual food, or she might get hungry again, or want to feed a new brood of Neverborn. Characters may still want to seek methods to destroy her or drive her away, should it become necessary.

PSYCHOPOMP PIONEERS

The destruction or departure of Grandmother and the Malfeans could leave the Underworld more or less vacant. The Maelstrom won't last forever, either, given its intensity is decreasing and bleeding from the Stormwall (though the rate of dissipation remains in the Storytellers hands, be it a matter of months or decades). As the Stormwall's strength slowly abates, travel to the Underworld becomes easier. A few ghosts cross the fading Stormwall deliberately; others might cross by accident. The Underworld becomes a dangerous new realm for the dead to settle.

A chronicle centered on the Underworld could emphasize two interwoven plot threads. In the first place, the remaining Spectres still pose a threat to

humanity, both the quick and the dead. Even if the Spectres lack direction by malign gods, they remain utterly hostile — and Reapers, Sparagmoi, and other powerful breeds are still quite powerful enough to threaten a ghost, or even a whole crucible.


Certainly, the more intelligent and powerful Spectres would recruit followers through their hive-mind. Such Spectres could emerge as warlords or petty dictators of small domains in the Underworld or the living world. The husks of any remaining hives become strategic strong points for such warlords. Even if the Stormwall abates enough that ghosts can enter and leave the Underworld with comparative ease, the hives possess value as defensible locations thanks to their ghost-proof ectoplasmic walls. In time, some of these Spectre warlords might hope to grow powerful enough to rule the Underworld and Labyrinth as a new generation of Malfeans.

In this plot thread, the characters work to thwart the Spectre warlords. Some they may destroy; others they merely drive out of their hive strongholds, so they cannot work their mischief in an organized way. In the long run, the characters might hope to imprison the remaining Spectre warlords in the Labyrinth, or even drive them all the way into Oblivion, leaving the Underworld open for ghosts.

As the Maelstrom abates and the Spectres are driven back, some ghosts might want to leave the material world for the Underworld. Ghosts who accumulate too many enemies on Earth might prefer to take their chances in the Wasteland. Other ghosts might want to escape painful memories by setting a new realm, while ambitious ghosts might try to stake their claim on anything valuable. The Wasteland is a whole world, after all, with the wreckage of a whole civilization buried in its sands. Surely, a tough, clever and determined ghost can find some form of wealth or power in the Underworld. Eventually, some ghosts may hope to build new towns in the Underworld for a civilization of the dead.

Both plot threads offer a crucible plenty to do. As spooks of proven power and resourcefulness, other ghosts expect the characters to take the lead in fighting the Spectre warlords. Powerful but less intelligent Spectres, such as the Hekatonkhire, Omophagia and Irrumo, present their own dangers. A crucible can find plenty of work just hunting these marauding monsters, every one of whom may present a unique challenge.

Meanwhile, their Emblems make the characters extremely valuable to the ghosts in the Underworld. For a while, many ghosts may need the crucible's help to pass the Stormwall in either direction. Their Emblems also enable the characters to guide other ghosts through the



Wasteland's trackless expanse and still-fierce storms, as well as helping them bind and capture Spectres. Indeed, their Emblems may make the characters the only spooks able to battle and capture the more powerful Spectres.

A chronicle set in a just-opened Underworld has its own movie parallel that Storytellers can draw upon: the western. The Wasteland fills the role of the frontier, with ghostly pioneers. Ghosts can search for relics of the past ghostly civilization just as prospectors sought gold or silver. Spectre warlords take the place of villainous ranch and mine owners, with lesser Spectres (or just vicious ghosts) as outlaws and bully-boys. Groups of Orphan-Grinders may feel that as former Spectres they have prior claim on the Wasteland as their home, pushing them more or less into the role of native tribes. The characters, bearing their Emblems instead of a gun and a star, can become the sheriffs and marshals who bring law and order to the new settlements of the Wild Wasteland.

RAIDERS OF THE LOST UNDERWORLD

For another option, the characters could do some in-depth exploration of the Underworld without the Spectre Breed War getting in the way. The remaining Spectres still pose an ongoing threat, of course, but the crucible doesn't have to dodge, fight and run quite so much.

The Underworld holds plenty of mysteries to discover. It holds the wreckage of an entire civilization built by ghosts over thousands of years. How did that civilization operate? Who governed it? What was its history? Most importantly, perhaps, what sort of loot did it leave behind? During the Spectre Breed War, the crucible already may have found objects made of an indestructible black steel. With the war ended, they can look for more of these valuable or enigmatic items. The Underworld may hold other desirable relics as well. They can range from "magic items" that increase the crucible's power to relics that solve historical mysteries, such as Nero's emerald monocle or Jack the Ripper's blade.

Characters with more scholarly interests, however, may prefer to seek the records of the Underworld. Like archeologists in the living world, they seek knowledge, not golden gewgaws from long ago. Cleaning potsherds with little brushes doesn't make for very good stories, however, so Storytellers can add elements of pulp adventure such as deadly Spectre guardians, fiendish traps, sly informants (ghosts or Spectres who prefer temptation to slaughter), cryptic maps and riddling inscriptions. Instead of a jeweled idol, the loot consists of tablets bearing the laws of the Nameless City, a description of a ghostly power that could help the characters develop a hitherto-unknown Horror or

clues to a Labyrinth chamber where one of the Malfeans hid the key to its destruction.

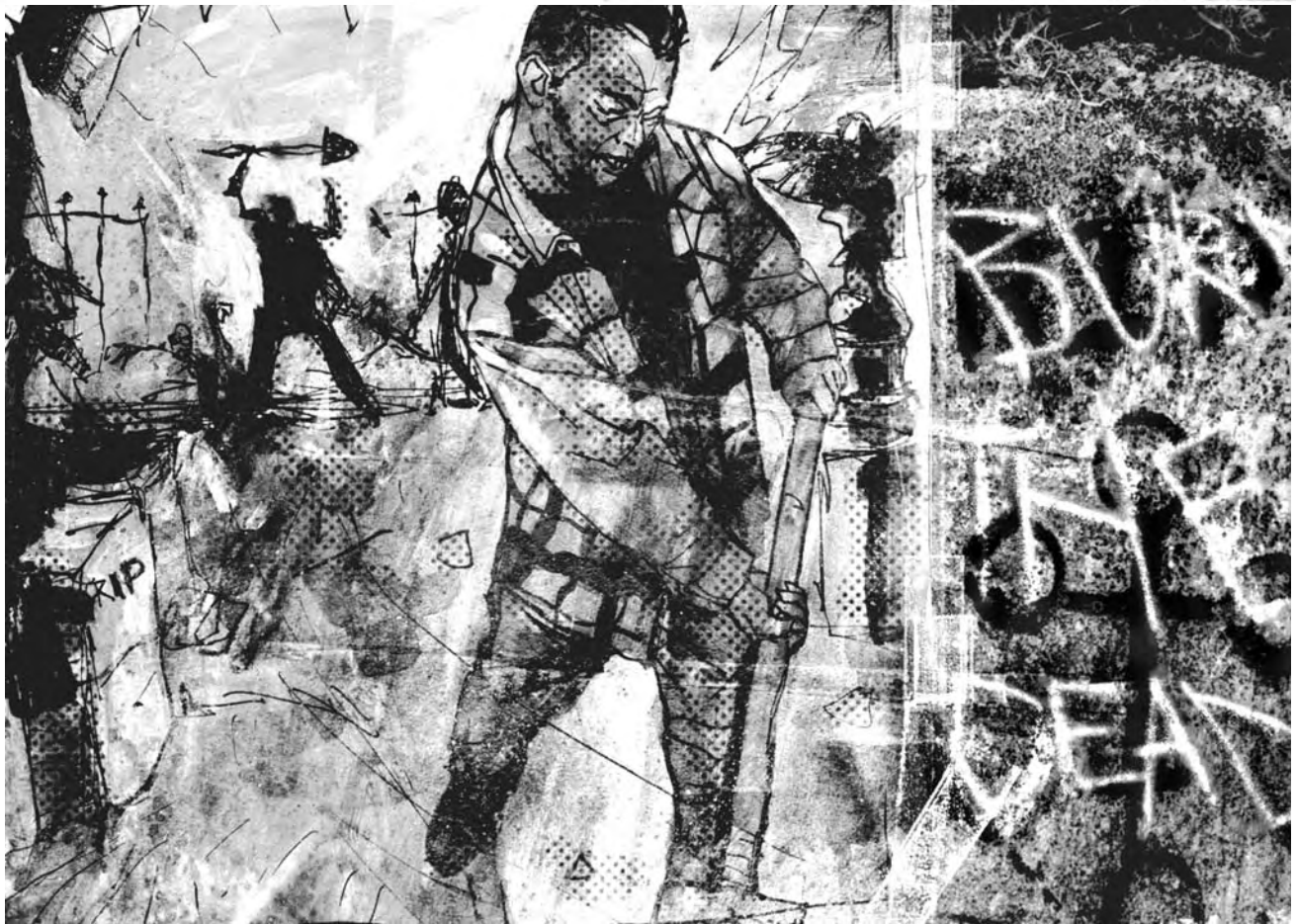
The Underworld's records might tell of mysterious periods in mortal history, too. Some evidence around the Nameless City suggests that it once occupied an island in an Underworld sea. Is it the necropolis or relic cast by Atlantis? Even if the Storyteller decides that Atlantis was just a fable, perhaps the Nameless City holds records of some other civilization lost to mortal historians. For instance, mortal archeologists cannot yet translate the writings of the Indus Valley civilization, while ancient cultures like the Hittites and Etruscans just didn't write very much down. Maybe someone in the Nameless City transcribed the memoirs of ghosts from those civilizations. Plenty of mortal archeologists would cheerfully hack off an arm to gain such records. Ghostly archeologists would have a hard time proving that any archives copied from the Nameless City are not a hoax, though, unless the Underworld becomes common knowledge to mortal folk.

THE MALFEANS WIN

On the other hand, the characters might fail to save the world. What happens if they, or the Malfeans, manage to stop Grandmother but the Malfeans break through to Earth? It could happen. Perhaps the crucible merely weakens Grandmother instead of killing her. The Malfeans then attack in a feeding frenzy of cannibalistic demigods. By devouring Grandmother, they gain the power to breach the Stormwall on their own. Even if the Malfeans cannot freely invade the living world, they still rule the Underworld and can maintain the husks of Grandmother's hives.

A World of Darkness beset by Malfeans who no longer have Grandmother to worry about becomes an even darker place. The Malfeans soon turn on each other, and they see the living world as at once a battlefield, a source of sustenance and recruits, and a playground for their vicious impulses. The Spectre Breed Wars stay just as vicious, but the Malfeans direct their troops to attack the living as well as each other. When large numbers of mortals die in pain, fear and hate, they easily become Spectres. Those who do not can be captured for conversion, or as food. Mortal authorities can do little against Jasons who turn their skills to mass terrorism instead of isolated murder, or other Spectres who find ways to affect the corporeal world.

A world beset by Malfeans could resemble the espionage thriller setting of "Doomsday Delayed," but driven to even greater violence and extravagance — from the almost-realistic espionage of the James Bond books to the hyperbolic action and comic-book flash of



James Bond movies such as *Goldfinger* or *Die Another Day*. Malfeans and Spectres take the place of evil masterminds and henchmen like Blofeld or Odd-Job.

For an even wilder chronicle, the Malfeans could erupt into the material world and rampage in their full, awful power. The Storyteller could treat them as supervillains, with the characters as the heroes who fight their evil, or even as giant monsters in the style of a Japanese monster movie. Such a chronicle would stray very far indeed from the inspirations behind *Orpheus*, but if you think that would be fun, who are we to discourage you?

GRANDMOTHER WINS

So far, we've assumed that if Grandmother defeats the Malfeans and the characters cannot stop her from erupting into the corporeal world, the chronicle ends along with the world. Fiction (print and movie) supplies models for stories set after the end of the world, though.

The Storyteller has to decide how Grandmother manifests in the material world. This should probably bear some resemblance to how she manifests in the Underworld, so her invasion could range from a mountainous mass of slime and tentacles to a cold, sourceless

shadow that brings death to all who fall beneath it. Perhaps the Spectre hives materialize and erupt in millions of tendrils that suck the life force from everything they catch, until they wrap a city like giant cobwebs, with flaking, dried husks of the inhabitants caught like so many dead flies. Whatever form Grandmother's manifestation takes, most of humanity dies in less than a week, leaving behind not even ghosts.

Most — but not all. Some few people survive.

If Grandmother wins, most of humanity dies within a week. Grandmother's lesser children follow her to the material world as well and help her to harvest humanity. Soon after, Grandmother begins spawning a new brood of Malfeans, whom she nourishes on the blended and digested Vitality of six billion souls.

Any chronicle that continues in this setting must concern itself with mere survival for quite some time. Grandmother herself may remain quiescent after the initial harvest, but Spectres and Malfean demigods roam the world freely. They view any remaining mortals or ghosts as food or sport. Even powerful characters cannot hope to defeat the Spectre hordes. Their duty lies in helping the scant remnants of humanity hide from the invaders from Oblivion. Typical stories would include finding some refuge concealed from



Spectres, rescuing small groups of mortals and gathering supplies for the enclave.

The world under Grandmother can be as desolate as the Wasteland, in its way. Grandmother begins her feast with human souls, but she can also feed on the meager Vitality of animals, insects and plants. Eventually she may even devour the feeble life force of bacteria. Not only is humanity almost extinct, the Earth itself slowly dies. Wherever the characters go, they see reminders of Magna Maw's triumph: rotting corpses of people and animals; stands of dead trees; dead bees still perched on dead, dry flowers; soil turning to dry, sterile dust.

Humanity's buildings do not last forever. The omnicide of humanity brings plenty of property damage too. Cars, planes and trains crash as their occupants die. In the chaos, fires start and burn out of control, leaving whole cities in charred wreckage. Over time, wind, wear and weather takes a further toll. The steel skeletons of skyscrapers rust and collapse, and wooden buildings rot. Underground spaces such as cellars and subways slowly fill with water and detritus unless someone tends them.

Still-living characters can gather food from derelict grocery stores for a while, but that supply does not last forever. Food in cans and jars may last for years, but only if it's properly stored.

In time, Grandmother and her children may decide not to eat humanity into extinction. They make the leap from hunter-gatherers to herding. Spectres gather whatever people they can find to breed them like cattle. The more intelligent Spectres may keep mortal pets, which they value for their ability to scream. Inevitably, some humans will try to make deals with Earth's new masters. These quislings hunt free mortals and oversee the farms in order to preserve their own lives and indulge whatever twisted appetites they learn from their masters. Grandmother's most favored slaves may learn to project; these people may become Spectres while they yet live. Though these collaborators are perhaps the weakest enemies of the characters, they are certainly the most loathsome.

In time, the characters may progress to spying on the Spectres in hopes of finding some weakness to exploit. The crucible may even begin a resistance movement that fights to take back the Earth.

Of course, that assumes the Spectres *have* a weakness. Perhaps they do not, and humanity's only hope is to remain hidden. Survivors might move entirely underground, growing fungus nourished by organic detritus brought from above, and shielded by material stolen from defunct Spectre hives (like the Lazarus Redux building from *Shadow Games*, p. 142).

Perhaps living humanity has no hope at all. Nothing can stop Grandmother from completely sterilizing the

Earth in her hunger. Mortal humanity cannot survive... but what of ghosts? As Grandmother drags the once-living world into death and Oblivion, humanity's sole refuge may lie as ghosts who move into the now-vacant Wasteland. This is a grim end to the *Orpheus* story, but such is the price of failure.

MERGED WORLDS


Perhaps the strangest way to push a chronicle past *End Game* comes with the complete destruction of the Stormwall. Grandmother is the most likely culprit for this. She pushed the Maelstrom into the barrier between worlds, turning it into the deadly Stormwall. Her departure or destruction could cause a metaphysical rebound that merges Earth with the Underworld. If the characters or the Malfeans hurt Grandmother enough but fail to kill her, she might thrash and withdraw all the Spectre hives, causing so many breaches that the Stormwall rips apart.

The most immediate result is a ghost-quake everywhere in the world, as the Underworld tries to coexist with Earth. In *Shadow Games*, a single building thrust out of the Underworld caused havoc; now every place on Earth suffers even greater disruption. The shredded Stormwall also releases the Maelstrom to sweep over the globe, inflicting the destructive effects described in Chapter One of this book. The sterile sands and chaotic wreckage of the Wasteland sweeps over the spirit world.

Even worse, the Stormwall's end erodes the boundary between the material and immaterial realms. The Wasteland starts manifesting and replacing the material world. The Maelstrom blows vast sandstorms into the living world, scouring cities and burying forest and farmlands. Stranger storms happen as well — rains of bones or iron pellets, whirlwinds of blood and gall, lightning that screams like a thousand souls in torment.

The Labyrinth flickers in and out of material existence as well. In New York, Boston, London and Moscow, subway cars rattle from manmade tunnels into twisting corridors of ebon stone or pulsing flesh, right before Spectres and their own nightmares tear into the doomed passengers. Grand Central Terminal becomes the bone-encrusted haunt of the Malfean Vidod, from the New York Necropolis. Spectres erupt from sewers, mines and storm drains.

Spectres who could not materialize before now gain that power. Millions of them invade the mortal world, reveling in a frenzy of slaughter, rapine and destruction. Any Malfeans left in the Underworld



join them, rampaging through whole nations as monstrous demigods of doomsday. Mortal armies fight gallantly... but what can they do against entities that can dematerialize with a thought?

Most of civilization collapses. Most of humanity dies from starvation, plague and Spectre attacks. Spirits of the dead outnumber the living, though the Spectres quickly reap much of the ghostly population. The world becomes horribly strange.

Surviving mortals are forced into a more primitive existence, limited to whatever technology they can maintain with their local resources. Small enclaves may retain electricity, automobiles or other critical technologies for a while. In the developed world, however, most survivors are left trying to figure out how to plow a field or plant a garden. Many survivors, of course, turn to banditry. These gangs survive by robbing and killing any other mortals they meet. Blades and clubs replace guns as people run out of ammunition.

Everyone has frequent contact with ghosts. Some mortals ally with ghosts to protect each other from bandits and Spectres. Some among the quick and the dead worship the Malfeans and offer them sacrifices in hopes they will avert their wrath and keep the Spectres away. The smarter Malfeans encourage this worship. At least the Maelstrom calms without Grandmother to stir it — except when a Malfean rouses the ghost-storm again. Malfeans use the Maelstrom to punish communities that offend them, or just for sadistic fun. People quickly learn that the new gods of the world are cruel and capricious. It's best to appease them with as many sacrifices as possible, preferably gathered from weaker communities. Perhaps the Malfeans can grant Horror-like supernatural powers to their mortal priests, creating crucibles that combine the most dangerous aspects of mortal, spook and Spectre.

In this horror-haunted new Dark Age, few have the power or courage to stand against the Malfeans, the bandits and the murderous cultists. The characters and other powerful spooks can become the heroes of a grim sword-and-sorcery epic. They can defend humane enclaves from monstrous Spectres and the bloodthirsty armies of Malfean-worshipping warlords. They can seek Spectre-slaying weapons cast into the material world from the Underworld. They may be Earth's last heroes before Malfean evil envelops all... or maybe they can lead the world out of this reign of horror beyond death.

NEW CHRONICLES

Last but not least, you can create entirely new **Orpheus** chronicles set in the post-**End Game** world, or completely unrelated to the published story arc. If your **Orpheus** chronicle gave short shrift to one particular subplot, such as the pigment cults or Lazarus Redux, you could use it as inspiration for a whole new chronicle, with new characters.

Orpheus starts with the default assumption that the Orpheus Group recruited the characters and brought them together in a crucible. A chronicle could begin with the characters brought together for some other reason. Military, law-enforcement or intelligence agencies would all appreciate agents who can walk through walls and wield other ghostly powers. A military chronicle could see the characters as members of Operation: Black Mercury, while a law-enforcement chronicle could have the characters as cops and detectives with access to the afterlife. A university or private group (such as the National Geographic Society) could recruit spooks to perform anthropological (thanatological?) fieldwork or explore a newly opened Underworld. In an all-ghost chronicle, characters might all have died in the same accident, terrorist attack or natural disaster. A shipment of poisoned pigment (as in **Shades of Gray**) supplies another shared death that could bring characters together.

A new chronicle also gives players and Storytellers a chance to explore other ways that people might become spooks. Perhaps some people spontaneously project during near-death experiences and remember how to do it afterward. The Orpheus Group developed scientific ways for the living to become spooks, but they studied shamanism, Voudou and other traditions of trance possession, soul projection and communication with the dead. Maybe some of those traditions really work, and other cultures have always had a few projectors. Storytellers could build a chronicle around the interactions between these mystical traditions and the Orpheus Group's scientific spooks. Other cultures also relate to their dead in diverse ways, which could provide further grist for an international chronicle.

These are just a few of the possibilities for post-**End Game** chronicles. Whether you decide to conclude your chronicle with **End Game** or something utterly different, we hope that **Orpheus** gave you thrills and chills, horror and wonder and high adventure that you will remember for the rest of your life... and, maybe, beyond.

Thank you for playing...

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