

GUILDBOOK



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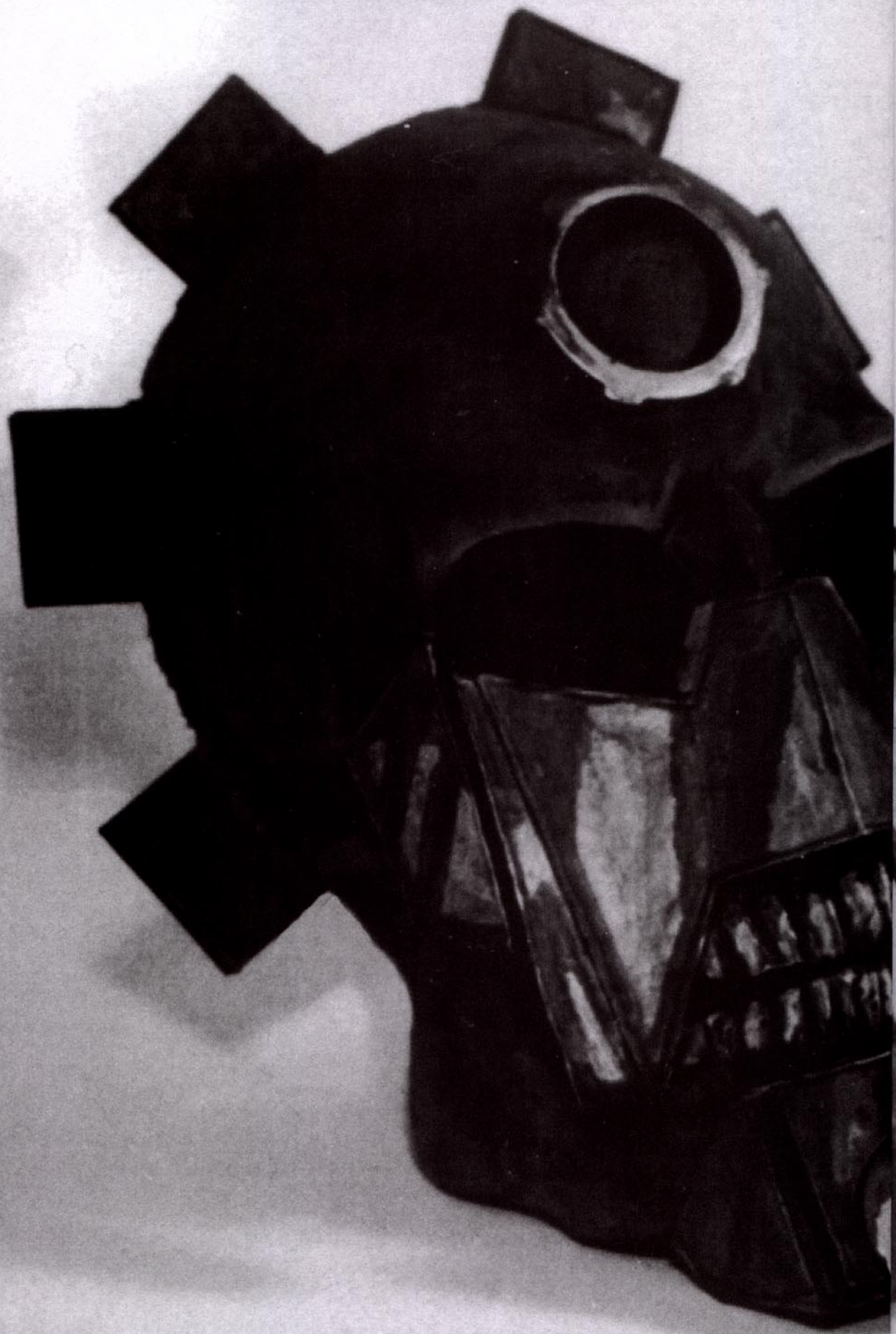


The Masquers Sourcebook for Wraith: The Oblivion
Guildbook Three

G U I L D B O O K :



by Ethan Skemp



A MILITARY OPERATION INVOLVES DECEPTION.
EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE COMPETENT, APPEAR
TO BE INCOMPETENT. THOUGH EFFECTIVE, AP-
PEAR TO BE INEFFECTIVE.

- SUN TZU, THE ART OF WAR

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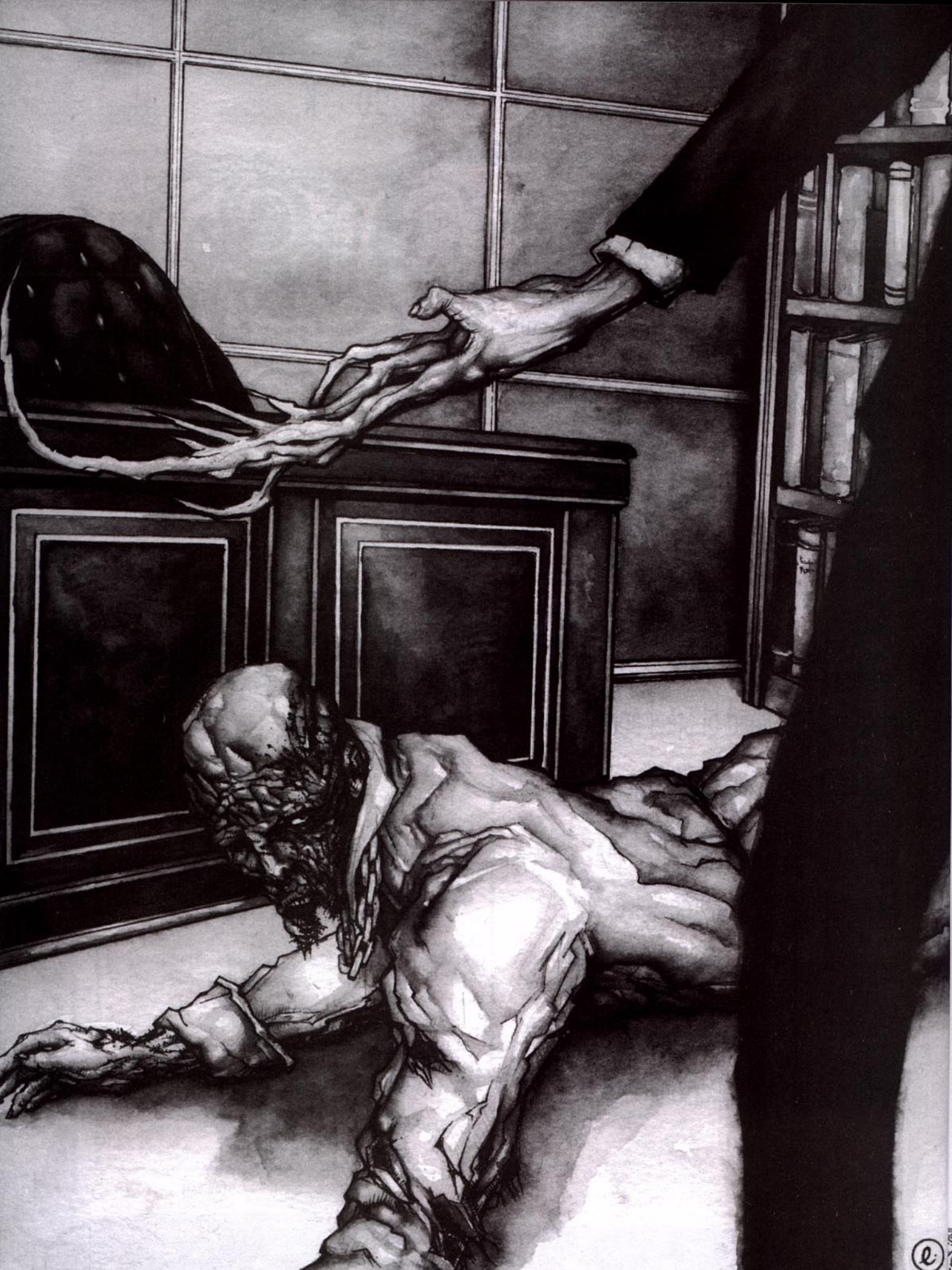
Slander created by Ethan Skemp. Lord Ember and Miklos created by Richard E. Dansky. Thusimos created by Beth Fischl. Dame Katrin created by Ethan Skemp and Richard E. Dansky.

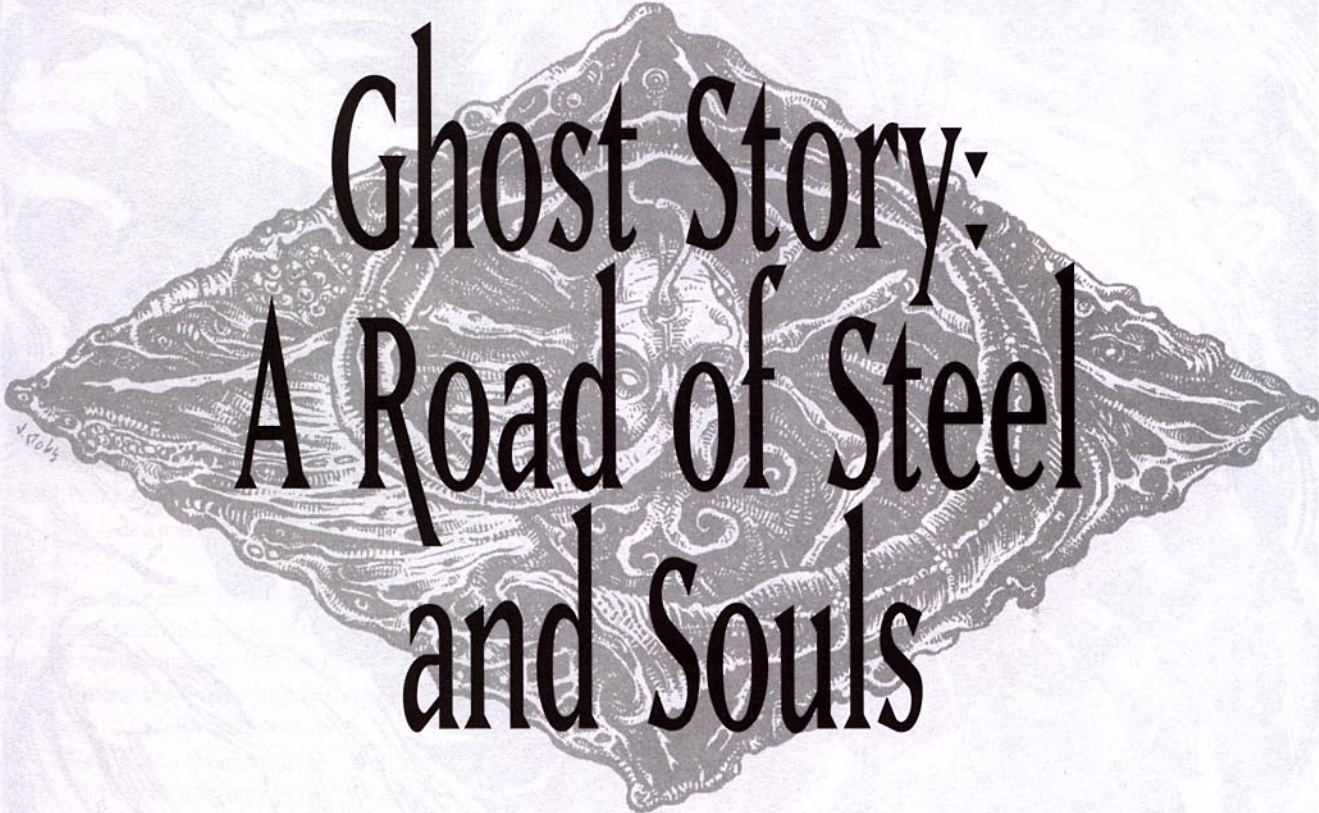

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Ghost Story: A Road of Steel and Souls

Part III: Feints and Ripostes



On the outside, it was a simple ziggurat in a middle-class Stygian borough. On the inside, it was an Escherian labyrinth of shadowy openings, false stairs, hidden doors and more rooms than even the architects remembered. This peculiar architecture made it, to Dame Katrin's mind, a perfect metaphor for the Guild it housed. In a particularly elegant twist, a crack patrol of Legionnaires prowled the surrounding streets at Swiss-watch-precision regular intervals. More than anything, the complex was comfortable and secure — at least for those permitted to occupy it.

And why not? the Masquer spokeswraith mused as the building came into view. *Stygia can be a pleasant place to live and to carry out your work, as long as you know what's what. Of course, it's not idyllic, and there are certainly areas that could be improved, but everything in its time and place....*

The Masquer diplomat had, out of habit, already shed the form of the willowy houri "she" had worn to the Guildmasters' secret conclave. The wraith who crossed the large building's threshold was a short, pear-shaped black man whose gargoylish mask hid an acne-scarred countenance. His footsteps, soft as they were, echoed in the barren entry chambers. But a hundred paces and eight doors later, he stood in a brightly lit, almost plush room that resembled a Victorian den. A lean, gray-haired wraith stood patiently in a corner, hands clasped behind his back. "Welcome back," he said politely. "What news of the council?"

"Quite a bit, Panax. It makes for an interesting story — Charon betrayed, Siklos recovered — but I'd never be fool enough to swallow the entire tale as they served it to me."

"Ah. Well, I have sent word to some of our brethren, and some further detail should be forthcoming soon."

"You're a marvel, old friend."

"The meeting was called rather abruptly," mused Panax. "I had just gotten used to the regular schedule. Your fellow 'conspirators' — did they seem familiar?"



The other wraith stretched, lengthening into a longer, leaner form. "They're for the most part pretenders, or so they'd have us believe. Lord Ember seems too... convincingly stifling to be an impostor. But what do you expect from that Guild? Thusimos had quite a bit to say. I'd hazard he holds fair rank, or else is a superb decoy. But most of them acted entirely too naive for Guildmasters. Very unprofessional."

"And I take it they thought the same of you?"

"What do you mean — indulging in deception? Of course the Masquers would be." The gothic mask softened, ran and congealed into the features of a completely unremarkable young man. "As disliked as we are, we'd have to be fools to let our Guildmaster attend such a feast of arrogant lordlings." He removed the iridescent cloak with great reverence, then softly released it. It fluttered to the stony floor as cloth and rose again as a slender girl, ten years old (at the most) when she died.

Both men bowed deeply. The young girl nodded sharply, then waggled her fingers as if to make sure that they were all still there.

"Thank you for your assistance, Panax. You are dismissed. You too, Fulke. Go explain to the Council of Tides what the Sandmen would have of us. I shall see to the rest."

"My fellow Guildmasters." The young girl's curtsy was very polite, very courtly, but her eyes never looked away from the six wraiths at the relic mahogany table. Like them, she had donned

a mask for the meeting. The Council's whimsy had settled onto yet another theme for the year, and thus Drusilla covered her face with an antiquated relic fashioned in Columbine's likeness.

"Mistress Drusilla." The speaker was a portly wraith in plum period costume, his mask that of the archetypal Harlequin himself. "I trust there was good reason for Ember's latest emergency meeting?"

"So they said," replied the tiny Masquer, settling herself into the unoccupied seventh chair. "According to M'lord Overdone, Charon himself was betrayed, offered up to Gorool by a mysterious traitor. Not only this, but according to a number of dreaming mortals, he may not be dead. Well, less so than usual."

"How peculiar," breathed the Scaramouche-masked scarecrow. "Did the Sandmen have anything to say on this matter?"

"Oddly enough, they promptly changed the subject. Of course, Thusimos couldn't just come out and say what was on his mind; no, we got a song-and-dance with props. Siklos, to be precise, or a handsome facsimile. To make a long story short, they want every Guild to select a volunteer to wander into the Labyrinth itself, where they claim Charon's toy rests. I've written up all the pertinent details, and you'll soon have them. You'll also get verification once we can switch the seat cushions."

The sleek, corded wraith with the Doctor's mask stirred and nodded. "I've already got a journeyman on it."

"Well, then," replied the Harlequin with a soft French accent that evoked centuries past, "I suppose we should settle on a course of action. I presume that everyone here believes the other Guilds are withholding tidbits of information?" The other six masks nodded promptly. "Then I suggest we pause for a moment and see what else we can overhear before we set a course of action for the Guild as a whole. I prefer to avoid any sort of foolhardy charge alongside the rest of the Guilds; far better to act when well informed."

"No argument here," offered Pantaloon. "I've some personal interest in finding Charon, and I know you've dealt with him before, Master Molière..." — the Harlequin gracefully bowed from the waist, still seated, at this — "...but we'd be fools to dive in without testing the waters first. As far as entering the Labyrinth goes, I have a promising young Helldiver who might be ideal as our representative."

The Doctor stroked her chin. "One with Castigate training, yes?"

"But of course. This mission strikes me as an ideal place for certain wraiths' Shadows to get loose and betray the whole party. I want someone there who can prevent such a tragedy — or, failing that, someone who can get out quickly enough to report to us what happened."

"Well then." Harlequin made a show of stretching languidly. "I believe all that's left is choosing personal approaches to the situation. For those that are interested, of course. I, for

one, am positively alive with ideas. The possibilities seem virtually endless. Shall we disperse, then, and reconvene when we've decided what events to set in motion?"

The wraith with Pulcinello's face cleared his throat, an obvious affectation. "Another item of business has arisen that I believe merits this Council's attention — a contract from a mysterious client in the Chanteurs' Guild, a contract so fresh you can almost smudge the ink."

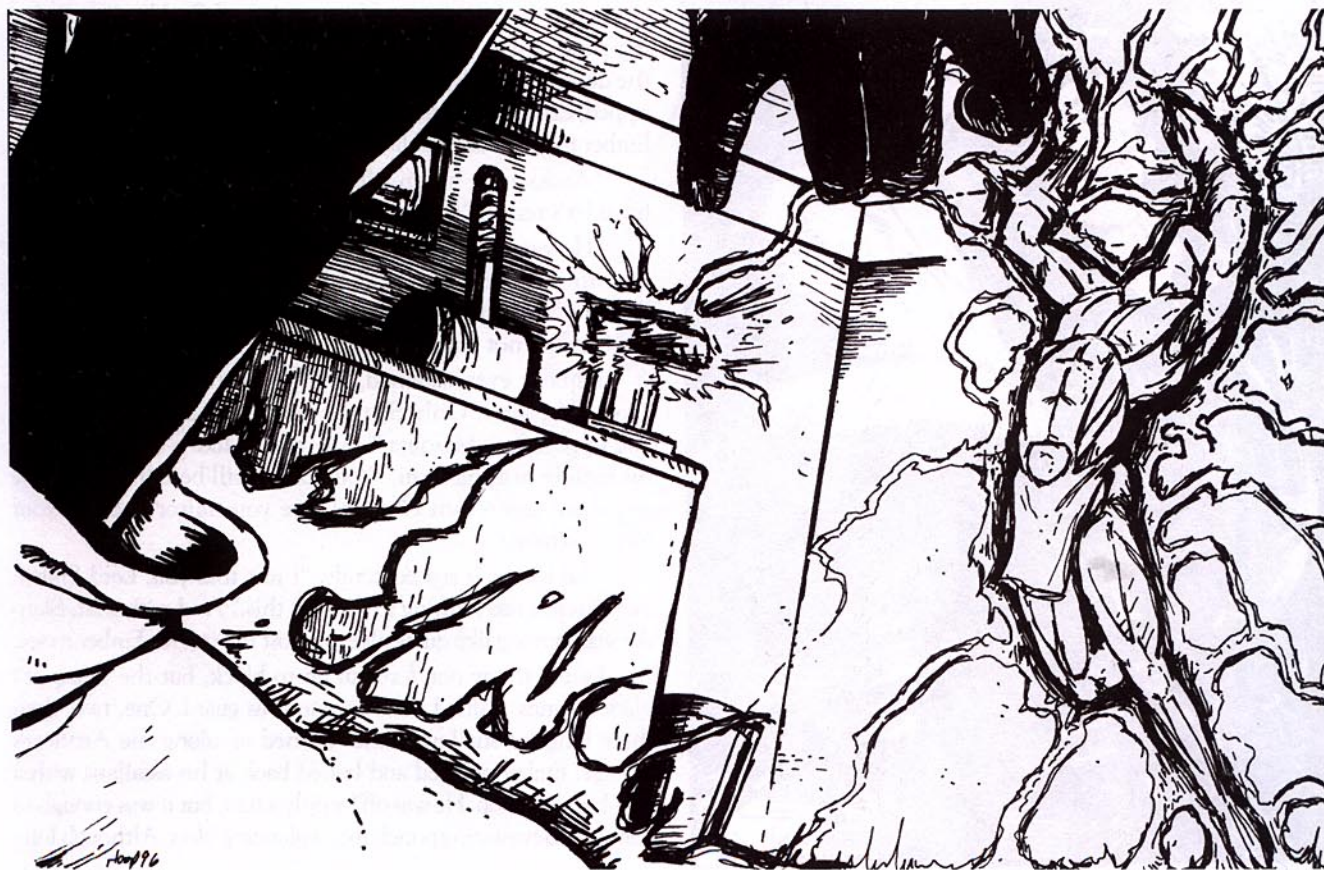
Drusilla's eyebrow arched like a cat. "Not to be disrespectful, Guildmaster, but this is hardly the hiring fair. I presume the contract is of especial note?"

The motley-clad wraith offered her a scroll of relic paper. "Read it for yourself. Apparently our friend Miklos has had enough of Ember's abuse, and wants him to learn a rather vivid lesson. The contract's for a Harrowing. Goodness me, whoever's wearing Katrin's face next is going to be in for some fireworks."

Drusilla skimmed the contract, fixating on the signature at the bottom. Her eyebrow twitched up again, this time more abruptly.

"Well. Master Ember, I hope you've visited your Pardoner recently."

Reclining in an armchair in the most secluded study of the knotted, sulphurous mansion that he called home, Lord Ember, Master of Apprentices to the Eldest Guild, muttered quietly to himself. For once, his dream of the return of the Guilds was not foremost in his brain; instead, he sat drum-





ming his fingers on the edge of a heavy desk and mulling over the image of an ancient scythe.

"Siklos. Siklos." He shook his head as if to clear it. "Why now? Damned if I know. Only an Oracle could figure out these coincidences. Or maybe I'm being deceived. But that was Siklos' image, sure as I'm dead. Someone's hiding more than they're telling. Or are they? Damn it, why now?"

A soft knock came from the door. "Lord Ember?" The voice was muffled, but familiar.

The Artificer sighed and stood. "Enter, Danika."

The door opened, and a young female in apprentices' robes cautiously stepped into the study. The soulforges were already beginning to blacken her skin just so, and her voice was thick and a touch raspy from too much smoke.

"My lord, I have the reports from our spies in the Emerald and Grim Legions."

Ember nodded and took the pseudo-slate tablets from her arms. "Good. Now, back to your studies. This business will not hold me forever, and I expect your skills to have improved since last I tested them."

Danika bowed, but did not turn to leave immediately. Her gaze flickered over the Artifact elephant gun on the wall, across a brace of portraits, and up to the mosaic ceiling.

"It's a very interesting manse you have here, milord." Her voice was suddenly smoother, gender-neutral. "Very appropriate."

Despite Ember's reputation as a pompous, antiquated psychotic, he hadn't risen to the position of Guildmaster by being slow of wit. He snatched at the heavy mallet resting by the desk, but the "girl" was faster. The plasm-skin on her hand ripped, exploding away from the eight-inch talons underneath. Ember recoiled as the claws raked across the back of his hand.

"Assassin!" he snarled, backing farther out of the intruder's reach. "If you've hurt my apprentice..."

"How insulting." Danika's skin bulged and tore away from the armored, sexless wraith who suddenly stood taller than Ember. "My business — and it is just that, Master Artificer — is with you, not your protégé."

Ember's eyes widened, and his teeth ground together. "You. Of course. Only Slander would be so bold. How dare you oppose me, Masquer?" Air rippled like a mirage around his rapidly heating form. "Your Guild will benefit like all the rest if we can return Charon! Are you traitor even to your own brethren?"

The Masquer sighed coolly. "I just told you, Lord Ember. Self-interest has nothing to do with this." And with that, Slander was moving like quicksilver, almost too fast for Ember to see.

Ember threw one forearm up to block, but the Masquer's bladed hands whirled neatly around his guard. One, two, then three long yet shallow slashes opened up along the Artificer's ribcage. Ember grunted and lashed back at his assailant with a two-handed chop. He was off by only a hair, but it was enough to convert a devastating punch into a glancing blow. Although long

years of soulforging had given him inhuman strength, most of his punch's force rolled off the Masquer's shining armor like water from a green leaf. Instead, the force of the strike overbalanced Ember, and he half-stumbled a step forward.

Slander caught the off-balance Artificer neatly by one arm and executed a neat Aikido throw. Ember hit the ground rolling, coming up against the desk and shifting into a ready guard position. The Masquer immediately lunged in as if meaning to pin him like a butterfly against his own furniture. Ember responded with a quick kick to Slander's kneecap; the assassin staggered briefly, but almost instantly recovered. Still, it was all the time Ember needed.

Rising, the Artificer stamped against the metal floor. His foot hit with the sound of a thunderbolt. Electricity flooded the room, arcing up from the baseboards and metal plates and across the furniture, rocketing up and down Slander's frame. The Masquer lurched and toppled, and Ember took the instant of reprieve to seize the hammer from the desk. He struck once, twice, three times, pounding Slander's limbs in an attempt to cripple the fallen wraith. One of the Masquer's legs bowed and doubled up under the blows as shining plasm spurting along the still-crackling floor.

"Twice-damned Masquer assassin." Ember straightened up, mopping his brow out of reflex. "Who sent you, damn you? Your Guild? The Spectres?" Somewhere in the back of

Ember's mind, somebody was screaming, *No! Don't taunt the Masquer, run! Get help!* Another voice, deeper and stronger, purred, *Yes. The assassin's ours.* Strength flooded the Master Artificer. *Let's punish the upstart now, you and I.*

Ember towered over the prone wraith. He seized the Masquer's hair in one charred fist and raised the mallet. "What to do with you? You aren't the only one who can Moliate your victims, monster. But I think it's going to be the soulforges for the infamous Slander."

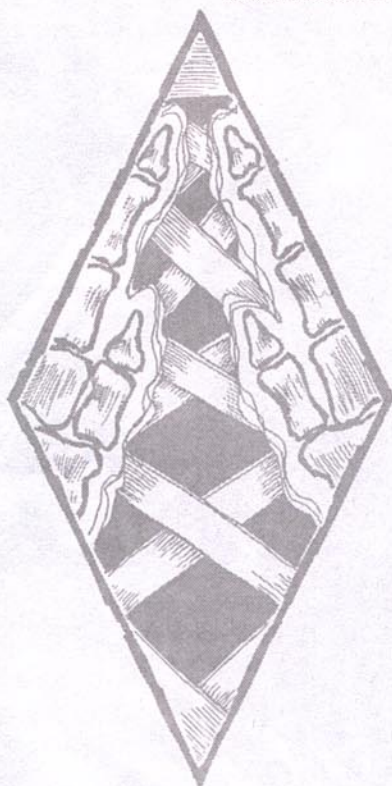
And then something like a metal adder uncoiled from the Masquer's back and struck the Artificer in the chin with bone-shattering force. Ember's head snapped back, and he felt his jaw fragment on one side from the impact. His vision blurred, but he could see Slander moving again. Suddenly afraid, Ember lunged for the elephant gun on the wall. He didn't make it.

The Masquer's chest half-exploded into shards of glistening plasm, soul-shrapnel that tore into Ember, shoving him into the wall. He hit hard, his blackened Corpus snapping and popping with the impact. His tongue probed around the wreckage of his jaw even as he reached up for the gun, but it was too late. "Dahhnn... yyhh... Hhhlaaannddr..."

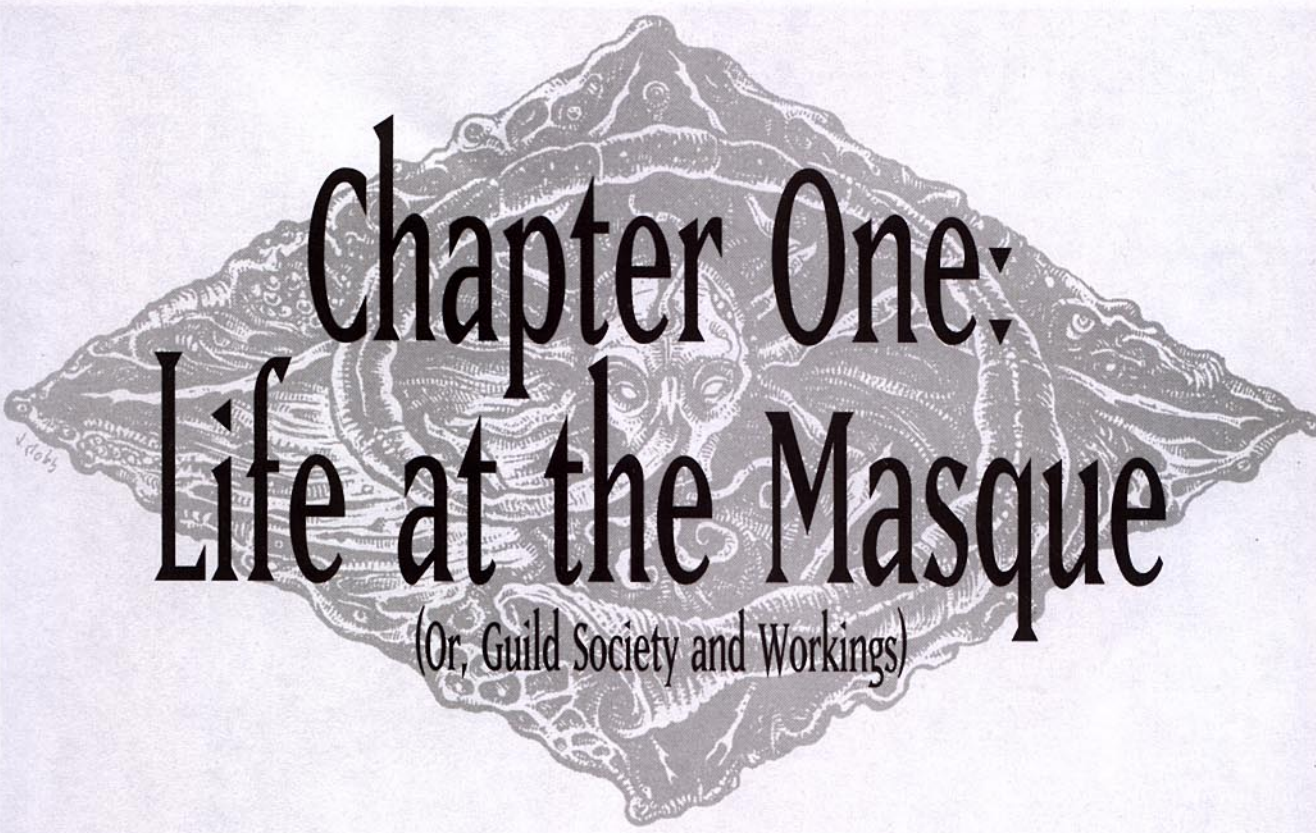

The other wraith straightened, twisted limbs unfolding and sliding back into shape. Within seconds, its frame was intact again, save for a slight limp. It raised the glittering spike that had grown at its right wrist, almost as if saluting the Master of Apprentices.

"May this be an educational experience, Lord Ember."

The spike smashed through Ember's head, and the Master Artificer fell into the talons of Oblivion.







Chapter One: Life at the Masque

(Or, Guild Society and Workings)

There is great skill in knowing how to conceal one's skill.
— François, Duc de La Rochefoucauld, *Reflections*



From a letter delivered to the Renegade Gang, the Metal Martyrs:

Hi, guys. You can stop worrying now — everything's going really well so far. I'm being treated fairly — well, fairly. There's some less-than-friendly competition now and then between apprentices, but one of my teachers has kind of adopted me. The lessons are coming along great, and I'm picking up a lot of tips just by keeping my ears open. You were right, Stone: If we could somehow manipulate a wing of the Guild into helping us out, we'd be in excellent shape.

I've had to use a lot of tricks to get this report to you. If they find out I sent this, I'm going to be some journeyman's wall hanging. For Charon's sake, destroy this letter but good once you're finished with it. I'll try to get myself out before too much longer. I know, time's of the essence, but I can't act too quickly without attracting attention. Until I can talk to you in person, here's a rundown of what I've seen in the last year.

Dwelling Among the Shapers



The metaphor that won't go away when I think about this Guild is that of the Russian nesting dolls. You know the ones I'm talking about, the ones that you pop open to find a smaller one inside, then another one and another and so on. The organization around here works like that, with circles inside circles inside circles all the way up to the Guildmasters. Even the geography of your typical Masquer headquarters is laid out in kind of the same way.

For starters, there are two levels to every Masquer complex. What even the most trusted clients see is the Guildhouse, which is kind of the hiring house for contract work. This is where you go if you're good friends with an Idunn too tal-



Initiation

Elena stepped nervously into the circle of gray-robed Masquers. Her bare feet felt even colder than usual on the stony floor. She could swear that a wind was blowing through the dark room, right through her naked form. Nerves, I guess, she thought. She repressed the long-dormant urge to shiver.

The tallest Masquer noiselessly stepped forward and raised his hands. The robe's sleeves slid down his forearms, revealing long, silvery fingers. A pair of eyes beneath the hood briefly met Elena's, and then the cold hands plunged into her Corpus.

Elena's mouth dropped open in shock as she felt her plasm melt and flow, shaped by the Masquer's icy fingers. She involuntarily dropped to one knee, shining strands of her very being running back to the sculptor's hands. He released the handfuls he'd taken, and then two other wraiths stepped forward.

Elena would have choked if she could, as the two began swiftly and soundlessly to mold her into something surreal and terrible. With a brief gesture, one Masquer smoothed away her eyes, leaving only the sensation of the hands playing with her plasm, re-creating her. When these touches withdrew, Elena tried not to think about what would come next.

And then the half-trained apprentices began to work on her, inexpertly folding and stretching her in the same rough way that creative children stretch soft clay. They pushed, pulled, twisted just as her room-

ented to work at the average Stygian salon, or a Warsmith whose work isn't for casual hire. And don't think they'll let you in or even admit that a Guildhouse exists unless they're sure you won't tell. Trust me, they've got ways to check your sincerity, and lots of ways to enforce their secrecy. It's not easy getting in here.

The Guildhouse, by the by, is also where the Masquers do most of their dealings with members of other Guilds. This is where they bring out apprentices for a session with a Pardoner or hire on to a Sandman troupe. This inter-Guild trade is fairly brisk, and it accounts for most of the Guildhouse dealings.

But further into the maze is what they call the Masque, where Guild members without other arrangements live. This is where Guild apprentices get trained, too. I haven't seen much of the Guildhouse since my initiation rite. I almost feel like I'm in some Byzantine boarding school where your most feared teacher might, just might, live in the room right above your ceiling.

That's two nesting dolls. There might be more somewhere back in there, but I haven't seen any hint as to what they might be.

mate had said they would. By the time they pulled away, Elena was no longer recognizable as a person.

Now. Now I have to show them. *Elena focused on the image of her face. She'd spent some time with a mirror each night, dreading when the elders would come and take her to initiation. She pushed a feeling of warmth across her whole Corpus, gently softening it. You're in, girl, if you can just stand up!*

The twisted knot of plasm on the floor rippled, then again, and then finally straightened. Slowly, as if being born for the third time, Elena rose, tottered a bit on freshly resculpted feet, and opened her eyes.

Like cherubs attending Aphrodite, the two nearest Masquers wrapped Elena in a gray robe.

THE MASQUER INITIATION RITE IS VERY QUICK AND SIMPLE, COMPARATIVELY SPEAKING. THE NOVICE IS MOLIATED INTO A FRIGHTENINGLY TWISTED FORM BY A NUMBER OF GUILD MEMBERS, TAKING ANYWHERE FROM THREE TO SEVEN CORPUS LEVELS OF DAMAGE. SHE MUST THEN USE RETURN OF DEATH'S VISAGE TO RESTORE HER ORIGINAL FORM (AT DIFFICULTY 10). THE NOVICE IS GIVEN FIVE MINUTES TO MAKE THE CHANGE; IF SHE FAILS OR BOTCHES, SHE IS GENTLY RESTORED TO NORMAL AND RETURNED TO TRAINING. IF SHE SUCCEEDS, SHE IS WELCOMED AND GIVEN THE BADGE OF APPRENTICE. SOME SAY THAT AFTER THREE FAILED INITIATIONS, A WOULD-BE MASQUER IS SOLD TO THE USURERS AS RAW MATERIALS, BUT THIS IS MERELY THE AFTER-DARK WHISPERINGS OF NERVOUS NOVICES.

Attitude

The most important caveat I can think of regarding the Masquers is this: Expect anything and everything. Sure, they've got bullyboys in their ranks who are about as subtle as chainsaws to the head. They've also recruited wraiths whose machinations do the Deathlords proud. The worst part is, the two kinds are interchangeable. Yes, the gossipy Idunn you frequent today can be the semi-Spectre thug you meet tomorrow.

But there's an amiability to most of them that you'd never expect from their reputation. I think it has to do with their (quite respectable) business ethics. You know how the Usurers have this tendency to look at everybody as if they were a potential resource? That's close to the Masquer attitude. The difference is that the Masquers see you as a potential customer, and are therefore far more agreeable. For the most part, that is. I've seen what happens to those who irk the Guild, and believe me, it's the sort of thing that Sandmen who play muse to the Gigers and Dalis of the world would love to use.

Most of the Guild members are really polite and nice to each other, at least back in the Masque. They're pretty so-

ciable with their clients, too. That's a great word for the Masquers, actually. Sociable. Even if they really aren't interested in how your day went, they're polite enough to fake it and good enough to put you at ease.

But still, I get frightened sometimes in my room after hours, just before I try to catch up on my Slumber. They say there's somebody here who papers the walls of his cell with Skinmasks, and he wants to have the place completely decorated with them before the turn of the millennium. Can you think of how many it might take? And the most horrible thing is that he might be my teacher. He might be the pleasant young guy down the hall who wants to be a Warsmith. She might even be that timid little apprentice two rooms over who half-smiles at me every time I pass her in the hall. I learned you can't take a Masquer at face value really early on; I wish I knew which ones are the real self-satisfied, honest wraiths and which ones are lying out of habit.

Recruitment

So who joins the Masquers? If you've seen what the really good Shapers charge, your first guess might be that the naturally greedy try to sign up. Nope. Don't get me wrong, the Twisters like to make a good solid profit as much as anybody else, but the money-minded are far better off with the Usurers. (Yes, I know — I'll talk about them later.)

My best guess (and this is based very loosely on my experiences — not all Masquers are the loquacious sort) is that Masquers recruit heavily from people who have a strong sense of who they are, and who don't base that on who they seemed to be in life. I'm not talking about those "I was fat in the flesh but am a god in the plasm" types. You can get your ideal Corpus after an expensive visit to a Masquer; you don't have to join the Guild to become beautiful. No, I'm talking about the people who had a self-image miles away from what everybody else saw. Maybe they were reclusive and weak back when they were alive, but now they're strong and dynamic. Sure, that'd make sense. But I've also run into the type who was drop-dead gorgeous in life, but who takes on unassuming forms now because they got tired of all the attention. (Or so they said... yeah, I know Masquers don't always tell the whole truth.)

But it's bizarre how Guild life affects them. Until that absolute need for human contact gets hold of you, you almost forget about the Skinlands entirely. Not all Masquers care about the living, you know. There's nothing Moliate can do to the Quick, so if the Quick have no real impact on the Guild, there's not much point in hanging around them except to use them as a source of Pathos. And our friends the Usurers will supply Pathos to us at discount prices.... I imagine there are probably a bunch of Domems somewhere in this Guild. It's creepy how few Masquers miss living friends or relatives. I guess for a lot of them, the unlife is a step up.





There's a real mood of practicality and purpose in these halls. I'd expected some kind of artists' commune, with everyone all caught up in their fantasies of what they can see, do or become. But the Masquers never forget who they are, and they base that self-perception on their Shadowlands existence. I guess we need an ironclad sense of personal identity with all the changing around we do. Old joke: What do you call an indecisive Masquer?

A Doppelganger. Har har.

Internal Strata

The Guild's internal organization is more understood than carefully explained. I know, that's not very helpful. Well, the basic layers of novice, apprentice, journeyman and master are present. I think that's a holdover from the earliest times, and my teacher says that these levels exist in most Guilds. (Who'd know better, right?) You're a novice when the Guild admits to you its existence as an organization and agrees to train you (just after you pass your background check, naturally.) You become an apprentice after you learn the basic arts of Moliate and undergo your initiation. That's where I was six months back.

Don't ask me what the dividing line between an apprentice and a journeyman is, though. I don't know, and I'm a journeyman. I train a little more in some of the other Arcanoi (which really weards me out, even considering that I'm only learning a basic art or two), and I'm quite a bit better at sculpting plasm, but there wasn't any rite or anything like that. Master L_____ came to my door one afternoon, handed me a tiny soulsteel badge, and that was it. Congratulations, and good luck on your continuing studies. (Oh, and Fox, don't give me any crap about the sexist title. I kind of like it — it sounds all archaic and everything. Besides, the alternative's "journeywraith" or "journeyer." Really elegant.)

I suppose you become a master when your talent's just too impressive for you to be called anything else. I've studied under at least three, and they're really good. Impossible to describe, though. Just like a really fantastic painting. Sure, you could spew out that art-school pabulum about "underlying metaphors" and "abstract sensuality," but what I've seen taught me something about art. There are the people who stand around and talk about it, trying to make themselves look good. Then there are the people who *make* it, because they just *have* to — because it sticks inside them and they have to get it out *somehow*. That's what a master Masquer is. The Guild sees through phonies pretty quickly.

There are various textures to the ranks, too, and I'm not too clear on how to describe them. Some journeymen around here get treated better than some of the masters. I can recognize them and act appropriately, but I'm not sure what the criteria are.

The people at the top are the Guildmasters. I think they organize into Councils, ones that keep sporadically changing their names. Or maybe the Silver Soul Council has a differ-



Thought and Memory

Mention the word “Mnemos” to a Masquer and you’re likely to get a long, baleful glare. Accuse a Masquer of being a Mnemos and you’re even more likely to wind up a sofa cushion for a Spook. The Shapers very much dislike being compared to the long-scattered Mnemioi, and their infamous sense of humor evaporates like a dew-drop in Nhudri’s forge when someone is gauche enough in casual conversation to connect the two Guilds.

The Guild’s reasoning is simple enough: Each apprentice is taught first and foremost that the Mnemioi and the Masquers were rivals in the field of information brokering. Sure enough, the competition for oboli, Pathos and other fees quickly grew quite intense. The memory-miners soon developed a habit of undermining Masquer activity, and learned to delight in unmasking Moliated spies and assassins. Naturally, this incensed the Shapers to no end, and what was once a cool professional rivalry erupted into a furious secret war. But the war had a happy outcome, Masquer historians always happily proclaim. The Masquer Guildmasters, in a beautiful show of politicking and intrigue, subtly (and untraceably) advised Charon of the Mnemioi’s upper-level corruption. When the Emperor investigated, what he found enraged him. He broke the Guild, cast its head into the Sunless Sea, and exiled the Mnemioi to the shadowy corners of the Underworld. To this day, the Mnemioi seek revenge, but the well-entrenched Masquers are able to play defensively enough that *almost* all attempts at retribution have come to naught.

In this, the Masquers are lying.

Although there was once a rivalry between the Masquers and the Mnemioi, the two Guilds eventu-

ally struck a truce. Essentially, the Mnemioi agreed not to pry into Masquer affairs, and vice versa. The two Guilds never became all that close, but when Charon smashed the memory-readers, the Shapers took in *some* refugees. In return for being hidden by the self-proclaimed paragons of espionage, the rogue Mnemioi began instructing some of the Masquers in the arts of Mnemosynis.

This arrangement has proven incredibly beneficial to both sides. A few Mnemioi are currently able to exist safely (well, *mostly* safely) in the heart of Stygia and the greater Necropoli, and take advantage of the added opportunities of city life. And armed with even low-level arts of Mnemosynis, the Masquers are able to practice more and more elaborate and realistic deceptions. The Fetches alone have prospered immensely since the Mnemioi’s fall.

It goes without saying that this is one of the greatest secrets of the Masquers’ Guild. Any wraith even *suspected* of learning the truth is in quite a bit of trouble from the Shapers and any Mnemioi they protect. In fact, perhaps not a twentieth of the Masquers know of their Guild’s Mnemioi connection. It is on a strictly need-to-know basis — and *no* wraith not directly loyal to either Guild needs to know. Best not to dwell on the fate of those who actually came close to uncovering this secret...

(In fact, some Masquers in the know wonder if Charon in fact destroyed the head of the Mnemioi all those years ago — or a clever facsimile. Naturally, the implications of such a complex and cunning subterfuge are quite disturbing, and none of the aforementioned Masquers care to dwell on the thought for long.)

ent collection of Guildmasters than the Ephemera Circle. It could be like cabinet posts or senate committees or something like that. As is, I think there are about seven Guildmasters. Visible ones, at any rate. It’s a wonder anything gets done around here — how do you know who outranks whom without a program? Not that the illustrations would be accurate for more than about eight minutes, anyway....

Art or Prostitution?

I ranted a bit about art and Moliate a little while back. It’s pretty much common belief (outside the Guild) that the Masquers are prostitutes, doing all their work on commission. Not like the Chanteurs or Sandmen, they say.

Some Masquers get really touchy if you start bringing that up, too. I know, real artists aren’t supposed to care about money,

but the Shapers have an eye for profit. This is something of a dichotomy among the Guild, but so far the “we do damn fine art and get paid as a bonus” camp has the most followers.

I guess you could say that the Guild is run by enlightened self-interest more than from the desire to make a statement. It seems to be the logical way for us to do things, on account of Charon’s Edict of Breaking. Maybe there are other reasons, too. After all, since its formation, this Guild’s had a tradition of unabashed sneakiness.

The Guild’s Allies

Warning: I really can’t say for sure who the Masquers consider to be their best “friends” among Guilds. All I have to work with are the people who my fellow journeymen and I



can visit. That said, it's fairly common knowledge that the Masquers and Usurers are frequently in bed with each other (a figure of speech, for the most part). The nature of this alliance seems to stem from both Guilds' taste for businesslike, practical solutions to sticky problems. It also means your average Usurer has some nastily sculpted enforcers to call on, and your average Masquer has plenty of Pathos to work with. Just what you wanted to hear, right?

Of the others, the Proctors seem to get along fairly well with us. There seems to be a three-Guild cabal between us, the Proctors and the Haunters; the resulting "Apparition Squads" (my name, not theirs) can pretty much evict the Quick from any house in nothing flat. The Masquers also have a bit of an "artists' understanding" with the Sandmen and Chanteurs. I can say that I've personally never seen a Sandman troupe without a Masquer on its payroll. So if you intend to move in on the Masquers in any given area, expect at least a little hindrance from these Guilds. On the other hand, the Solicitors and Monitors don't seem to care for the Masquers much. Not that I'd recommend hiring one of those green-eyed pushers anyway, but there you have it.

The Endgame

Okay, Stone, I know there's one question you wanted me to answer. What are the Masquers up to, and how are they going to achieve their ultimate goal?

Your guess is as good as mine.

Oh, I've heard rumors, mind you. Some say that Charon himself will return triumphant to Stygia, only it'll be some really powerful Fetch. Once the plan's been deemed foolproof, they'll put it in motion and suddenly have control of Stygia through "Charon." And if the Deathlords don't like it, well, nobody in Stygia's so safe that it's impossible for her to disappear.

Another group says that the takeover of Stygia's already begun, as more and more Hierarchs are gradually replaced by impersonators. This seems a little silly to me, considering the sheer number of well-trained Masquers you'd need to pull off this coup, but considering how high up your average conspiracy theory goes... Some people even say there's a secret alliance between the Mnemoi and the Masquers. I get chills just thinking about it. If there were wraiths out there who could look just like you, and have access to any and all of your memories... Brrr. Thankfully, I can say this is so much bunk. You so much as say "Mnemos" in the Masque, and somebody grabs your arm to give it a friendly little squeeze that leaves it looking like a pretzel.

Now what I think is that we're trying to get some sort of political leg up on all the other Guilds. The Guilds are more organized and far larger than any other would-be Renegade or Heretic groups, and besides, so many of these people enjoy the shadowy cloak-and-dagger trade that I can't imagine them wanting to go public once more. Nope, the real power to be

Signatures

Masquers are artists. As artists, they take pride in their work, and they often feel the need to mark their work as somehow their own. After all, what's the point of creating an eloquently ornate carapace for a client if nobody knows it's your design?

A Masquer's signature takes many forms. Some Masquers might actually work their initials into a filigreed knot of ornamentation. Others prefer to tint the customer's nails a certain shade, or to push their thumbprint into a shoulder blade. Players should be creative in defining their Masquers' signatures — after all, one can make the Corpus do nearly *anything*, and the customer is paying for quality, after all.

made can be found on the backstreets, and the best way to go about getting it is the sneaky way. And if you haven't gotten the point yet, sneakiness is this Guild's stock in trade. Sure, we fit very nicely into Deadlands society, and we have little enough to complain about. But an edge is an edge, and everybody knows you can use every advantage you get these days.

Farewell

Well, I've been putting off writing this final part, but... I'm sorry, friends. I hate to tell you this, but I've lied. No, this document isn't an entire work of fiction, but I've put some misinformation in strategic places. Or maybe I haven't, and I'm lying now. I'm really sorry. I guess it's osmosis from this place — I've gotten to like the Masquers, and I've sopped up some of their taste for subterfuge. *Our* taste for subterfuge.

I imagine you wouldn't want to see me if I came back to the Cinder Mill. I guess I'm okay with that. I'll miss you, I really will. Especially you, Ash. I hope you're the one who reads this first. But you've just got to go with what suits you best, and I think I've found it.

Take care, all.

For the last time,

Elena

Of Contracts

Masquers try their best to be honest in their dealings, and they expect as much from their clients. More to the point, they don't expect their clients to be naturally honest, and therein lies the long tradition of contracts. This is a practice some say the Masquers borrowed from the Usurers' Guild.

Simply put, a Masquer will rarely undertake any dangerous or potentially shady employment unless she has a written





guarantee of payment. The contracts are drawn up by Guild elders, usually according to specific templates. Some haggling over terms is acceptable, although a pushy employer may irritate the Masquers so much that they flat-out refuse to do business with him. (In some cases, this becomes very hazardous to would-be employers. The Masquer assassin you offend may proceed to inform your intended target of the plot almost laid against her — and mention your name!)

Breaking a contract with a Masquer is considered to be very bad form. On the other hand, if a Masquer is unable to fulfill her end of the bargain, she will generally keep part of the fee and do her best to hide any suspicious evidence. However, a partial job is better than no job at all, and if a Shaper deliberately breaks a contract, she may well be taken into the hidden rooms of the Masque and never heard from again. Employers who renege on their half of an agreement may be blacklisted, Harrowed or worse. Those who hire a Masquer only to give her over to her target (a favored Hierarchy tactic) are the most reviled. These betrayers earn the worst Guild punishments: Those whom the Guild catches often spend the rest of their afterlives as doormats, torches or worse.

Callings



Only a fool tries to be everything to everyone. The Guilds arose because there was a need for specialization, and like all Guilds, the Masquers have further diversified within their ranks. If admitted into the Stygian Guildhouse itself, a customer could likely find at least four Masquers who

have concentrated on any of the particular arts of Moliate.

Hereafter follow some of the more widely recognized Masquer specialist groups. Many can be hired without going through the Guild (the Idunn and Warsmiths in particular), but others carefully check their clients' reputations before arranging a meeting. After all, one of the Masquers' mottoes is that you can never be too careful.

Arrangers

You've made an enemy of a very powerful person. It'll cost double my usual fee, and half up front. However, I can guarantee he'll get the message.

The most notorious of the Masquers, Arrangers do just what they claim to — arrange things. Harrowings, disappearances, sudden Moliations into Barghest form: These are the province of the Masquers' equivalent of assassins. Sadly, Stygia has proven to be a fertile hiring ground for the Arrangers, as the twists and turns of politics often create a market for their services.

A typical contract with an Arranger can be for a simple Harrowing, the equivalent of a very serious warning. The Arranger will simply exhaust her target's Corpus, pitching him

On Patience

The Masquer who feels herself slighted is a dangerous enemy. If an entire local branch of the Guild is offended, the results are far worse. In many cases, the best an enemy can do is to lay low until the Masquers forget about him and move on to other business. However, this is not a proven method of dodging Masquer attentions, as the example of Inspector Elisha of Richmond attests.

It is unknown exactly how Elisha infuriated the local Masquers; perhaps it had something to do with his intolerance of art and crackdowns on residing artists. He most assuredly sent at least one Guild member to the soulforges during one of his persecutory crusades, but there was no immediate response to this insult. In fact, it was almost 30 years before the Masquers struck back.

A Grim Legion patrol learned the whereabouts of a local incendiary Heretic cult, one with a decidedly political streak to its nature. The patrol managed to storm its headquarters, capturing all the Heretics within. As they scoured the premises, they discovered to their surprise a cell — one in which the Inspector was locked, pale and infirm for lack of Pathos. The Inspector immediately cried out that the Heretics had planted a Masquer look-alike in his position, and that they were only keeping him around to drain his mind with Mnemosynis. He maintained this story even when it was brought before the Marshal, who determined he was telling the truth. Entirely too many of his facts were accurate, and too much of his story made sense. The Marshal led a squad in to arrest the false Inspector, who proclaimed his authenticity up to the point that he was placed on the anvil. Elisha was restored to his post, and resumed business as usual. Two months later, the reinstated Elisha vanished without a trace.

into the Tempest. Far more expensive are contracts that require a wraith to vanish permanently. These victims often wind up as Moliated pieces of furniture or as tapestries, or perhaps as Barghest stock. Some enterprising Arrangers will sell off the victim's Pathos or Corpus to the Usurers before utterly disposing of him.

Obviously, these Masquers tend to be experts at disguise and infiltration. Cheaper thugs are available, the sort who ambush their target in Shadowlands alleys, but these brutes seldom have Guild sanction.



Anonymae

Many Masquers, for whatever reason, prefer to give up all evidence of their mortal lives. The Anonymae is the general term for those who discard who they were in favor of what they choose to become. Almost all Anonymae adopt pseudonyms of some exotic form or another; Krait, Bluejack, Scylla, Palestra and Slander are currently the most renowned. This new identity usually goes hand in hand with a specific Moliated look, or perhaps a total lack thereof. Some Anonymae prefer to have a different face for each client. Occasionally, multiple Masquers whose work is similar yet complementary adopt a collective pseudonym; Scylla is rumored to be one of these groups.

It's hard to tell whether or not abandoning your birth name or not is all that effective a business move, however. A not-yet-established Anonyma is often sneered at as a pretentious poser, while some customers prefer dealing with Masquers with a touch of mystique. Generally speaking, the Anonymae earn acclaim the same way as any other Masquer — entirely on merit.

Fetches

Gentlemen, I have the information you requested. However, I am adding a stipulation to the contract; if you act on this data, the Marshal's charming and kind wife is to remain unmolested. Please, do not cross me on this.

Just as in the living world, there are certain Underworld factions who are willing to pay dearly to have an inside agent in any given Underworld organization. The Fetches, each one carefully trained in the arts of impersonation, fulfill this need admirably. Given enough time, a good Fetch is capable of not only appearing as the spitting image of an Anacreon, but even of holding friendly conversation with the Anacreon's closest confidants. Some say this is because the Fetch Masters have close ties with the Mnemoi, and can barter in memories. The price for hiring a Fetch is said to be obscenely high, but considering the level of talent such work requires, such a steep cost is a fair wage.

Fetches are very closely monitored by the Guild. Although they are highly esteemed, the thought of one turning Doppelganger is entirely too frightening. Consequently, in any given Masque, the Fetches have first claim to the services of the finest Pardoners — and none dare argue with this arrangement.





To the Right Honorable Tobias Schreck,
Anacreon of Raleigh:

Greetings, milord. Forgive my lack of formality, but events have recently transpired which have filled my Legion with justifiable concern.

On Tuesday of week last, one of my Centurions noticed an anomaly in the behavior of one of his patrolmates. He wisely notified his sergeant, who arranged for the errant soldier to be questioned. The subject forcibly resisted questioning, maiming three Centurions before his capture. Interrogation revealed that the subject was in fact a Masquer operative, paid handsomely to infiltrate the patrol and route information regarding my Legion's doings back to a Renegade gang. The prisoner was then sent to the soulforges, where, I have been informed, he was beaten into another weapon for the ranks. A subsequent brace of Barghest division patrols located and imprisoned the Renegades responsible.

I am concerned at the ease with which the Masquer infiltrated my Legion, and request permission to conduct extensive investigations among both the military and civilian administrative bodies. I'm sure you will agree that the need for such an inquiry justifies the expense.

I await your response,
Marshal Fullerman

Helldivers

The kids are always the creepiest. Who'd hurt a child so much in life that they turn Spectre when they die? Poor little devils, the best thing you can do for them is be quick.

Suicidal? Mad? Who can tell? One thing is sure, there's nothing more frightening than the Masquers who try to best the Doppelgangers at their own game. Specially trained in Argos by sympathetic Harbingers, the Helldivers try to pull Oblivion's teeth by diving in its mouth, dressed as its children. They Moliate themselves to resemble Spectres, infiltrate Spectre society and quietly weed out whoever seems the most dangerous.

It's a profitable venture, as Helldivers receive top bounty for their kills, but the personal cost is frightening. Naturally, only a few can both master the necessary skills and survive more than a few jaunts without going mad. The most successful Helldivers know not only Moliate and Argos, but also have learned the arts of Castigate and Usury. Some say that the Helldivers in fact accept members from both the Harbingers' and Pardoners' Guilds as well, but since so few are available in the Shadowlands at any given time, nobody has yet questioned one to full satisfaction.



Idunn

Darling, everyone wants to be Marilyn Monroe. Why don't you relax and trust me? These days, exotic is everything. And I've got a face in mind that wouldn't do for just anyone, but I think you might be just the right one to wear it....

Specialists in beauty of all forms and to all tastes, the Idunn cater to the desires of those who want to be more than they were. For every wraith who wants horrible blades for hands, there are three who want to look like famous actresses. Obviously, not just any Masquer makes a good Idunn. Apprentices must show a real taste for aesthetics (*not* fashion) to even merit training from a Guild journeyman. Competition is often fierce among the Idunn, and the resulting rivalries make for excellent work. Many wraiths visit their favored Idunn every month or so, and the work of some of these Masquers is a true status symbol.

Just as in the living world, beauticians are gossips. The Idunn have therefore become choice sources for rumors and dirt. Locals often take advantage of the talkative Idunn to spread slander or bolster their own reputations; either way, the Idunn avoid the blame, since they only deal in "secondhand" information. As a result, they are highly valued by the Guild for the wealth they bring back — both in oboli and rumors.

Warsmiths

If you like the serrations, that's fine. I'd recommend having them on the outer cutting surface, though. That way, you can rip through someone with a backhand when you feel nasty, but your draw cuts on the inside will be as fast as you need them to be.

The martial counterparts to the Idunn, the Warsmiths specialize in arming wraiths for self-defense and in Moliating shock troopers into war machines. Although most accept individual contracts, some are employed full time by the Hierarchy to manufacture Barghests and the like. Warsmiths are more likely than the Idunn to mass-produce work without customizing it to their style. Still, many are renowned for their work's durability and unique flourishes.

The talented Warsmith will never lack for clients, as Renegade, Heretic and Hierarchy alike pay top obolus for his talents. However, his social life often suffers, as the call of his business prevents him from wandering about the Shadowlands, mingling with both dead and living. Many a Warsmith has spent years without harvesting Pathos from the living, instead subsiding on the dull stuff offered as payment. In addition, the grim nature of his work tends to strip him of the usual Masquer cheeriness, further inhibiting his chances of attending the latest Sandman performance or Chanteur ball. However, not that many notice the difference....

A Shaper Speaks

To the Esteemed Succubus Kharybdis of the Sable Throng:

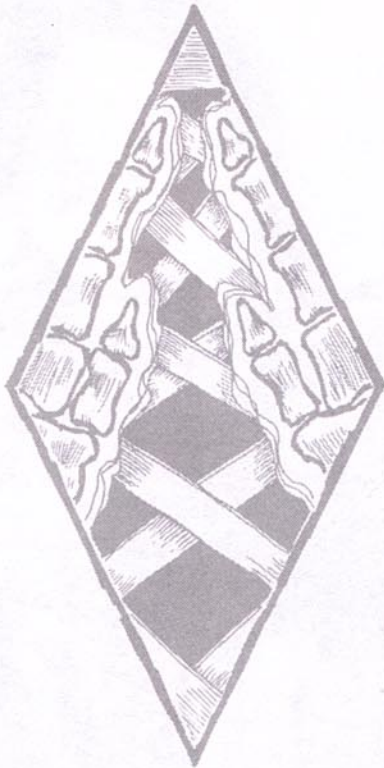
My dear Kharybdis, I find your offer of employment most flattering. However, I feel that I must decline. Oh, do not fret that you offer an inadequate wage: Your clients must be most influential, and I bow in respect to your resources. No, I feel that our association would be ultimately flawed and that it would snap given time.

Why, you ask? Because I disagree with your priorities. In your business of satiating the lusts of the Quick while they dream (and, I am given to understand, the lusts of certain influential persons on this side of the Shroud), you demonstrate a certain specialization that I long ago discarded in favor of versatility. You dwell ever on Passions inspired by the cumbersome endocrine systems of the flesh. My muse, by comparison, encourages me to explore beauty and grotesquerie to levels unknown to the Skinlanders. Why, I ask you in return, do you insist on thinking of your Corpus as a merely more versatile version of your discarded body?

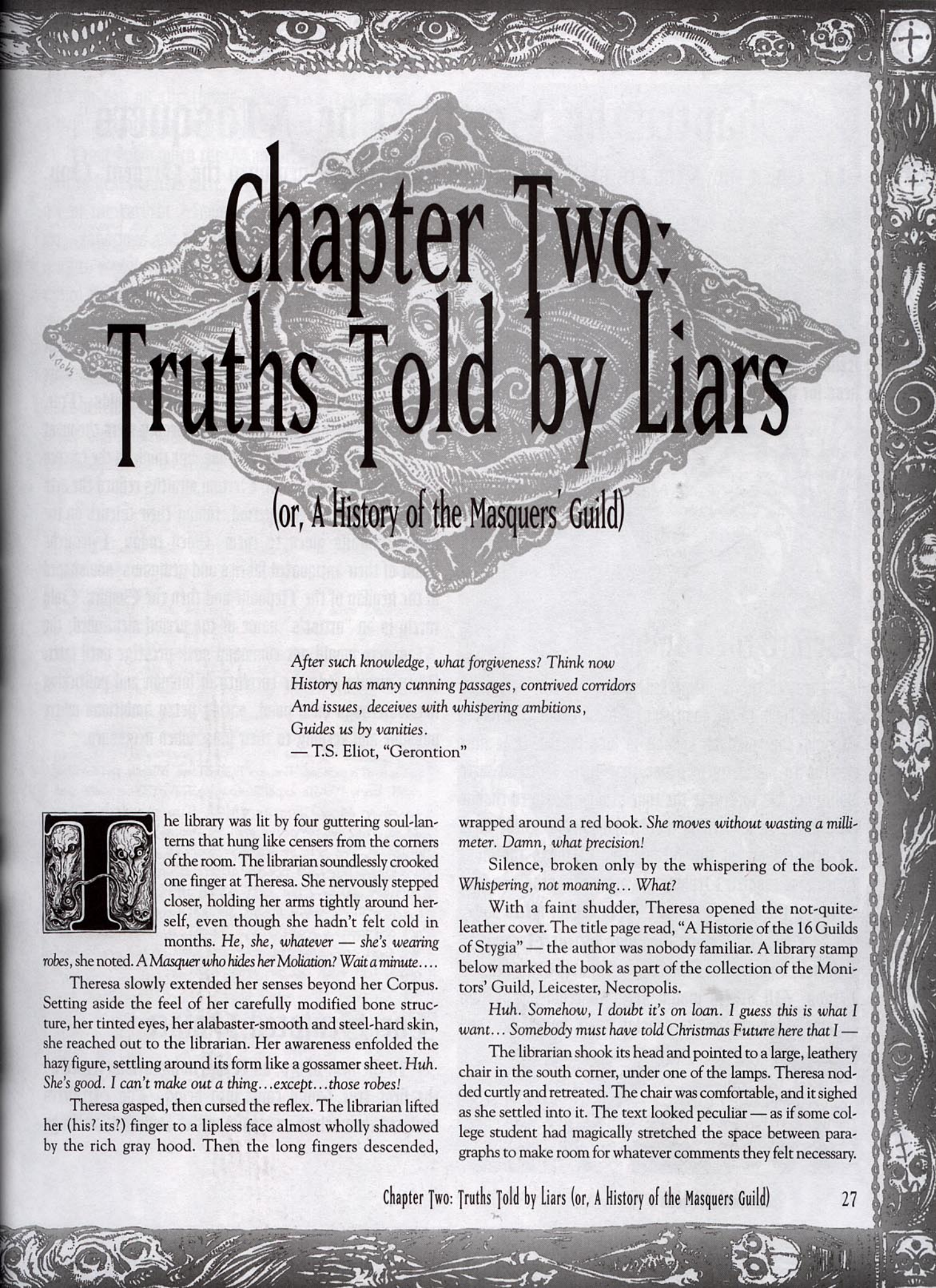
Kharybdis, there is far more to the ways of plasm than the simple tricks you recognize. Tap into the most hidden dreams of your living consorts, those that defy color, form and logic. Then perhaps you might understand. If we wraiths were meant merely to ape the fondest hopes of our lives, why would our plasm be so infinitely workable? Why is it that we may be winsome siren, terrible lover, contorted monstrosity or metal-skinned machine with equal facility? As Masquer and artist, I am compelled to leave the cravings of my body behind, to explore more readily the wonders of transience. Perhaps the rumors are true and Transcendence only comes when one finds one's true form, the form denied to us by the flesh.

I enjoy your company, friend, but your road is far too narrow for my tastes. You called my skill and beauty "enchantingly surreal." Such a label is inaccurate. It is you who are still locked in a facet, a possibility of the reality you may yet reach. In the Shadowlands, my dear, there is nothing more terrifyingly real than I.

Morgan







Chapter Two: Truths Told by Liars

(or, A History of the Masquers' Guild)

*After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities.*

— T.S. Eliot, "Gerontion"



The library was lit by four guttering soul-lanterns that hung like censers from the corners of the room. The librarian soundlessly crooked one finger at Theresa. She nervously stepped closer, holding her arms tightly around herself, even though she hadn't felt cold in months. *He, she, whatever — she's wearing robes, she noted. A Masquer who hides her Moliation? Wait a minute....*

Theresa slowly extended her senses beyond her Corpus. Setting aside the feel of her carefully modified bone structure, her tinted eyes, her alabaster-smooth and steel-hard skin, she reached out to the librarian. Her awareness enfolded the hazy figure, settling around its form like a gossamer sheet. *Huh. She's good. I can't make out a thing...except...those robes!*

Theresa gasped, then cursed the reflex. The librarian lifted her (his? its?) finger to a lipless face almost wholly shadowed by the rich gray hood. Then the long fingers descended,

wrapped around a red book. *She moves without wasting a millimeter. Damn, what precision!*

Silence, broken only by the whispering of the book. *Whispering, not moaning... What?*

With a faint shudder, Theresa opened the not-quite-leather cover. The title page read, "A Historie of the 16 Guilds of Stygia" — the author was nobody familiar. A library stamp below marked the book as part of the collection of the Monitors' Guild, Leicester, Necropolis.

Huh. Somehow, I doubt it's on loan. I guess this is what I want... Somebody must have told Christmas Future here that I —

The librarian shook its head and pointed to a large, leathery chair in the south corner, under one of the lamps. Theresa nodded curtly and retreated. The chair was comfortable, and it sighed as she settled into it. The text looked peculiar — as if some college student had magically stretched the space between paragraphs to make room for whatever comments they felt necessary.

Chapter the Sixth: The Masquers

In Which the Masters of Moliate Are Discussed Even unto the Present Day

My esteemed fellows, now we arrive at one of the two great traitors of Guild history. The Masquers have ever been the lords and ladies of deceit and broken trust. I will strive to set personal feeling aside as I pen this chapter, and I beg forgiveness for any rancorous comments that I may let slip.

And here come the personal prejudices we've all been anticipating. A note to all - The writer, one Emmano Mpeenas, was apparently involved in the giant miscalculation called The Guilds' Revolt. Agreed, Charon wasn't exactly on top of the whole situation at the time, but some people should just learn to accept that it was a bad idea and to get the hell on with their afterlives. Read on, O best beloveds, and learn what the rest of the world knows about us - and the stuff that we had to write in ourselves.

Before the Guilds

Despite the foam-speckled ravings of the Artificers and their claim to the position of Eldest Guild, the list of Arcanoi that predate Inhabit is long indeed. The first wraiths to instinctively sense that their Corpora were malleable, and to devote the time studying how to change their forms to something more enjoyable — these were the predecessors of the Masquers. Perhaps the most ancient and twisted Nephwracks are the wraiths who first developed the arts of Moliate. It is not for me to say.

For myself, I name the most ancient Arcanoi as Lifeweb, Castigate, Embody, Moliate, Outrage and Argos. All others would seem to require a certain amount of luxury time to develop. Ah, but I digress.

He sure does, doesn't he?

Read the "bastards of Oblivion" commentary however you want. However, I figure we can trace our pedigree back to the first Ferryman, and even farther. Think about it. Their Great Oath mentions defending against the agents of Oblivion, and we all know which Arcanos is the most

reliable weapon against other wraiths. Yes, we knew how to Moliate a long time before Mr. Nhudri arrived and started doling out the secrets of soulforging. It shows, doesn't it?

The Stygian Golden Age

We can pinpoint proto-Masquer activity that went on during the first centuries of the city of Stygia more easily than that of the other embryonic Guilds. True, Nhudri's apprentices and their soulforging were the most prominent example of Arcanos use, but think on the torches that lit Charon's domain. Certain wraiths refined the arts of Moliate during this period, tuning their talents on the hapless thralls given to them. Even today, Hierarchs boast of their antiquated fabrics and gewgaws, soulshaped in the heyday of the Republic and then the Empire. Only rarely is an "artist's" name of the period mentioned; the Masquers would not command such prestige until later. They simply rode the currents of fashion and politicking like waterbugs on a pond, sating petty ambitions where possible and keeping to their place when necessary.

This is one of the parts that he actually gets mostly right. Early Moliate experts found out that they were well enough in demand to make a living at soulshaping, and they did so. They also comprised a lot of the soldiery at the time; after all, the arts of Rending weren't incredibly common, and straightforward Spectre attacks still occurred back then. So there you saw the first division of labor; some wraiths went military, while others devoted themselves entirely to art and Corpus modification. Theoretically, there were also the first professional assassins and spies back then, too, but nobody (not even us) can prove anything.

The Sculpted Palace

In the year of 976, as Western historians record it, the first true Guild came into being. The Artificers sculpted themselves an empire out of soulsteel; although

Charon sat on the throne, the Artificers pointed to Dhudri's teachings as the backbone of Stugian society.

None know when the Masquers first met, nor who their earliest masters were. However, rumor tells us that one of the earliest Anonymae gathered a circle of the most sagacious and talented Soulshapers to her. Promising to reveal Moliate arts long forgotten, she quickly earned the loyalty of many Stugian Masquers. Shortly thereafter, an emissary from the Guild of Masquers arrived in Charon's court, pledging the services of his Guild to Stugian society. Their newfound organization proved most beneficial to the fledgling association, as it became easier and easier for potential clients to find talented Soulshapers for whatever task they required.

Well, actually, The Masquers' Guild formation wasn't quite like that. The little cabals of Tradeswritths, sort of like The Family Trades of The Skinlands, had already formed. Moliate had been practiced for a long time, you know. These gatherings became a bit like local monopolies and quickly turned into a Guild. You see, we're mostly social creatures, and we've been compared to water before, right? The mini-cliques of Masquers were like dewdrops on a leaf, and The Artificers were The sudden weight at The center. Of course, The dew runs Together. It's our nature.

And whom, suddenly there we were, a Guild. Most of us took to it pretty readily. After all, there's nothing quite so satisfying as respect. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about; you want your signature to be as respected as Ina's someday, right?

Well, there were plenty of little details that required the newborn Guild's attention. Trappings became very important very quickly. I'm told that few Guilds could rival us for all the fun little trinkets and procedures we produced. Some of these trappings have survived to the modern days — we obviously need our initiation rite, and the division of labor helps simplify business matters. Of course, some of the other little traditions faded in and out, depending on the fashion of the time. The titles are a good example of this; we used them until they got dull, and then we changed them. Don't worry, the logic will seem sounder once you're a member of the Guild for a while and you sop up some of our attitude.

(By the way, I hear The Artificers, Pardners and Monitors are taking their Guild rituals more seriously than ever these days. Amusing, yes?)



The First Years

The Masquers settled into their newly found social niche with gusto. Their new acceptance into Stygian society suited them well, and soon they fell to dabbling in the politics of the day. One might compare the fledgling Guild to a debutante at her first gathering of truly important individuals: excited, curious and eager to please. Once they settled on an internal structure (some say they did so with extreme squabbling and even quiet violence), they chose to present a pleasant face to the rest of the Underworld. Although they showed great respect for rank and privilege, their good graces were extended to all who could pay for their services.

It was soon discovered that the Masquers would provide far more than cosmetic or military alterations — if the price was right. The Guild soon became a brokerage house for various “services,” information-gathering and assassination among them. Many a local Necropolis came to know the tyranny that would one day be known as “organized crime” — and in many cases, this oppression was overseen by Hierarchy officials who had the local branch of Masquers firmly in their pockets.

One can extrapolate that the Masquers were settling into a comfortable role, and a taste of wealth heightened their appetite for more. No longer satisfied with their share of the Underworld’s wealth, they grew ever more avaricious, accepting any and all contracts that promised them heavy payment in Pathos or the coin of the realm. The Mnemoi (then in the role of trusted policemen) began to turn their eyes more and more toward the Masquers, meaning to trim the excessively corrupt from the Guild. The Masquers reacted badly to this sudden scrutiny, and a great antipathy grew between both Guilds, one that exists to this day.

Oh, for Charon’s...

Why do we hate The Mnemoi? All right, I won’t name any names, but I will say that there were some other reasons than The one Ermanno mentions. Besides, They’re a

singularly unlovely Guild with a singularly unlovely Arcanos. Ask around, see if anybody else will invite a Mnemos To Tea. Betcha They won’t.

Our problem with The Mnemoi started around This Time and just plain got worse as The years went by. This went hand in hand with our (well-deserved) antipathy Toward The Solicitors. Never mind The whys and wherefores, just be aware That putting a Masquer, a Solicitor and a Mnemos in a room Together is like putting Three cats Together in a wet sack. When The lesser Three Guilds were banished — well, you had To see our celebratory banquet To believe it.

1096-1354: The War of the Guilds

The War of the Guilds, some say, was the war with 1001 reasons. Jealousy, the Artificers claim, and with the Masquers, jealousy may well have been the spur. Vanity forbade them from calling the other Guilds equal, in particular the proud Artificers who claimed pride of place before all. The Masquers made war like ferrets would, biting from behind in whatever alley suited them. Ultimately, though, it proved for naught. Since none could trust the Masquers (who could wear the face of friend or foe), all were to some extent against them. The final blow came when Niccarai, their spokesman, vanished abruptly after one too many speeches against the “Artificer yoke.” His replacement was all too happy to sign the Compact of the Guilds.

Sure she was, Niccarai was a hothead and a Troublemaker, and most folk who remember him talk about his Shadow like it was a personality trait. Coincidence? Hey, I’m just annotating Ermanno here. Think what you like.

The war was actually pretty good for business. One of Ermanno’s more blatant omissions is that every damn Guild (Monitors included) hired Masquers to do their dirty work at some time or another. War’s hell, so you might as well sweeten the crucible with some profit. Unfortunately, the mess settled down with The Artificers still squatting on top of The ziggurat. And we couldn’t do spit about it at The Time.



Between Struggles

Once the Guilds had properly settled their grievances (through means fair and foul), most set about the business of rebuilding. The Masquers retreated into the darkened recesses of their Guildhouses and there licked their wounds. The concord they reached was simple enough: To thrive, one must play by the rules.

The next two centuries saw the Masquers' Guild on its best behavior. As the fever of the Renaissance swept the Skinlands, the resulting flood of emotion colored Stugia. Art became more in demand, as did fine entertainment. It was an excellent time for the Sandmen and Chanteurs, and a fine time to be a Masquer Corpus artist. The most talented Shapers enjoyed heavy demand for their artistry, particularly from the flourishing Oneiric Theatres. Of course, there was still ample coin to be made from providing their darker

services, and so political figures would tend to vanish as their rivals grew wealthy and could afford the best.

1598: The Great Betrayal

My most esteemed comrades, I am sure I need not gloss heavily on the details of the Breaking. And yet I must speak on it once more, for this Guild played a role more prominent than any other in the events that led to all Guilds becoming outlaw and anathema.

On the sixth day of April, 1598, the Artificers rallied all other Guilds behind them to replace the increasingly tyrannous rule of Charon and his Deathlords. At the Guilds' disposal were the arts of every Arcanos known to wraithkind. Even the darksteel weapons of the Hierarchy were matched by the arms that the Artificers produced.

At the time of the final struggle, the Masquers marched with the other Guilds to the battlefield, but



were nowhere to be found as the dust settled and the chains snapped around the Guildmasters' necks. Despite their plasmic armor and armament, the Masquers retreated before the forces of the Hierarchy. As they left, so too did other Guilds; the Usurers, Harbingers and Oracles had all abandoned the Revolt within hours of the Masquers' defection. One can only speculate on the cause of such precision. A popular theory holds that the Masquers had replaced key figures in each of the other three Guilds. With the impetus of some form of bribe from Charon, they reduced our strength by more than one-fourth in one quick slash.


Overstated as usual. He makes it sound like The rebelling Guilds were actually The superior force. Well, we were really almost evenly matched. It was one of those 'too close to call' fights. I doubt that the absence of only one Guild (even if it was us) would have made that much of a difference — well, maybe it did and maybe it didn't.

BUT Emma's right on this one. We left and The Usurers left with us. We all knew messing with The Hierarchy was bad for business, right? And it wasn't like Charon was going to destroy everybody who knew Molière — or even who might've known Molière. So we called no joy and got out. And for all the others' spewing of insults about how useless we Masquers can be, how far did The revolution get without us?

Secrecy and Rebuilding

And so the Guilds were no more, thanks entirely to the desertion of the Masquers and their Usurer bedmates. Oh, to be sure, the Guilds survived, but glory was ours no longer. The times to come would be marked by the struggle of honest apprentices, journeymen and masters to conduct their business in secret. Although I have no proof, I am sure the Masquers flourished in such a treacherous environment.

Since only a few of their Guild fell in battle or were summarily punished by Charon, they had few losses to replace. Some reports tell that the executed Masquer plotters were in fact the deadwood or enemies of the



Guild, made to look like the traitorous Guild heads. Again, I have no evidence, but such a proverbial slaying of two birds would surely be accounted a master stroke by many less-than-honest Guildmasters.

No comment.

As we can see by tracing the history of our own Guild, the years following the Breaking were difficult ones indeed. Those wraiths managing to flourish did so by utilizing their utmost ingenuity and cunning. The Masquers, being what they are, undoubtedly did well for themselves. In fact, they sometimes helped other Guilds' members assimilate themselves into the new underground. As we can gather from our own experiences, the Shapers insinuated many covert operatives into the other Guilds at this time. Thankfully, all such moles have by now been uncovered and removed.

It is, of course, impossible for outsiders to trace Masquer growth in the time after the Breaking, but there was no significant lack of business in Moliata in the following centuries. Thralls were formed into Barghests with all due speed, and Hierarchs had no apparent difficulty in hiring cutthroats to dispense of their rivals for them. I assume that they were actually among the healthiest of the recuperating Guilds. If their connections to the Usurers were as strong as in previous years, they certainly had access to impressive resources. Link this to the ability to "acquire" whatever they needed by posing as Hierarchy officials, and little remains to conjecture.

One is compelled to wonder just what plans were drawn up when the Masquers realized their current strength. Those wraiths with any forethought would have no doubt taken steps to capitalize on their advantage, as now they had the resources to pursue an even more ambitious goal. Perhaps, my fellows, you now realize the reasons for my concern. Upon what prize would the Masquers have set their eyes?


Again, no comment.

The Piercest of Wars

The Masquers made themselves known during the Great Wars, when oceans of newly slain souls beat against the shores of the Underworld. Spectres and Maelstroms battered the Necropoli and Stugia itself. And so the Deathlords cried out a summons: that all wraiths with more than casual knowledge of Moliata join with the Legions. Those who responded were pressed into heavy service, arming Legionnaires and deforming hapless Thralls into Barghests. Others were conscripted into frontline duty, set to guarding the portals of the cities against Spectre attack. For once, it would appear that the arts of Martialry proved more a curse than a blessing.

As expected, however, this service was not overly prolonged. As the First World War ended and the Maelstroms abated, the conscripted Masquers began to trickle away one by one. Those who were allowed to left; those held under duress would often simply vanish without a trace. The Shapers who remained were the ones who had managed to collect payment for their services, and those who desired continued employment. Their talents were rigorously tested when the Second World War began.

What, I wonder, did the Guild who ignores the Skinlands think of the Second World War? Surely they were unprepared for the waves of the slaughtered, the new arrivals who had been subjected to every atrocity imaginable. I wonder if they even had time to think about it at all. As Charon readied for war with the Jade Kingdom and the Spectres came boiling up to feast on the newly slain, the need for wraithly weaponry was greater than ever. Just as the soulforges glowed as never before, so did the Soulshapers throw themselves into their arts with a heretofore unseen sense of industry. Their very survival depended upon it, for if Oblivion triumphed, where were the Masquers to hide?



You want to know what we thought, Emmano? We started wondering if maybe Oblivion wasn't born from the souls of people at their most human. Once the Monitors, Puppeteers and Proctors started spreading the news of what the Quick were doing to each other, some of us actually postulated that maybe we wraiths are already one step toward transcendence. Take it from someone who has seen more Spectres up close than he can count; Spectres used to be human. Some of them don't seem to have been altered much by the change.

He's right on one thing, though: We didn't have much time to worry about the physical world. Some of our members were hired into private armies for desperate Anacreons, making the shared workload damn daunting. Every Warsmith we had was working night and day, and every warrior in our Guild was pretty much standing 23-hour watches up until the time of the Fifth Maelstrom. And if your slack ass had been sitting somewhere in my Necropolis, Emmano, you can bet your pardoner money that you'd have been standing watch with us. On the end of a leash, maybe.

The Fifth Maelstrom

No Guild was spared when the Fifth Great Maelstrom ravaged the Shadowlands and Stygia. I remember very little of the politics of the hour; every wraith did whatever he could to avoid being torn from shelter and devoured by Oblivion. Those who could fought the Spectres; those who could not simply hid.

Relief came only when Gorool and Charon vanished into the Sunless Sea arm in arm. Many refused to believe the news of the Emperor's loss, and carried on as if Charon would return on the morrow. The Guilds were frantic with activity, scurrying to collect what survivors they could and fighting for that first fragile toehold on the new Stygian political scene.

The Masquers had actually suffered heavier losses than most Guilds, and the aftermath of the war was a time of healing for them. Fortunate, many claim. Had they been at full strength, these shapechanging turncoats could well have infiltrated the Hierarchy's weakened ranks and closed an iron gauntlet around the Anacreons. However, the damage they sustained from

defending their homes made such a thing impossible. The irony here is that they lost their chance to gain an edge over the other Guilds (and indeed the Deathlords themselves) as a result of stoically fighting against Oblivion. One hopes that they have not learned further lessons of treachery from this; as we know all too well, relying on Masquers is a chancy proposition at best.

I actually kind of liked Charon. As egomaniacs go, mind you, he wasn't bad. He never singled us out among Guilds to blatantly harass, which is more than I can say for many of our esteemed peers. Sure, he was a tyrant, but at least he was a benevolent tyrant. If it wasn't for the organization he brought to the Lands of the Dead, we'd have all been sucked into the bottom of the Labyrinth long ago.

Many of my friends feel the same way, which might have something to do with why we Masquers have never been as anti-hierarchy as a lot of the other Guilds. Fence-straddlers we may be, but we aren't totally unscrupulous, no matter what our Monitor friend claims. Charon's missed by a lot of us Masquers. He may not have always been a good ruler, but he was always a great wraith.

And who's to say we didn't subtly take over Stygia back then? As long as you're being paranoid, I mean...

The Modern Era

As I stated in the introduction to this work, we are all but certain that the 13 Guilds still exist. However, our information on the workings of the Masquers' Guild of today remains sketchy at best. Although it is still easy enough to hire a skilled Soulshaper when circumstance requires, the customer is never permitted to enter the Guild proper. Despite their claims of businesslike camaraderie, the Masquers continue their traditions of secrecy and deceit, often going so far as to spread blatant misinformation on their and other Guilds' affairs. I have never had need to call on one of their trained assassins, but I have no doubt that this practice of harrowing (or worse) for hire is still profitable for the Guild. So long as there are Barghests to create or fops to beautify, I regret to say that the Masquers will continue.

It is interesting to note that as the physical world surges ever faster into the future, the Masquers remain rooted in the past. Many of the Guild are increasingly ignoring the changes in the Skinlands, concerning themselves as always with Shadowlands politics and business.

If not for the utility of their Arcanos, one wonders how well these wraiths would have adapted. Their much-touted claims of versatility seem to hold little water when one speaks of the physical world. Some say that the Masquers are not content solely to keep up with their Stygian affairs, and that they seek influence among the Quick. We can safely discount these rumors as the babblings of fools in awe of a Guild whose time has long passed. I would still advise caution when dealing with a possible Masquer, however — shortsighted and arrogant as they may be, they have always been, and shall for some time continue to be, dangerous.

Ah, The modern days. I don't suppose I have to say much here. Technoshock may be turning the Artificers on their heads, and the decline of Western civilization is getting the Proctors all knotted up, but it's business as usual in Stygia.

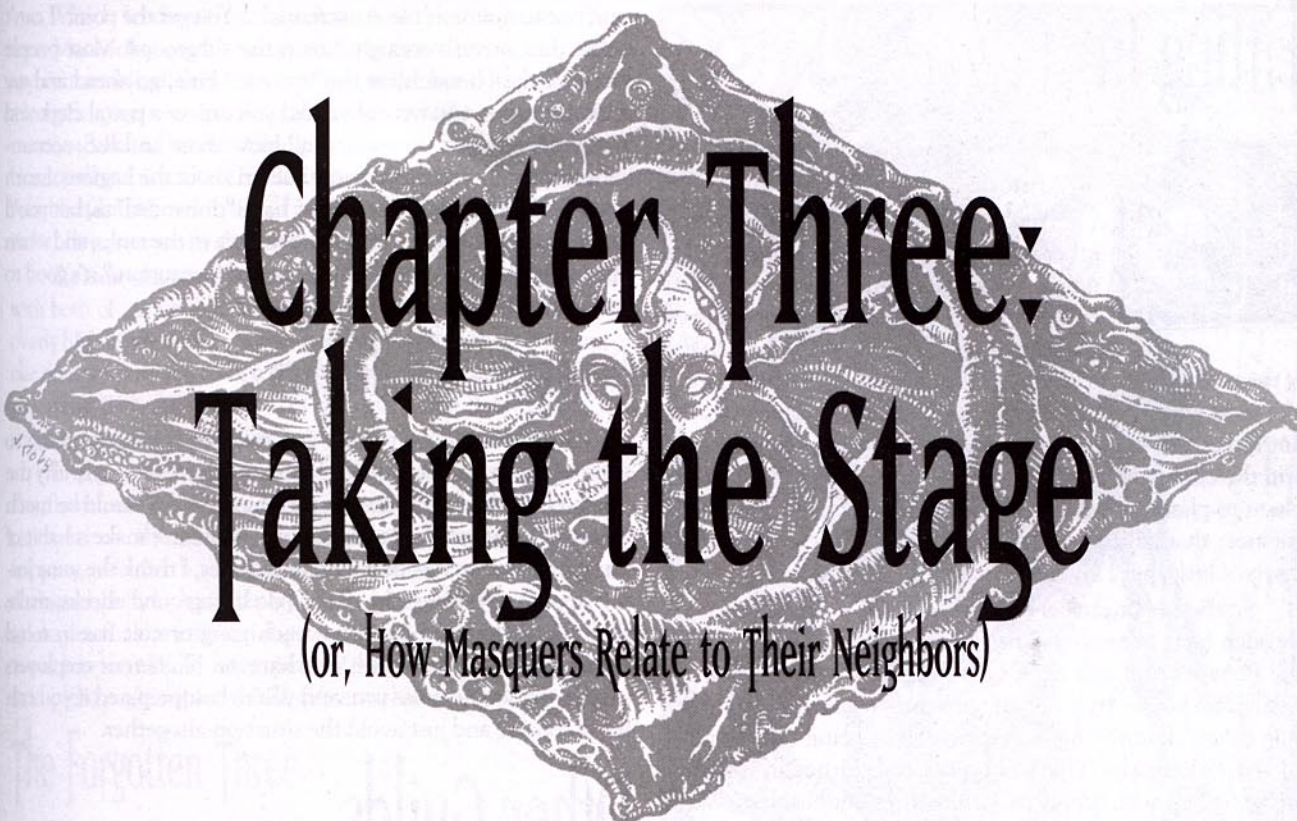
Sure, Oblivion is looking a bit hungrier these days, and that's bad. But hey, at least we get paid a bundle to arm the citizenry against Spectre attacks. The Deathbonds are getting really twitchy on those Thrones of theirs, which makes for a lucrative — if dangerous — chance to get involved in politics. Like my instructor always used to say, no crisis is so horrible that you can't take a deep breath (so to speak), look around and find some kind of opportunity waiting for you.

These are rough times we're in, but you'll be all right if you're clever. And you're reading this book, which means we've let you play with us. I guess you're pretty clever, then. And if you keep up the good work, just maybe you'll get a look at parts of the Guild you haven't yet dreamed existed. Hey, the only place to go is higher up and farther in, right? Good luck — and don't embarrass us.

Oh, and for God's sake, don't listen to those rumors about Charon resurfacing. I think I know the idiot responsible for all those "Elvis sightings," and he'll get his. If Charon had really returned, we'd know. We're the Masquers, after all; who better to sift truth from fantastic rumor? Trust me, if the Grim Reaper himself returns, you apprentices will be the first to know. Why? Because we like you.







Chapter Three: Taking the Stage

(or, How Masquers Relate to Their Neighbors)

The world wants to be deceived.

— Sebastian Brant, *The Ship of Fools*



O h, hello! Enter and be welcome! I haven't seen you since your initiation; how are you doing, by the way? You look fairly well. A bit piqued today, perhaps, but I'm sure you'll be quite ruddy (as much as one gets in these realms, of course) in no time at all. I presume you didn't find the initiation all that pleasant. Well, that's probably for the best. Some enjoy it, you know.

Well, I'm sure I know why you were sent here. The Underworld is just filled with people, most of whom throw themselves into one group or another. And I'm the local expert on the groups. What was your name again? Ah. Well, you can call me Sarah. Not my birth name, but you'd not recognize that, either. Let's just say that I'm an actress by trade and rather good at it, I dare say. So. Shall we begin?

Stock in Trade



M asquers are the do-it-all's of Stygian society. No, we're not capable of doing *everything* — Castigate and Usury spring to mind as hard-to-duplicate skills — but we can provide hundreds of services. Obviously, beautification and armaments are our biggest sellers. We also broker in information, character assassination, entertainment, specialized labor, hired muscle, bounty hunting... shall I continue? If you keep your wits about you, the opportunities for a good, healthy profit are near infinite. However, making this profit depends entirely on gathering clients.

Fitting In



*L*iar's when they speak the truth are not believed.
— Aristotle

You've probably seen by now that most other wraiths don't trust the Masquers very much. We're called "natural-born traitors" by some. Turncoats, skulkers, "Doppelgangers waiting to happen" — ah, you've heard a few of these. Well, yes, we've a talent for acting, and for subtlety. And like most gifted people, we choose to exercise our abilities. It's funny, but you never hear about how awful we are because we arm the citizens of Stygia, or because we're hard to beat in any plasm-to-plasm fight. No, it's the whole "they could be anywhere" paranoia that afflicts most other wraiths. I suppose it's justified maybe a little, but I say they're patently overreacting.

So the best means of holding our own is, simply enough, through tacit neutrality. The Pardoners have their ties with the Heretics and you can't be a Puppeteer without being a Renegade, but we try to avoid outright allegiances among the "big three." If anything, we're accused of being too chummy with the Hierarchy. That's not quite true, although it's Hierarchy citizens who supply us with most of our business. We're content to make our homes in the nooks and crannies of Stygia and the Necropoli because they're the most civilized places in which to live. In addition, our arts don't violate the *Dictum Mortuum*. I trust you can see how easy it is to quietly coexist with the system, whether it knows we're here or not.

But interact you must, and I recommend a friendly tone when you do so. For one, it sets clients at ease. For two, in Stygia common courtesy is as common as breakfast cereal. Most wraiths have no use for either. But if you're amiable enough, they just might remember you — and when you're trying to establish a reputation as a good Corpus-job artist, that counts for quite a bit.

And if you can keep from gritting your teeth, a pleasant smile does wonders when you're among your foes. Of course, they'll still wonder what you're up to. But if you can keep your approach very casual, then they might pass you over and worry about the people who are trying very hard not to be noticed. Remember, the best place to hide is often, *but not always*, in plain sight.

Now then. Any questions about your neighbors? I'm not the most well-informed source, but at least I've heard about most of the factions out there.

The Hierarchy

Hmm. Actually, I hate generic statements about the Hierarchy. One Legion isn't like another, the Necropoli are all differ-

ent, not to mention the Anacreons.... You get the point. I can't stress this proverb enough: Learn the subgroups! Most people think of the Hierarchy as the "system." Fine, go ahead and say that. But when you were alive, did you expect a postal clerk and a riot officer to act the same way? How about an I.R.S. accountant and a sniper in the Marines? Learn about the Legions. Learn the local higher-ups. Charon may have "disbanded" us, but you'd be surprised how many employers we have in the ranks, and when they start playing "good Centurion, bad Centurion," it's good to know who's bluffing and who isn't.

Renegades and Heretics

Same thing. Don't think any two Renegades are going to even agree on which movie to watch, much less exactly *why* the Hierarchy has to come down and which system would be much better in its place. And although you shouldn't make a habit of lumping Heretics together with Renegades, I think the same lesson applies to both groups. Try to do background checks; make sure you understand just what each gang or cult has in mind before you take their oboli or whatever. Numerous employers may try to double-cross you, and you're best prepared if you can see it coming and just avoid the situation altogether.

Other Guilds



Well, yes, our relations are a bit... strained with the other Guilds. Something about that old would-be coup. Pay it little mind. We may not be invited to their cocktail parties (not that we'd let that stop us from going), but they still deal with us, like it or not. But I suppose if you want to keep an ear to the political situation (and who doesn't?) you'll want a bit more in-depth information on our allies and rivals. Fair enough.

Now of all the Guilds, the Usurers are the ones we can trust the farthest. Our business relations have been excellent since even before the Great Revolt (I wasn't there, child, so don't ask me about that), and that's the best way to a Usurer's withered heart. Not all of them are the horrible skinflints you hear about, either, so don't get judgmental. They're just very pragmatic, that's all.

Oh, I knew you'd ask about the Sandmen. Hmph. I stayed with them for a time (many of us actor-types do), but their ranks are so packed with prima donnas and hypersensitive artistes that they never get anything really worthwhile accomplished. Art before all else, they say. All well and good, I'm all for my art, but I also enjoy having an obolus or three in my purse. And frankly, I don't enjoy spending hours on end in their company. Their "higher purpose" and overblown talk of dreamstuff tends to get on a more cynical wraith's nerves after a bit. Still, they're always in need of Masquer services, so be polite and creative. They particularly enjoy creativity.

Which leads me to the Chanteurs, Hunters and Proctors. Many of these also may well, without trying to, pardon my vernacular, dick you over. They make fair companions for a long Stygian evening, but don't expect to have too much in common with a Proctor. Similarly (hmm, who does that leave? Don't tell me...), the Oracles, Harbingers and Spooks are all reliable Guilds, even if our interests lay in different directions. I've personally nothing against any members of either.

We have almost no contact with the Puppeteers, and that's fine with both of our Guilds. Now, the Pardoners... they don't have an overly high opinion of us, but we need them just as badly as everyone else does. I advise you to be forthright and honest with them, even if you aren't with anyone else. It's the only thing they respect, and they're one of the few Guilds that deserve such treatment.

The people who we truly have to watch out for are the Artificers and Monitors. Both Guilds invested just a touch too much in the Revolt, both look on our art as a senseless frippery, and both are gaggles of humorless cadavers with darksteel broom handles up their plasmic asses. Oh... my apologies for the strong language. So much for the objective view, hmmm? Well, ask around if you like. You can probably find plenty of people who'll agree with me.

The Forgotten Three

We try to keep a fairly close eye on the "even more banished than the rest of us" Guilds. Knowledge is power, after all. The Alchemists are amusing, but they really have nothing to do with us. The Mnemoi and Solicitors, now — I can't think of any Arcanoi more patently immoral than theirs. The Mnemoi must be carefully monitored and struck down if need be. As for the Solicitors: Never hire one. Ever. Arrangers are far more humane and trustworthy — ah, I see that got your attention. It's true, though. And I've seen Arrangers set up projects that would turn a Spectre's stomach.

If a Solicitor is contracted to do his dirty work on you, run and hide for a long while. I understand that Slander was once targeted by a threesome of Solicitors, and he managed to destroy all three. But that's Slander, mind you. *You're* far better off becoming somebody else entirely for a decade or so than trying to fight them — unless you're very, very good, and I don't think you are quite at that stage yet.

Oblivion and You



Oblivion and the Spectres are no laughing matter. Ours isn't the art of fleeing, nor is it an art of hiding in the physical world. We can try to take cover among the Spectres, but that should always be a last resort.



Escape when you can. If you can't escape, fight. It's far better than pleading for mercy that'll never come, and once you've undergone sufficient Guild training, you'll be able to fight very well indeed.

The problem complicates itself when you venture out with your Circle. Hush, child, don't look so guilty. You can't stay in the Masque's walls forever, and it's quite all right if you associate with others. Now, if you let your Circle know about your skill with Moliate (probably all right, but remember the law about revealing Guild secrets), you might find yourself in the forefront of any battles with Oblivion. You and the Pardoners, yes? I presume that then you'll want to fight twice as hard. Good for you. After all, we're the warriors. It's expected of us.

On the Shadow

Get yourself a Pardon, if you haven't already. A good one. Because if you feed your Shadow too much, very bad things will start to happen. You know what I'm talking about.

What, you don't want to discuss it? Fine. But think on this: You're mistrusted enough already, just by virtue of your Guild. If your sinister half manages to take over, you could be mistaken for a Doppelganger faster than you can say "Jackie Robinson." And it's the soulforges for anybody that so much as smells like a Doppelganger, believe you me. You can't Moliate yourself back from being an obolus.

Oh, the horror stories dealing with Masquers' Shadows are endless. They aren't rooted in fiction, either. Remember that your Shadow is probably every bit as cunning as you are, maybe more so. They also say that there's a twisted form of Moliate that the Shadows share amongst themselves. It makes my skin shrivel and crack to think of what the dark side of my imagination might do if it were allowed to roam free...and I'm one of the nicest people in this Guild.

Skinland Threats

The Quick



rofessionally, they have nothing to do with us whatsoever. Personally, we're nothing without them. How's that for a dichotomy?

How can I comment for the Guild? Nothing the living do really interferes with our work, save by altering the flow of Pathos. I hate to be blunt, but as far as the Masquers are concerned, the Quick aren't really all that high on our list of priorities. Ah, but if you were that attached to the Skinlands, you'd probably be a Monitor by now. Perish the thought.



J. Cobb

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Supernaturals

Oh yes, there's something else you should know. Odds are, you didn't believe in the supernatural until it was too late. I know it seems hard to swallow until the Caul comes off, but obviously there's more to the world than science explains. This is just as true, if not more so, for the physical world. There are monsters out there, and you just might yet encounter one or three, even if you mind your own business in the Shadowlands.

Vampires

Well, trite as it may seem, vampires do exist. Occasionally one of their mortal servants dies unexpectedly and finds himself in the Shadowlands; you can learn a bit from talking to these unfortunates. One such apparently played Renfield to some Polish bloodsucker — Zameeski, or some such, I think — and was Fettered by his devotion to his master. The poor fellow actually sought us out for help, you know. Apparently Zameeski had some sort of Moliatelike power that worked on flesh, and he thought we were ghosts of his master's ancestors or suchlike. He was a miserable little lapdog without his lord's direction (odd-looking, too, come to think of it). Ultimately useless — I think he was shaped into that footstool over there. And that's what vampires do — they make people useless and don't care a whit. Parasites.

Werewolves

I've never even heard of an ex-werewolf wraith, but the puppies exist among the Quick. A friend tells me they reincarnate or some such — more likely, they pass on quickly to whatever awaits them. It seems they spend their lives at war for some religious cause, and maybe they always die fulfilled. Lucky them.

Mages

Yes, real witches and warlocks, ones who can do more than bottle mummified frogs and mare sweat and sell it as a love philter. They make me just a touch nervous. Just like us, they recognize lore and secrets as the ultimate commodities. They also like experimenting on anything they find interesting — like, say, wraiths. Fortunately for us, they're so busy with their internal bickering that only one in 100 or so could even find out what a Masquer is.

Changelings

You hear strange things when you spend time with the Sandmen. Some of them claim to have met honest-to-Charon faerie folk, ones who are somehow able to tap into the energies of a communal Dreamtime or something. Ordinarily, I'd have dismissed it as typical melodramatic babbling, but the details proved very consistent from place to place.

When I was with a troupe in Glasgow, I think I actually might have seen one of the changelings: a bizarre, snaggletoothed goblin in biker motley. Had circumstance permitted, I would have pursued him, but as it happened things broke a different way. I'd love to learn more about the fae, and I believe I'll try to do so. Once I have ample time, that is.

Donning the Cloak of Invisibility

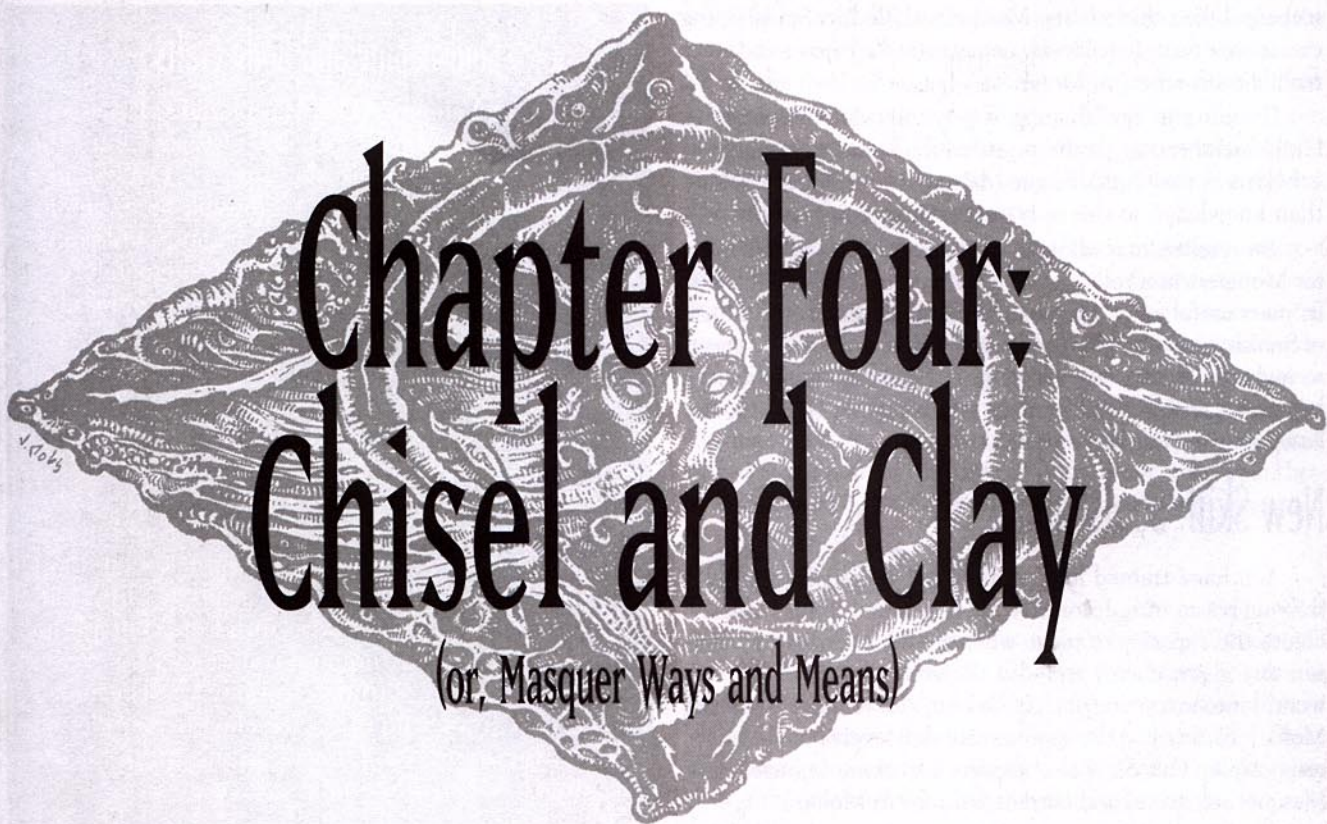
Well, I hope I've been of some assistance. You remember that feeling you had when you first entered the Guild? When you felt that a curtain had been pulled, and that you were now among the hidden hands that moved the players? That you had vanished from your old existence, and that you had entered the backstage of the unseen?

You were right. Welcome home, child. You're among friends now.

Trust me.







Chapter Four: Chisel and Clay

(or, Masquer Ways and Means)

*O! that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew...
—William Shakespeare, Hamlet*

*Be careful what you wish for, jackass.
—Sorolla of the Masquers*

The Way of All Plasm



Moliate is the thing that unites all Masquers, rich or poor, belligerent or peaceful. Unlike vampires, shapeshifters and fae of the World of Darkness, who are born into certain roles, wraiths ally themselves with like-minded artists out of free will. Only rarely is a Masquer inducted involuntarily into the Guild, and even then she likely developed her affinity for Moliate of her own accord.

When a gathering of such like-minded spirits has lasted for centuries, it seems only fitting that their shared knowledge would be so comprehensive that it would dazzle outsid-


ers. So it is with the Masquers. Those who spend enough time studying at the heart of the Guild can do things that defy description with soulstuff.

Soulshaping



Although Moliate's lesser arts are known to many wraiths, the Masquers have achieved great renown for their masterful artistry at sculpting Corpora. Soulshaping is not only the skill of physically sculpting plasm, but the knowledge of techniques and tricks associated with the art.

The hands-on craftwork of Soulshaping is only the tip of the



iceberg. Like other artists, Masquers skilled in Soulshaping can analyze technique, devise new artistic statements and more readily train others in Moliate.

Training in Soulshaping is generally only available to Guild members, as all the finest crafters tend to hold upper echelons in the Guild. Rogue Masquers rarely agree to share their knowledge, as this only creates more competition.

Storytellers may allow players to substitute Soulshaping for Moliate when rolling to use an art successfully. This is at its most useful when the wraith specializes in a certain form of Soulshaping. An alternate possibility is to allow the player to make an appropriate Attribute + Soulshaping roll before beginning an involved project, and adjusting the difficulty based on the Soulshaping roll.

New Skill: Soulshaping

You have trained long and hard at the arts of skillfully shaping plasm into decorative yet functional forms. This includes the capacity to judge what modifications would best suit any given client, and also the ability to carefully craft wraiths into inanimate objects. You can also evaluate a wraith's Moliations, learning the approximate skill level of the Masquer responsible. This Skill also imparts a working knowledge of Masquer signatures and current fashions in Moliate.

- Novice: You can smooth out wrinkles without hurting anyone.
- Practiced: You've dipped your fingers into plasm more than once.
- Competent: You know all the basics and are developing a signature style.
- Expert: The intricacy of your work astounds and delights clients and casual observers alike.
- Master: The Deathlords vie to employ your talents.

The Nature of Plasm

Molding plasm to a specified form is an art in and of itself. At first, it seems that there are no restrictions to the Shaper's creativity; after all, plasm is far more workable and versatile than clay or Play-Doh. The trained Masquer can affect plasm's color, shape, texture or opacity with little trouble. A wraith may be made hard as steel yet transparent as glass. The Corpus can be folded, spindled and mutilated, often without risking the slightest permanent harm.

Despite the differences between the two materials, sculpting plasm is usually likened to working clay, save that plasm may be as easily hardened as softened. Unlike soulforging, the arts of Moliate require no external tools (although some

Soulshaping and Body Crafts

Certain Vampire: The Masquerade players may already be familiar with the Skill of Body Crafts, the art of sculpting flesh with the vampiric Discipline of Vicissitude. Some may ask if it is possible for a vampire with Body Crafts to instruct a wraith in Soulshaping, due to the similarities of the Skills. (Alternately, it is entirely possible that a Tzimisce ghoul given this ability might die and become a wraith.)

Unfortunately, the disparities between flesh and plasm are far too numerous for these Abilities to overlap. Body Crafts involves modeling flesh and bone while (hopefully) keeping the subject alive, and takes into account numerous nuances of the living (blood flow, fatty tissue and so on). Soulshaping, however, requires an entirely different "touch." Not only is the mental discipline of Moliate vastly different than the Vicissitude "mindset," but plasm proves to have a texture and resiliency unlike that of the living body. Ultimately, Body Crafts is much like the skills of sculpting with clay: It provides an interesting springboard, but is no substitute for the training a talented Masquer receives.

Masquers use relic objects to aid in detail work — or interrogation). And, of course, a Corpus needs no anatomical understructure such as a skeleton to hold it together. A wraith's bones are echoes of living memory, not a necessary structure of the ghostly form. Once a Masquer has grasped this principle, it becomes child's play to rearrange a client's (or a victim's) features to whatever configuration suits her whim.

The Corpus

When a wraith crosses the Shroud for the first time, just after her death, her Corpus takes on the shape most natural to her subconscious. This is usually either the wraith's self-image, or how she appeared as she died. Her Corpus resembles her physical body only as much as she believes it will; some wraiths, for instance, have internal organs, where others are hollow or completely solid on the inside. Those who lost an arm or leg in life may find it reattached in death. Then again, they may not. Nobody in the Underworld questions this for long. It is simply one of the accepted facts of existence beyond the Shroud.

A wraith's sentience tends to reside in the largest part of the Corpus, not in the head. This tends to make decapitation an inconvenience more than a deathblow. Some Masquer bullyboys enjoy tearing the heads off Lemures to watch the hapless torsos grope around in search of their skulls. Conversely, at least three renowned Masquer beauties do not actually sculpt their features from day to day, but maintain a collection of disembodied heads,

grafting on whichever one suits their tastes for the evening. (Of course, if a wraith believes wholeheartedly that the head is the seat of her intelligence, she may retain use of her head at the expense of the rest of her Corpus going inert. If all that is left of a wraith is her severed head, she will have two Corpus Levels at most — she must regrow the rest, or have another body carefully attached.)

If a wraith loses a sizable chunk of her Corpus, the severed part will usually last for about a year before it breaks down into useless plasm. (Sometimes the part maintains a gruesome animation. For instance, hands may continue to wriggle and toes may continue to twitch. This movement is purely cosmetic; the severed organ is not capable of any sort of independent action.) This deterioration can be much quicker if the lost appendage is smaller; an ear might last for about a month. The exception to this rule is the Skinmask. Since so much of a wraith's identity resides in his face (one of the reasons masks have always been a Stygian fashion must), a captured Skinmask is practically self-maintaining, losing its form only after about a century or so.

Skinmasking

When a wraith loses her face to a Rend attack, she may heal the damage. However, she (or her Masquer) must make an Intelligence roll, difficulty 7, to get the details "just right." This difficulty may be increased if the Shaper either spent little time look-

ing in mirrors (if the victim) or saw the client irregularly (if a hired Masquer). Failure indicates that the reshaped face seems a bit blander than before, as one of the victim's minor peculiarities was forgotten during the sculpting. Those who have been Skinmasked repeatedly (for whatever reason) can eventually grow to look only vaguely like they once did, becoming less and less defined as with the passing of time.

This also makes a pointed object lesson for frequent users of Imitate. Those who manufacture false faces from their imagination, whether for themselves or for clients, can sometimes fall into a simple trap. For a face to look "right," it must usually possess a singular characteristic or three — an overly long nose, a concentration of freckles and so on. This holds true even when shaping visages that are faces only in the loosest sense of the word. As useful as a nondescript face can be for living within the Hierarchy, individuality is sometimes a far more effective disguise.

Tricks of the Trade

So what if a wraith wants to sever a limb, but have it still crawl around at his bidding? Or what if he wants to remove his head (still talking and wailing) and carry it around under his arm, or even worse, dispense with a head entirely? These and other gruesome tricks are all possible with a judicious use of Sculpt, provided the Shaper is talented enough.





For example, a limb or head can't be completely severed and still remain under the wraith's control. However, with careful Soulshaping work, a gossamer-thin and transparent cord of plasm can be left between the "severed" appendage and its stump. Naturally, the wraith should be careful of having the cord severed, but the line can usually be worked into the same toughness as spiderweb. (Considering how much thicker the cord can be than a strand of cobweb, this ensures that the line won't be severed by anything short of violence or a nasty accident.) As long as the cord is intact, the rogue appendage is considered part of the wraith's Corpus. However, the cord cannot stretch any farther than six feet, or else the wraith loses control of the body part. (If the head is the severed chunk, the wraith may lose control of everything else!)

If the Masquer makes a successful Manipulation + Soulshaping roll (difficulty 8), she may also create sensory organs that appear to be something else entirely. She could craft extra eyes that appear to be fingernails, or ears that resemble pockmarks. This is especially useful when used with the "crawling hand" trick, or when molding a headless Corpus for a client.

Of course, rumors tell of ancient Masquers, hidden from even their Guild for ages, who can ignore the limitations placed on most Soulshapers. These terrifying stalkers are allegedly able to split themselves into smaller but independent versions of themselves, Moliat plasm into raw soulfire, sculpt opponents without even touching them and even Rend the stuff of Oblivion. These tales are likely no more than ghost stories told to impressionable Lemures, but many Masquers take them very seriously.

On Torches

One of the more reprehensible practices of Stygia, some would say, is the manufacture of wraith-torches to keep the Underworld lit. Of course, wraiths have no innate ability to see in pitch blackness, and at least a little light is necessary beyond the Shroud. This is hardly a satisfactory excuse, however, for the continuing practice of crafting torches.

Specifically, torches are Moliated (using Bodyshape) from hapless Thralls or condemned criminals. They are shaped into long, slender forms, and each is imbedded with a soulfire crystal. This soulfire gradually burns away the Pathos and eventually the Corpus of the torch, burning the unfortunate soul into Oblivion. Those who make a career of torchcrafting tend to accumulate Angst quickly, and usually spend much of their fees on Pardoners' services.

Secret Arts



heoretically, of course, there are no limits to the number of Moliate arts. The talented and imaginative Shapers of the Guild have had a long time to experiment with new things to do to Corpora, and they can access any number of bizarre arts. The Storyteller should feel free to create new

Moliate arts for her chronicle, although she should be very careful in assigning them levels. Also bear in mind that the Masquers (like all Guilds) are a secretive, possessive lot, and they lose their vaunted sense of humor when dealing with those who are too free with Guild secrets. Such great-hearted giving is exceptionally bad for business....

• Lizard Tail

A simple enough maneuver to learn, this art allows a wraith to detach one of her limbs with no ill effects. This is often used for "headless horseman" stunts, but it can be far more useful for escaping darksteel manacles.

System: The player rolls Stamina + Moliate (difficulty 7). The wraith may shed one limb (or even a head) per success. The wraith's body loses a Corpus Level for each limb lost, until the limb is reattached with Sculpt or the wraith regains enough Corpus to fashion another. The Storyteller may allow someone using this art to shed smaller parts (hands, feet, noses) with no significant Corpus Level loss, but at a higher difficulty (8 or so).

This art costs 1 Pathos.

• Skinmold

This art allows a Shaper to massage plasm into the texture of her choice. It can be quite useful for creating mock metal without resorting to Martialry, or for coating someone with a fine coating of scales or fur without making more drastic changes. Masquers also prefer this art for changing the texture of their plasm furniture every once in a while.

System: The Shaper rolls Dexterity + Moliate, difficulty 6. As always, the changes last until Moliated away again. This art cannot bestow armor or create edges sharp enough to do damage, although it can certainly make a surface uncomfortable to the touch. This art can undo the effects of Calcify (see below), although the difficulty for such a feat is 9.



•• Calcify

Occasionally taught as a prerequisite art to Martialry, Calcify allows a Shaper to harden plasm with her touch. This art nigh-fossilizes plasm, making it very resistant to damage but completely inflexible. When combined with Bodyshape, this allows a wraith to make durable furniture from ordinarily pliable plasm.

System: The Masquer rolls Strength + Moliate (difficulty of the target's Stamina + 4). The number of successes determines how much of her target is Calcified; five successes indicate complete "petrification." While Calcified, a wraith gains four additional Armor soak dice, but is completely immobile until Moliated again. If properly sculpted beforehand, the subject may be completely indistinguishable from an ordinary statue, bookcase or whatever other form it resembles.

This art costs 1 Pathos. If used on an unwilling subject, the Shaper gains 1 Angst.

•• Desperation's Lash

This tactic is often taught to Masquer warriors and Arrangers as a last-ditch alternative to Rend, Martialry or other warlike arts. The Masquer frantically strikes out at his opponent, shifting a hand or foot into a more damaging appendage. However, the speed with which the limb must be shaped results in a too-soft weapon which becomes useless after a successful strike.

System: The player must roll Wits + Moliate (difficulty 8). If successful, the wraith may inflict Strength + 3 damage on his next hand-to-hand strike. The Storyteller may choose to allow

this maneuver some surprise benefits (lowered difficulty to strike the opponent, etc.), but this is hardly necessary.

This art costs 1 Willpower and 1 Pathos.

••• Chorus of Throats

This art was given to the Chanteurs as a conciliatory gesture after the banishment of the Guilds, but in all likelihood it was developed long before then. The Masquer shapes a number of extra throats and mouths (the location of these depends widely on preference; the sternum and palms are often favorites), effectively allowing herself to sing and speak in harmony. The effect is often unnerving, but can be eerily beautiful.

System: The Masquer rolls Manipulation + Moliate (difficulty 8). Each success provides another mouth, complete with windpipe and voice box. The singer may reduce the difficulty of any Keening rolls by one per mouth, to a minimum difficulty of 4. Alternately, each mouth may allow the player to ignore one botch on any Social rolls involving voice quality (song or hypnotism, for example). Of course, the extra mouths may penalize Social rolls unless the affected singer is dealing with the very open-minded.

This art costs 2 Pathos. The mouths last until Moliated away again.

••• Volley

This art allows the Masquer to shape projectiles out of his Corpus quickly and launch them at nearby targets. Although costly, this ability usually takes opponents completely by surprise.



System: The wraith rolls Dexterity + Moliate (difficulty 7) to strike his target. Range is the same as for a thrown knife. The projectiles inflict two dice of unaggravated damage for every Corpus Level the Masquer spends. At the Storyteller's option, the Masquer may "staple" his target to a nearby hard surface (usually difficulty 8 or 9). The Storyteller may also allow a Masquer to attempt certain other stunts, such as detaching one's gibbering head and hurling it at a foe, with a successful Stamina + Soulshaping roll (difficulty 8).

The wraith using this art must spend 2 Pathos in addition to the Corpus cost.

◆◆◆ Chrysalis

One of the hallmarks of the Masquer assassin, this art enables the user to sculpt a skinlike facade, over a prepared Martialry-built battle form. The wraith can then casually stroll wherever she pleases. When trouble strikes, she can tear through the facade in an instant, attacking without having to spend time and effort on Martialry. The sight of a war-Moliated form bursting through the pale plasm of an innocent-seeming wraith has paralyzed many a Guild enemy with fear — for a second or two precisely too many.

System: After preparing a (usually intimidating) battle shape with Martialry, the Masquer rolls Dexterity + Moliate (difficulty 8). The number of successes adds to the difficulty of any Shapense rolls to detect the Moliation, to a maximum of 10. The facade may look however the Masquer pleases, although duplicating another wraith requires using Imitate.

Tearing through the facade does not count as an action, although some deliberately exaggerate the shredding effect to intimidate their opponents. The difficulty of any Intimidation rolls is reduced by 3 in this case.

Chrysalis costs 3 Pathos.

◆◆◆ Girding

This art allows the Masquer to craft other wraiths as if using Martialry. It is one of the most profitable sidelines of Guild operations. The Masquer may only create weapons or armor in one session; if the customer requires some of both, the Shaper must use this art twice.

System: The Masquer rolls Intelligence + Moliate against the customer's Stamina + 3. As with Martialry, each success allows the customer to inflict an additional damage die in combat (if the Masquer is Girding weapons from her limbs) or add a die to her soak roll (if the Masquer is crafting armor). As with Martialry, each success after the first when creating armor adds one to the difficulty of Dexterity-based rolls.

This art costs 3 Pathos plus 1 Pathos per success gained.

◆◆◆ Cripple

Powerful Masquers are capable of inflicting such grievous harm on a subject's Corpus that permanent damage results. The

Masquer with Cripple may tear away enough plasm to weaken a victim, horribly scar him or even lobotomize him. It is also possible to destroy or smooth over sensory organs with this art.

Cripple is a jealously guarded secret, and one that ensures continued Hierarchy employment. (After all, Barghests don't begin their wraithly existence with the brains of animals.) It is considered a just punishment by many Anacreons, but some few Masquers deliberately seek out unjustly Crippled wraiths or Barghests to heal the afflicted.

System: The Masquer must roll Intelligence + Moliate against the victim's Willpower or Stamina + 4, whichever is higher. Each two successes allow the Masquer to permanently reduce one of his target's Attributes by one. These Attributes can be restored by careful surgery with Sculpt (difficulty 10 to diagnose and heal the damage).

Cripple costs 3 Pathos, and the wraith gains 1 Angst per success.

◆◆◆ Kiln

This art allows a Masquer to "fire" the plasm of a wraith, effectively making the plasm unshapable. Moliated furniture and tapestries, for example, can be preserved as they are without fear of the subject reverting to normal. It also serves as an effective punishment tool (imagine having to bear the face of a pox-ridden garden slug throughout your afterlife!) and even insurance for powerful clients. Those few Masquers able to shapelock their prisoners or clients are usually in incredible demand — rumor has it that the Guild has covertly provided three Deathlords with Kiln services. Although some Masquers dislike the idea of rendering a target immune to the Guild's Arcanos, the fact that the Shapers hold both measure and countermeasure has helped promote this art's survival.

System: The Masquer rolls Strength + Moliate, difficulty 9. If successful, the subject cannot be further Moliated until this power is revoked. This not only prevents Shapers from using Sculpt or Bodyshape on the subject, but also grants immunity to Rend, Cripple and similar arts. This art is its own antidote; a Masquer with Kiln can also reverse its effects, effectively undoing a previous application of the art. No other Arcanos can undo a shapelock.

The Pathos cost is 4. Shapers locking the shape of unwilling subjects gain 3 Angst.

◆◆◆ Soothe

This rare Art is used by compassionate Masquers in the Hierarchy as a sort of anesthesia. These Masquers quietly pick souls destined for the forges and Moliate their senses. The resulting forged objects feel no pain or discomfort; rather, they exist in a soft stupor. The existence of Soothe is a Guild secret. Some Masquers decry it as no better than lobotomizing prisoners; others argue that the art should be shared with all wraiths, to lessen



suffering everywhere. As few even among the Masquers have mastered Moliate to this degree, the point remains moot.

System: The Masquer makes an extended Manipulation + Moliate roll (difficulty 8; three successes on a Perception + Empathy roll reduces the difficulty to 6). Five successes effectively deadens the soul's senses so that the target feels nothing but a pleasant haze during and after being reformed. A botch indicates failure, and the Masquer cannot try again on the same soul. This can be used on free-willed wraiths as well: Each success deadens the wraith's senses for a longer period of time. (The exact duration is at the Storyteller's discretion. Preferably, one success equals a turn, three a scene and five about a week or so.) Soothe cannot be used on actively resistant wraiths.

This Art costs 4 Pathos. Wraiths with the Caregiver Nature (or another similarly appropriate) may regain Willpower for using Soothe to ease a doomed soul's torment.

Masquer Merits & Flaws



Here are certain advantages and disadvantages peculiar to Guild life. These Merits and Flaws reflect various characteristics that wraiths who consistently practice Moliate or who are allied with the Masquers' Guild could have. Storytellers may allow non-Masquers to purchase these Merits and

Flaws, although they are most appropriate for the Soulshapers.

Just as in the **Wraith Players Guide**, the following Flaws can be taken to increase a beginning character's freebie points (to a maximum of seven points), or a player may purchase any of these Merits with freebie points.

Omnidexterous (2 pt Merit)

You aren't just skilled at using both hands equally well, you're talented with whatever appendage you manage to sculpt. You receive no penalty for trying something with anything normally considered an "off-hand." Talented Masquers with this Merit can type with their feet, pick locks with their tails and wield darksteel with their tongues.

Fluid Corpus (5 pt Merit)

Your Corpus is so remarkably malleable that you can virtually pour yourself into a pitcher without Moliation. All Moliate attempts made on your form (including Rend) are at -3 difficulty, and you can squeeze your Corpus through a hole the size of a quarter without having to spend a Corpus Level or make a Moliate roll.

Forgettable (5 pt Merit)

You're good. You've managed to find the perfect face — the one that people have a hell of a time trying to remember.

While you wear this face (for purposes of Imitate, treat your memory as difficulty 5), your Appearance and Charisma are effectively 2. However, when trying to be unobtrusive among other wraiths, the difficulty of Stealth and low-key Subterfuge rolls is reduced by 3. In addition, the Storyteller may opt to rule that others may have to roll Intelligence (difficulty 8) to remember that you were ever there.

Plasm Famulus (6 pt Merit)

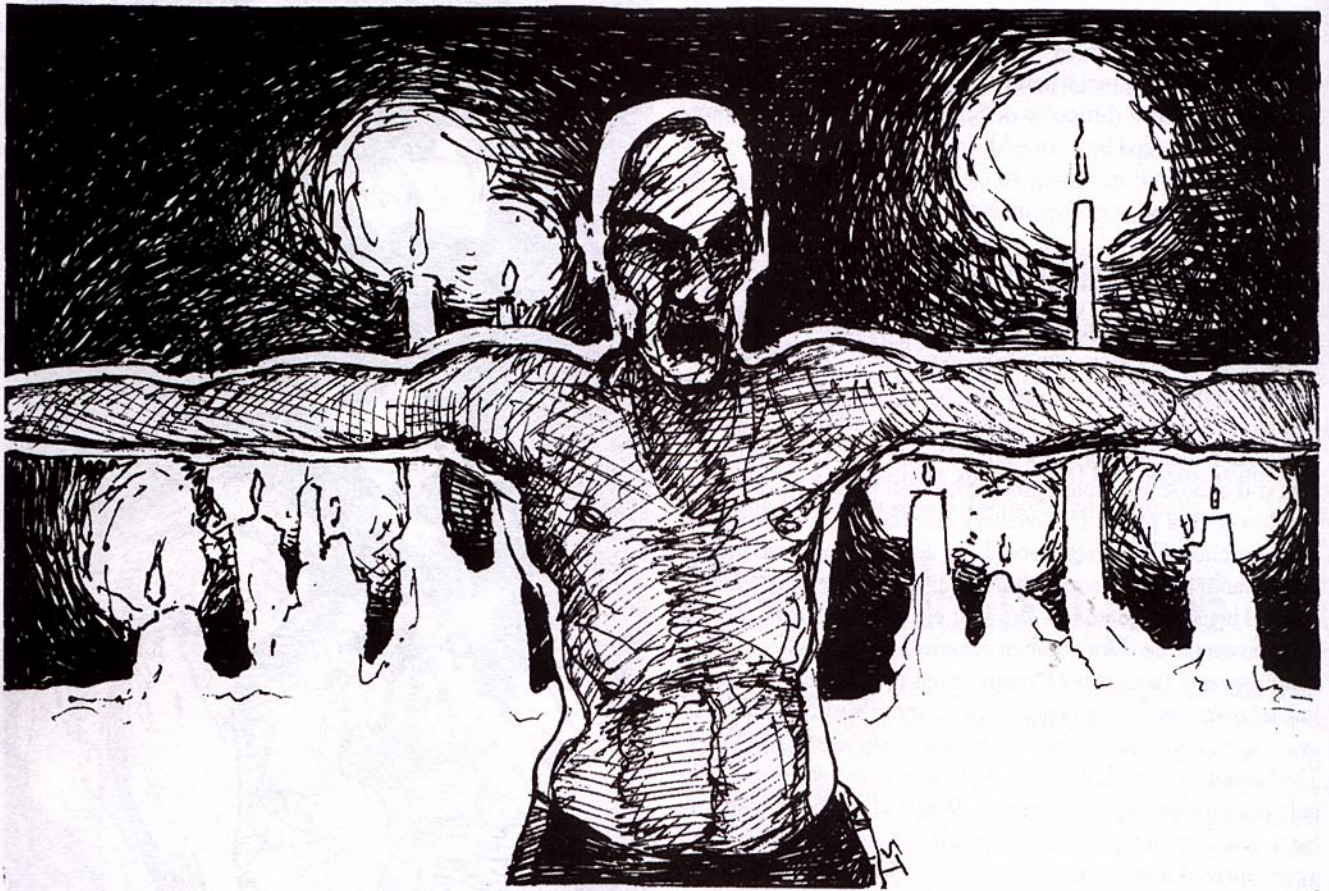
Through careful practice, you have managed to create a small homonculus out of your own plasm, one that is capable of independent movement and action. Alternately, some other Masquer may have fashioned this for you. This famulus ordinarily rides in a concealed pouch in your body, although you may release it whenever you choose. It remains attached to you by a slender, almost limitless cord of plasm. (Storyteller's discretion as to how far the cord stretches: The current record is a little less than two miles.) The homonculus has a sort of dim intelligence, something like the "second brain" of a dinosaur. While the cord connects the two of you, you may sense through whatever sensory organs it bears. If the cord is severed (with three Corpus Levels of damage, the sensory link is broken, and the famulus will attempt to return to you however it can. The cord may be mended with judicious use of Sculpt. The famulus has much the same Attributes as its creator, but may only have a maximum Intelligence, Wits and Strength of two. It has a maximum of four Corpus Levels. If it is slain, you must spend a permanent Willpower, four Corpus Levels, five Pathos and a week in seclusion to carefully craft another. Those taking this Merit gain an extra temporary Angst point during character creation, and another any time the famulus must be re-created. The division of personality is often a chink in the Psyche's armor....

This Merit's possibilities are infinitely gruesome. For one, a wraith may store the homonculus in almost any portion of her Corpus, including the head, shoulder or thigh. Also, since the famulus may take any form, it may seem to be something relatively harmless, such as a glossy rat with an infinitely long tail (the cord). However, other Masquers prefer more twisted versions, such as a plasmic embryo (carried in the belly, of course) attached by an umbilical cord. Of course, no matter how seemingly innocent your famulus is, it will almost certainly disturb those who see it emerge, or those who listen to it converse in its high, shrill voice.

Isolationist (2 pt Flaw)

You have become so caught up in Underworld affairs that you no longer interact with the living to any real extent. Your difficulty to use any Arcanoi that cross the Shroud (Embodiment, Outrage, Pandemonium and the like) is raised by one, to a maximum of 10. This only affects casual dealings with the living, not rolls made to interact directly with your Passions or Fetters. You may not even be aware that you have this Flaw, as you haven't wandered back to the old workplace in ages....





Mutarophobia (3 pt Flaw)

Although you can Moliate others without any qualms, you are extremely skittish about having your own form changed. This fear may have developed after your initiation, or perhaps you've never relished the thought of changing your own Corpus. You must make a Willpower roll to attempt to Moliate yourself or to allow another Masquer to do so. In addition, you probably dislike being touched (who knows when someone might try to Rend you?) and avoid "bodily" contact with other wraiths.

Headless (4 pt Flaw)

For whatever reason, your head is not attached to the rest of your Corpus, but it is still the seat of your intelligence and senses.

Moliate cannot reattach your head, and any extra sensory organs attached to your body have greatly diminished capabilities. Obviously, you need to take care of your head to remain at full efficiency, and you probably carry it around with you. If your head and Corpus are separated, your Storyteller may allow you to roleplay either or both parts, which may lead to some very interesting game sessions. (You'll be in a lot of trouble if you accidentally drop your head down a Nihil, for one...) The Shadow may be presumed to "dwell" mostly within the head, although sadistic Storytellers may allow it to take over your body's actions. (This becomes particularly vicious if it has the Psyche, in the form of the disembodied head, in its grasp.) Although this Flaw is suitable for any and all wraiths, not just Masquers, the Storyteller who allows a headless character should be ready to ad-lib the most insanely bizarre situations.

Artifacts



Every Guild has certain resources available to it and it alone. The following Artifacts are carefully kept secrets of the Masquers' Guild, who will take steps to retrieve any not in Guild hands. However, if the Storyteller desires, she may make them accessible to the average wraith in her chronicle.

Quicksilver Mirror (Luxury, level 3)

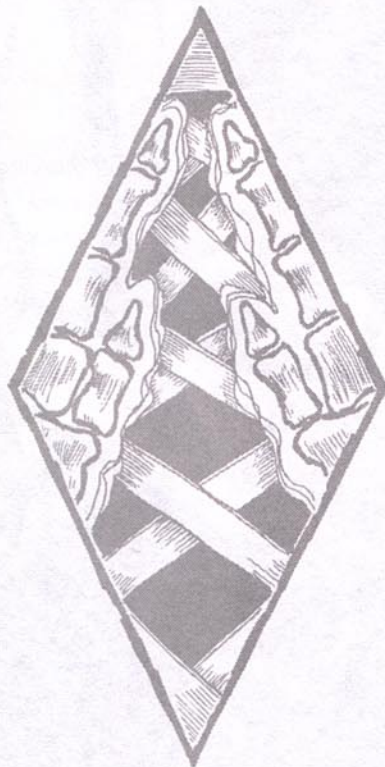
These rare devices serve a twofold purpose. For one, they are somehow capable of reflecting the viewer's face as he would like it to become. The Masquer who is using the mirror carefully constructs a desired face in his mind's eye, and the mirror depicts it just so. The reflection is always a little translucent, and the Masquer's current face is visible through it. This

allows the Masquer using it to subtract 1 from the difficulty of using Imitate, Sculpt or Bodyshape on himself.

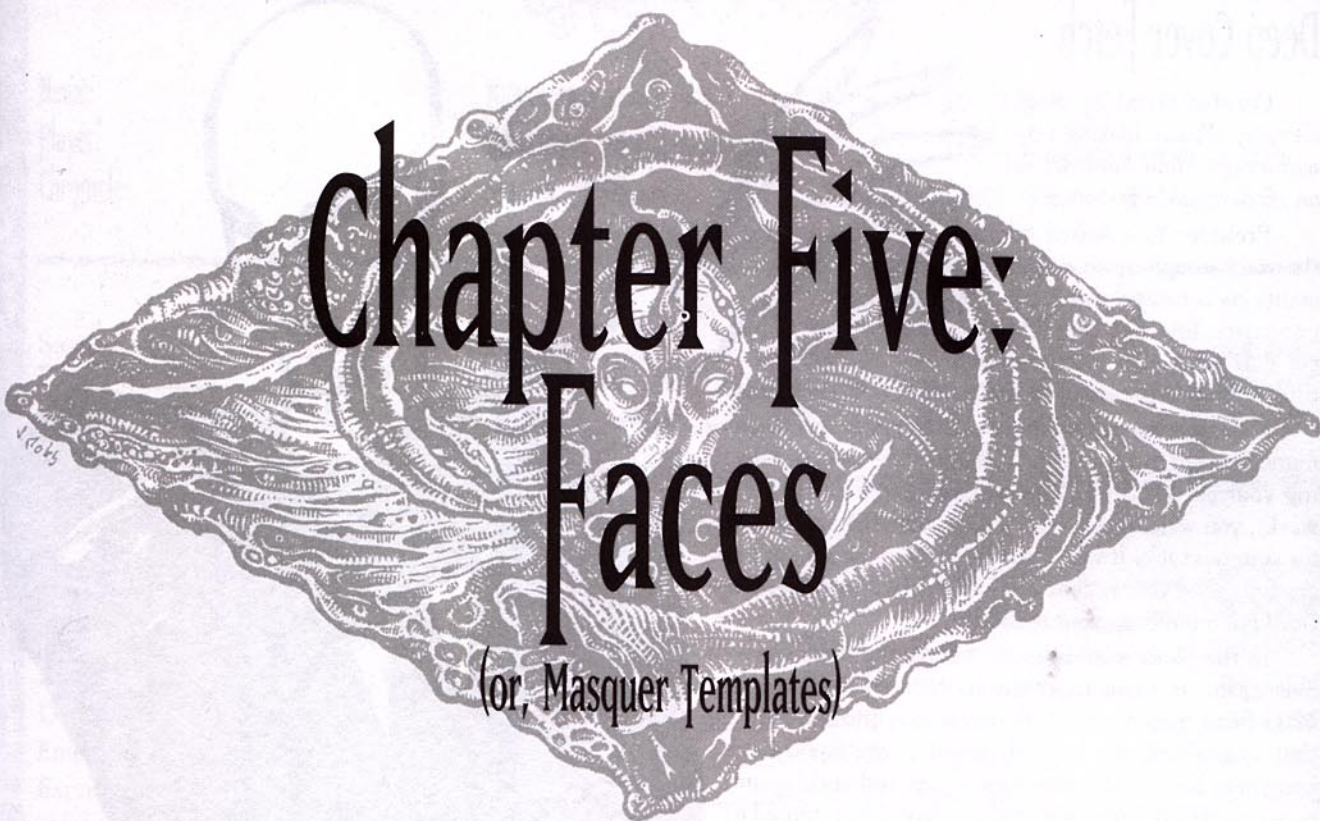
A Quicksilver Mirror is also capable of showing a wraith's original face, no matter how heavily Moliated she currently is. To activate this ability, the wraith must spend 1 Pathos and catch the subject's reflection. If the subject doesn't resist, the reflection is automatically accurate. If the Moliated wraith wants to conceal her true face, the mirror's user must make an opposed Perception + Empathy roll against the subject's Wits + Subterfuge. If the subject wins, the mirror reflects whatever face she desires. If the roll is a tie, the mirror goes blank. The subject's true face is only revealed if the mirror's user wins.

Facade Brooch (Luxury, level 4)

One of the more prized treasures of the Guild, the Facade Brooch is a must for all Fetches. While a wraith wears this brooch, Shapesense will not work on her. This artifact can come in many forms, such as tictacks, cufflinks, hairpins or even small buttons.







Chapter Five: Faces

(or, Masquer Templates)

*How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.*
— William Butler Yeats, “When You Are Old”

Behind every mask in the Guild lies a story. Despite tales of psychotic personality disorders and witless amnesiacs, the Masquers are every bit as human (as it were) as any other wraiths. Although their personalities often reflect the stresses and idiosyncrasies of Guild life, they run as variegated a gamut as is ever seen. Some of them are even what they appear to be.

The following templates represent a small sample of the characters who might owe allegiance to the Masquers' Guild. They can be adopted as is into a chronicle, or they can be heavily tweaked into versions more pleasing to a player or Storyteller's taste. As always, adaptation is the key.

Deep Cover Fetch

Quote: *Good evening, Demeter. You're looking very well tonight. Your Pardoner did an excellent job, I presume?*

Prelude: Your acting talent showed through at an early age, and your auditions constantly won you leading roles at university. You were very flattered when the dapper lady from MI6 quietly arrived and talked about career choices. Intrigued by the possibilities, you agreed.

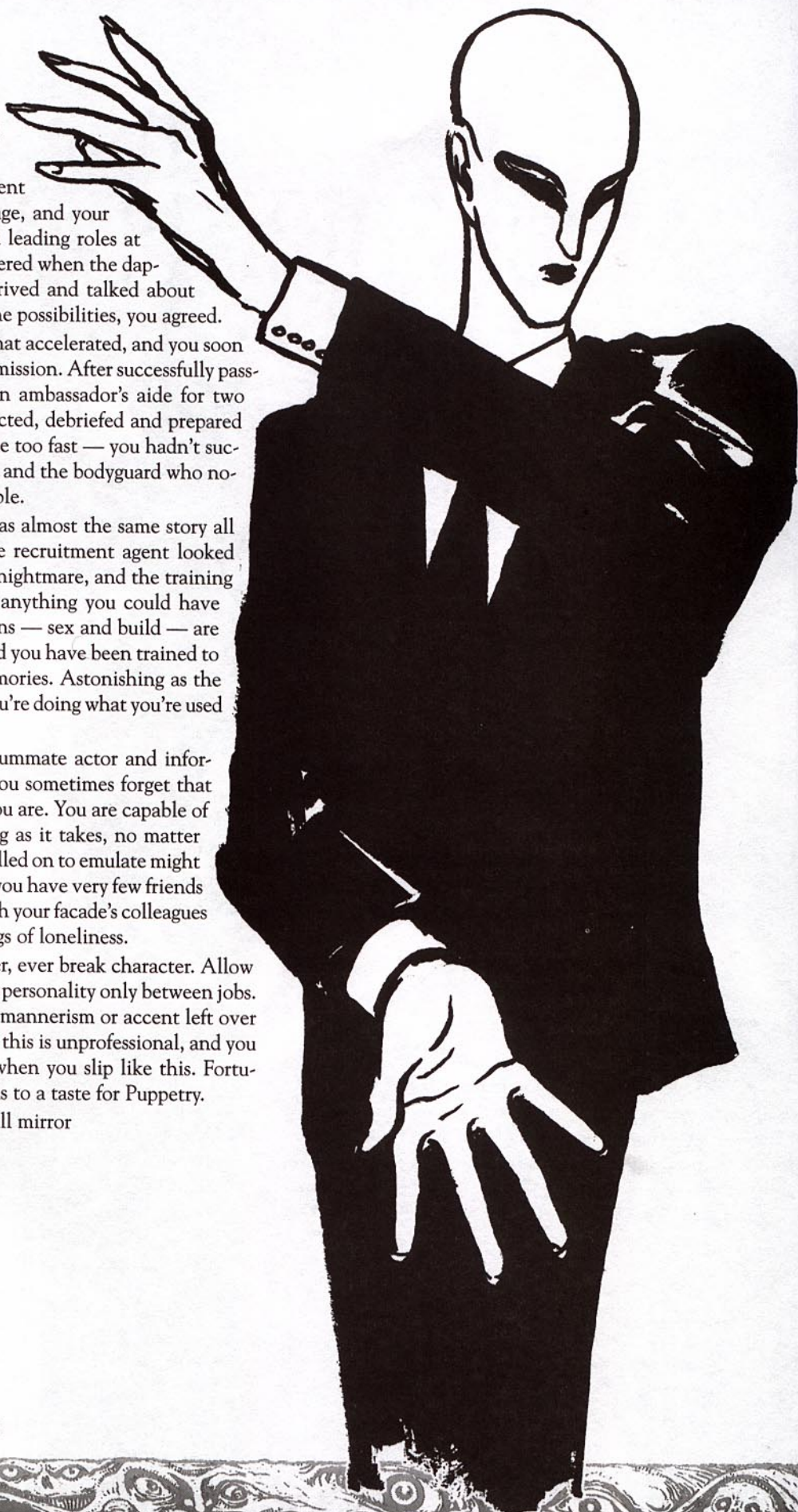
Your training was somewhat accelerated, and you soon found yourself in a "stand-in" mission. After successfully passing yourself off as the Iranian ambassador's aide for two weeks, you were quietly extracted, debriefed and prepared for your next job. It was a little too fast — you hadn't successfully shed your accent yet, and the bodyguard who noticed put a bullet in your temple.

In the Shadowlands, it was almost the same story all over again. But this time, the recruitment agent looked like a beast from a surrealist's nightmare, and the training that was offered was beyond anything you could have imagined. Your final limitations — sex and build — are now completely irrelevant, and you have been trained to read even into a subject's memories. Astonishing as the Underworld may be, at least you're doing what you're used to.

Concept: You are a consummate actor and informant, so talented that even you sometimes forget that you aren't who others think you are. You are capable of being someone else for as long as it takes, no matter who this new person you are called on to emulate might be. The only drawback is that you have very few friends of your own, but socializing with your facade's colleagues can sometimes ease the feelings of loneliness.

Roleplaying Notes: Never, ever break character. Allow yourself the luxury of your true personality only between jobs. Occasionally you indulge in a mannerism or accent left over from a previous assignment — this is unprofessional, and you are always horribly ashamed when you slip like this. Fortunately, most people ascribe this to a taste for Puppetry.

Relics: Pocketwatch, small mirror



Name:
 Player:
 Chronicle:

Nature: *Martyr*
 Demeanor: *Traditionalist*
 Shadow: *Director*

Life: *M16 "Stand-in"*
 Death: *Shot in line of Duty*
 Regret: *Failed Friends*

Attributes

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

Abilities

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

Advantages

Backgrounds		Passions		Arcanoi	
<i>Contacts</i>	●●○○○	<i>Avoid Failure (Shame)</i>	●●●○○	<i>Moliate</i>	●●○○○
<i>Status (Guild)</i>	●●○○○	<i>Watch Over</i>	○○○○○	<i>Mnemosynis</i>	●○○○○
<i>Allies</i>	●●○○○	<i>Coworkers (Loyalty)</i>	●●○○○	<i>Fatalism</i>	●●○○○
<i>Memoriam</i>	●○○○○	<i>Covertly Help Those</i>	○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○	<i>In Need (Compassion)</i>	●●○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○

Fetters	
<i>Case File</i>	●●●○○
<i>Mortal Coworker</i>	●●○○○
<i>Used Lotus</i>	●●○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
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Corpus	
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Willpower	
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Pathos	
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Angst	
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Thorns	
<i>Tainted Touch (Silenced Pistol)</i>	
<i>Spectre (Prestige 1), Tainted Relic</i>	
Dark Passions	
<i>Drive Psyche Mad</i>	○○○○○
<i>(Nihilism)</i>	●●○○○
<i>Quietly deliver friends to</i>	○○○○○
<i>Oblivion (Twisted Faith)</i>	●●○○○

Guild Marks

Soft Corpus

Empty Romantic

Quote: *No, I understand. I really do. Go ahead, tell me everything. I'm an excellent listener.*

Prelude: Your life was drab and cold. The other children teased you at school, and you responded by retreating into a literary dreamland. Fact was too dreary, so fiction was the natural escape. You soon developed a taste for fantasy, particularly romantic fantasy. Even if you didn't have any real-life proof that true love existed, you had faith.

You tried getting into acting in college, but stage fright crippled you at auditions. So you spent a lot of time watching plays and trying your hand at writing scripts and fiction. You weren't naturally inspired, but your vocabulary and sense of style got you somewhere with your English teachers.

Unfortunately, you were still alone. You didn't feel comfortable about the typical "campus social activities," and nobody invites a recluse into an interesting clique. It wasn't going to get any better, either. One particularly wet and miserable night, you were walking back from the library alone and a Jeep helmed by a drunken frat boy smashed you into the Shadowlands.

Your Reaper hustled you away and sold you to the Guild, who recognized a real talent for Moliate when they saw it. They were right; a lifetime of wistful thinking had sharpened your imagination for the aesthetic. And here, you get the chance to be what you never were in life. Now you're always alert, waiting for that one true someone that you'll know to be your soul mate. And you'll be anything your lover wants or needs. *Anything.*

Concept: You never found the true, eternal nourishing love that you knew you deserved in life. So now you seek it in death, and your self-image depends entirely on what you think you should be to attract your soul mate. You don't even remember what gender you used to be, but who cares? If there's one thing you believe in, it's that love has everything to do with the spirit, not the body.

Roleplaying Notes: You are more than a bit obsessive, although not quite the doormat that others might think. Check your face often, and hold yourself with poise. Fixate on someone that you think might be "the right one," try pleasing them as much as you can, and when it becomes obvious that they're not the one, gently cut the ties and move on. Move quietly and speak softly, but if anyone threatens you and yours, rip him into weeping tatters.

Relics: Silver pendant, copy of *The Riverside Shakespeare*





Name: _____ Nature: *Fanatic* Life: *Shy College Student*
 Player: _____ Demeanor: *Caregiver* Death: *Drunk Driver*
 Chronicle: _____ Shadow: *Parent* Regret: *Never Found True Love*

Attributes

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

Abilities

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

Advantages

Backgrounds		Passions		Arcanoi	
<i>Allies</i>	●○○○○	<i>Find Love (Hope)</i>	●●●●●	<i>Moliate</i>	●●●○○
<i>Haunt</i>	●●○○○	<i>Support Friends (Loneliness)</i>	●●●○○	<i>Usury</i>	●●●○○
<i>Eidolon</i>	●●●○○	<i>Make Yourself Perfect (Fear)</i>	●●○○○		○○○○○
<i>Mentor</i>	●○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○

Fetters

<i>Campus Library</i>	●●●○○
<i>Sketchbook</i>	●●●○○
<i>Local Pub</i>	●●○○○
<i>CD Collection</i>	●●○○○
	○○○○○
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	○○○○○

Corpus

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Willpower

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Pathos

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Angst

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Thorns

Trick of the Light, Shadow Traits (Appearance 2), Dark Allies (2)

Dark Passions

<i>Hurt Happy Lovers (Envy)</i>	●●●○○
<i>Make Others Adore</i>	○○○○○
<i>You (Lust)</i>	●●●○○
	○○○○○

Guild Marks

Soft Corpus

Faithless Warrior

Quote: *Yes, I can handle them. I'll bring you their Skinmasks first thing tomorrow morning.*

Prelude: You had to fight a lot in the backwoods town where you were raised. They grew 'em mean back there, and you had to defend everything you wanted from the local toughs. You finally escaped by earning an athletic scholarship to the state university, where you met her.

She was wonderful. Nobody could ever slip under your shell the way she could. Everybody else had always tried to take what was yours away from you; she offered everything she had to you, and you did the same for her. You were practically on cloud nine until the accident.

You wandered blindly for a time, until a Reaper found you and tore away your Caul. Your lover's name was the first thing you cried. By the confused look in the Reaper's eyes, you knew he'd never seen her. He took your hand, snapped a manacle on your wrist, and led you to a black-market auction. You didn't pull yourself together until one of the guards snapped a barbed whip across your back.

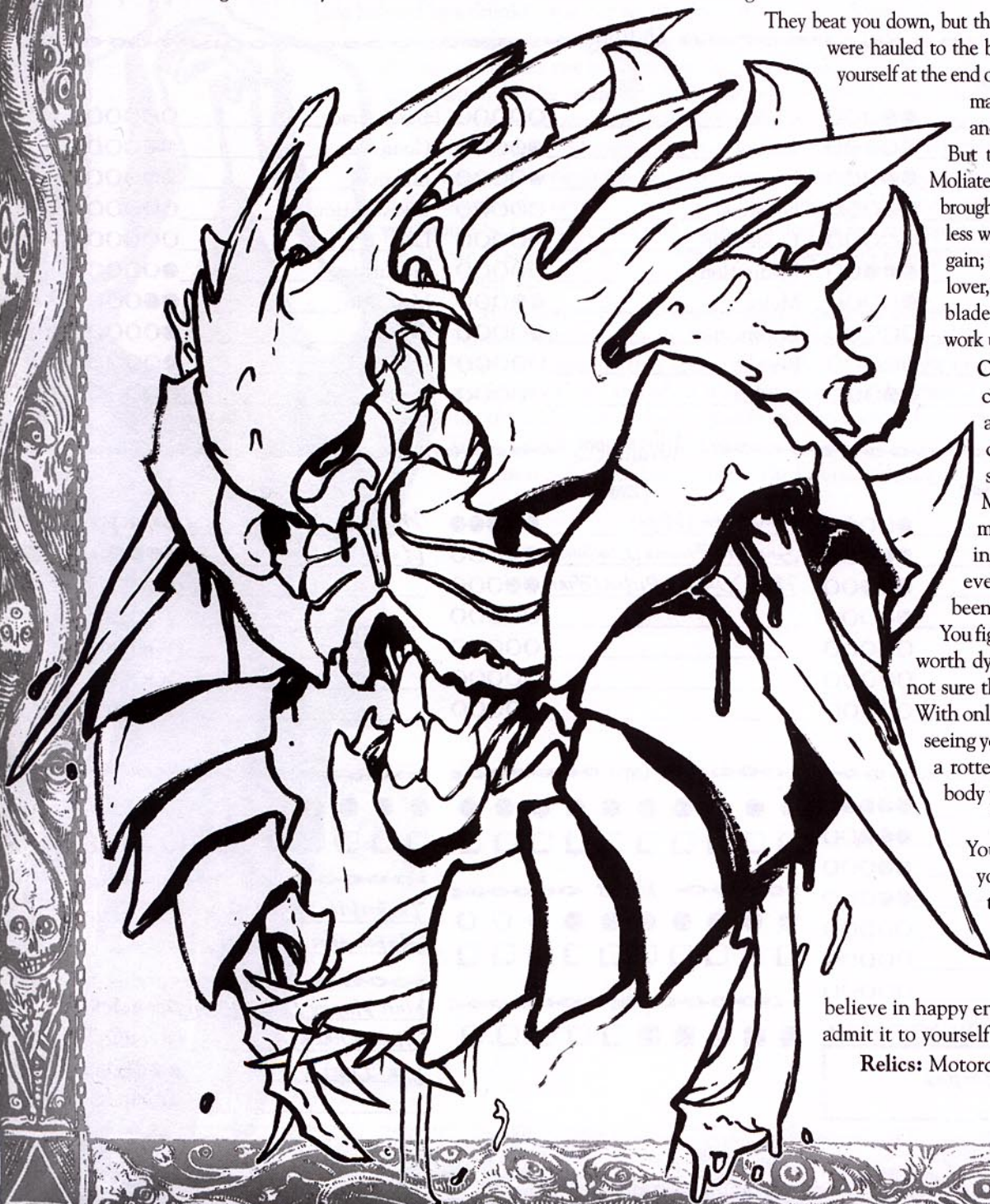
You caught him in your chains and hammered him into a Harrowing.

They beat you down, but they didn't destroy you. You were hauled to the block, and you soon found yourself at the end of a leash. Your ferocity had marked you as Barghest stock, and that would have been it. But the wraith who came to Moliate you slipped you away and brought you before a strange, faceless woman. It was a simple bargain; they'd help you find your lover, and you'd become a honed blade for them. You couldn't work up the spit to disagree.

Concept: You were a vicious fighter in life, but are almost mechanically efficient in death. Now you spend all your time Moliated into your armored form, only becoming vaguely human again every once in a while. It's been a year in the Guild now. You figure the Masquers may be worth dying again for, but you're not sure they're worth "living" for. With only a half-tarnished hope of seeing your lover again, you make a rotten actor. That's fine; nobody pays you to act.

Roleplaying Notes: You're practically a shell of your former self. The only thing holding you here is your complete refusal to believe that your lover is gone. You still believe in happy endings, even if you don't admit it to yourself anymore.

Relics: Motorcycle





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Survivor*
Demeanor: *Conformist*
Shadow: *Monster*

Life: *Hardened Athlete*
Death: *Motorcycle Crash*
Regret: *Separated from Soulmate*

Attributes

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

Abilities

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

Advantages

Backgrounds		Passions		Arcanoi	
<i>Allies</i>	●○○○○	<i>Find Lover (Love)</i>	●●●●●	<i>Moliate</i>	●●●●○
<i>Eidolon</i>	●●●○○	<i>Never Surrender</i>	○○○○○	<i>Argos</i>	●○○○○
<i>Status (Guild)</i>	●○○○○	<i>(Determination)</i>	●●●○○	<i>Keening</i>	●○○○○
<i>Memoriam</i>	●○○○○	<i>Achieve Athletic</i>	○○○○○		○○○○○
<i>Notoriety</i>	●○○○○	<i>Perfection (Pride)</i>	●○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○

Fetters

<i>Site of Crash</i>	●●●○○
<i>Lover's Class Ring</i>	●●●●●
<i>Motorcycle Keys</i>	●●○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

Corpus

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Willpower

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Pathos

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Angst

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Thorns

<i>Shadow Traits (2 Strength)</i>

Dark Passions

<i>Hurt any who get too close (Hatred)</i>	●●●●●
<i>Cause accidents (Rage)</i>	●●●○○
	○○○○○

Guild Marks

Soft Corpus

Helldiver Anthropologist

Quote: *It never gets any better — it's kind of like mileage that way. You wouldn't happen to know which way to a Pardoner, would you?*

Prelude: Things had been going fairly well for the past few years. You'd recently gotten tenure in recognition of your extensive anthropological research, and the university had agreed to send you to the Amazon for the summer. You'd heard some interesting rumors about a secret war that the natives were fighting, and who better to learn the truth? It didn't take too long to befriend the inhabitants of one of the Yanomami villages. Unfortunately, you were only beginning to fit in when a silver nitrate bullet from a corporate rifle took your life.

You came to your senses while being dragged along a By-way. You'd been found by one of your former students, who felt your talents would be useful to her Guild. Intrigued by the possibility of learning more about the Underworld, you agreed to come with her.

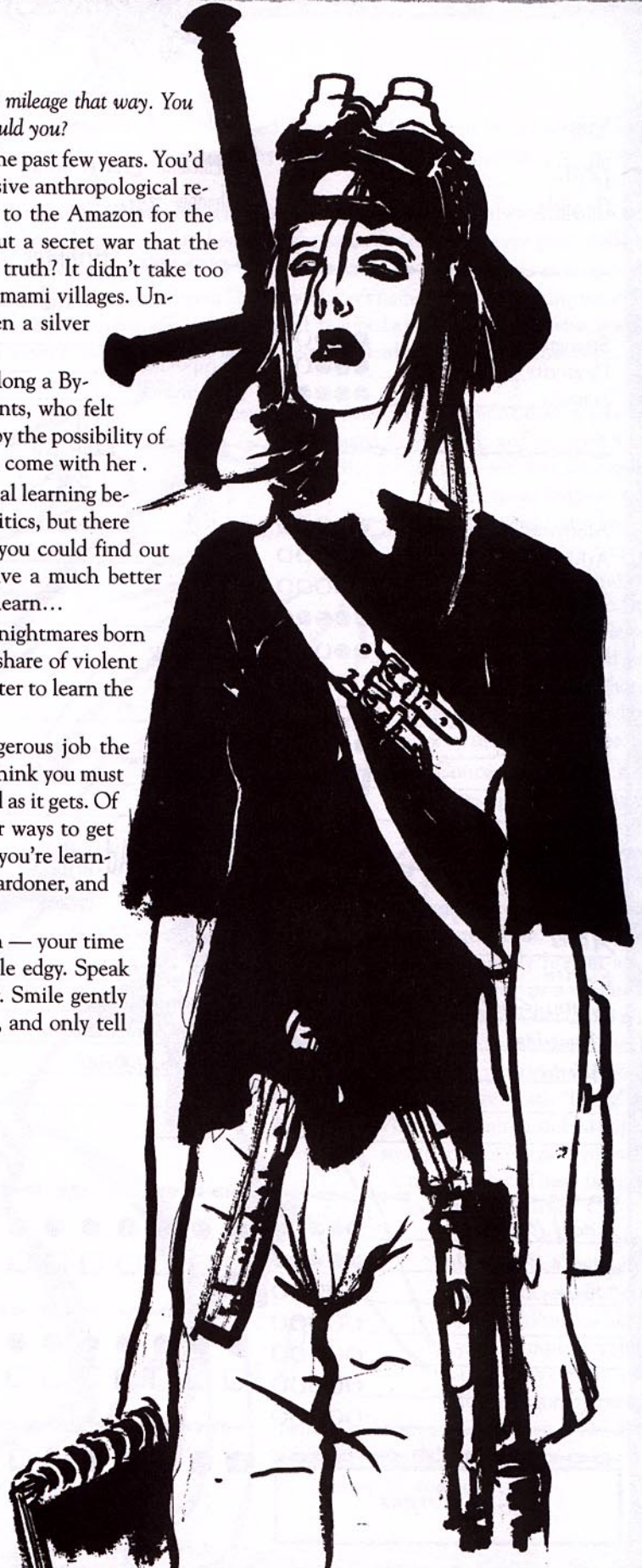
When your formal education ended, the practical learning began. You could have gotten involved in Stygian politics, but there was a much more intense lure — the Tempest. If you could find out what made the Spectres tick, everybody would have a much better chance at fighting Oblivion. And the things you'd learn...

No, that settled it. The Spectres were, after all, nightmares born of human imagination. You'd seen more than your share of violent customs and casual bloodshed. Once again, who better to learn the truth?

Concept: You've signed up for the most dangerous job the Masquers are willing to talk about, so most wraiths think you must be completely crazy. Far from it. You're as committed as it gets. Of course, the hefty bounties help, but there are easier ways to get rich. Hell, they've all got to be easier than this. But you're learning more about Oblivion than anybody short of a Pardoner, and they say knowledge is power. Damn straight it is.

Roleplaying Notes: Never let your guard down — your time among the Spectres has made you more than a little edgy. Speak quietly and precisely, and avoid losing your temper. Smile gently whenever someone starts rambling about Oblivion, and only tell them the truth if they sincerely want to know.

Relics: Notebook, reading-glasses





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Architect*
Demeanor: *Judge*
Shadow: *Rationalist*

Life: *Adventurous Anthropologist*
Death: *Killed by Pentex Troops*
Regret: *Never Learned Enough*

Attributes

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

Abilities

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

Advantages

Backgrounds		Passions		Arcanoi	
<i>Contacts</i>	●●○○○	<i>Discover the Spectres'</i>	○○○○○	<i>Molinate</i>	●●○○○
<i>Memoriam</i>	●●○○○	<i>Weaknesses (Curiosity)</i>	●●○○○	<i>Argos</i>	●●○○○
<i>Wealth</i>	●●○○○	<i>Aid the Amazon Natives</i>	○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○	<i>(Compassion)</i>	●●○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○	<i>Sabotage Pentex (Revenge)</i>	●●○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○

Fetters

<i>Passport</i>	●●○○○
<i>Lecture Podium</i>	●●○○○
<i>Fedora</i>	●●○○○
<i>Fishing Rod</i>	●●○○○
	○○○○○
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	○○○○○

Corpus

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Willpower

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Pathos

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Angst

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Thorns

Tainted Relic (Rifle)

Dark Passions

<i>Convince Psyche to Join the</i>	○○○○○
<i>Spectres (Self Loathing)</i>	●●○○○
<i>Torment "Privileged"</i>	○○○○○
<i>Citizens (Envy)</i>	●●○○○
<i>Corrupt the Pure (Jealousy)</i>	●●○○○

Guild Marks

Soft Corpus

Twistfreak

Quote: *That? That was nothing. Kid stuff. Watch THIS!!*

Prelude: God, you had a boring life. You were born to boring parents in a boring suburb of a boring city in a boring state. Elementary school was a joke. High school was more interesting — sort of — but even the fringe cliques didn't appeal to you. For all the posing and strutting, each supported its own grinding engine of conformity. Everybody felt like they had to belong, and they felt like they had to be just like their friends to do so. The whole damn mess was completely wrong, so you turned your back on all of them.

You took to bizarre pranks as a way to rattle the cages of convention. Of course, the copycats started up after your first little "project," but you weren't daunted. With an artist's passion, you continued on to bigger and greater tasks, driven by your desire to be different, to be larger than life. And if some of your pranks got a little mean-spirited, what did you care? Chaos doesn't pull any punches — why should you have to?

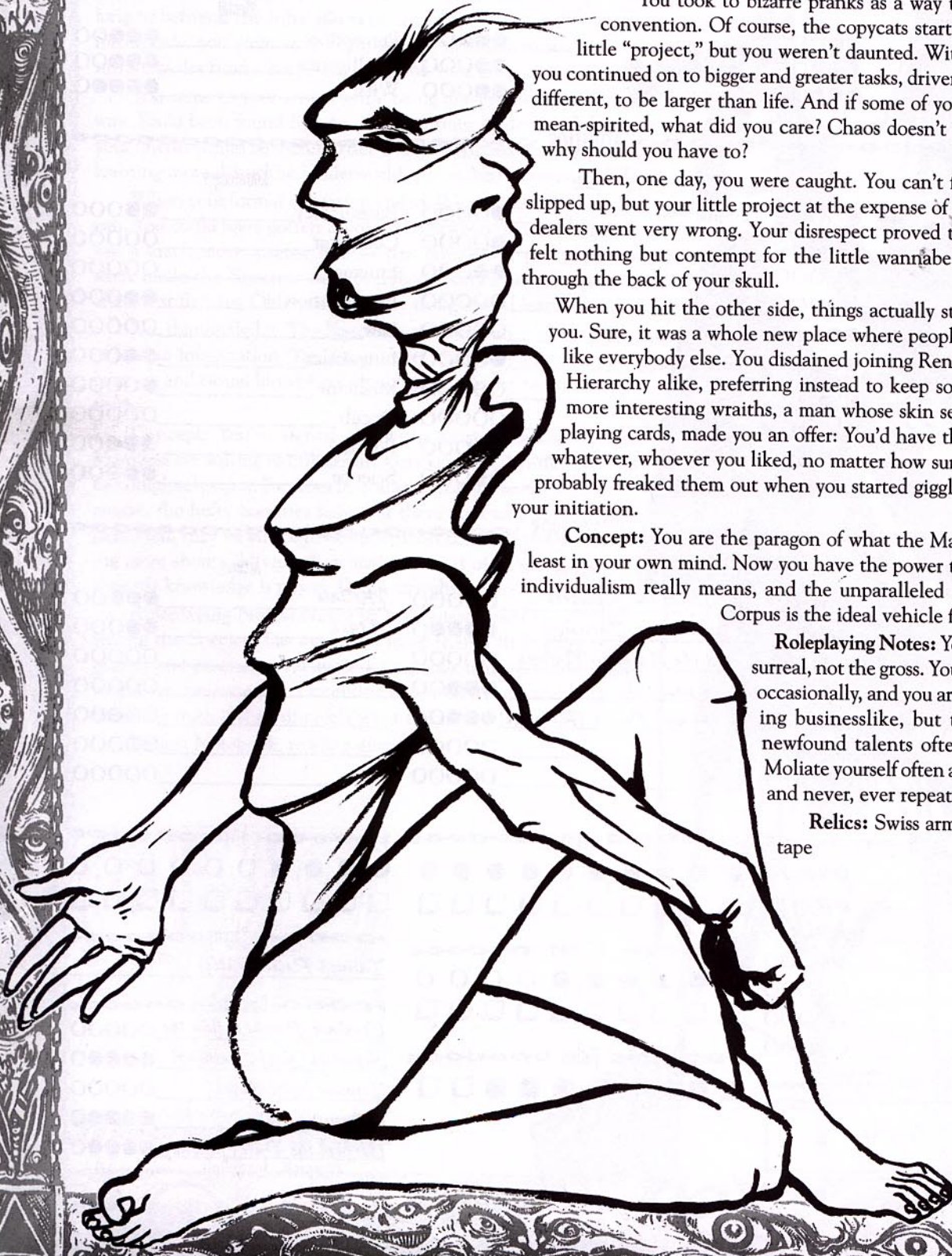
Then, one day, you were caught. You can't figure out where you slipped up, but your little project at the expense of one of the classroom dealers went very wrong. Your disrespect proved to be fatal. Still, you felt nothing but contempt for the little wannabe as the .44 slug tore through the back of your skull.

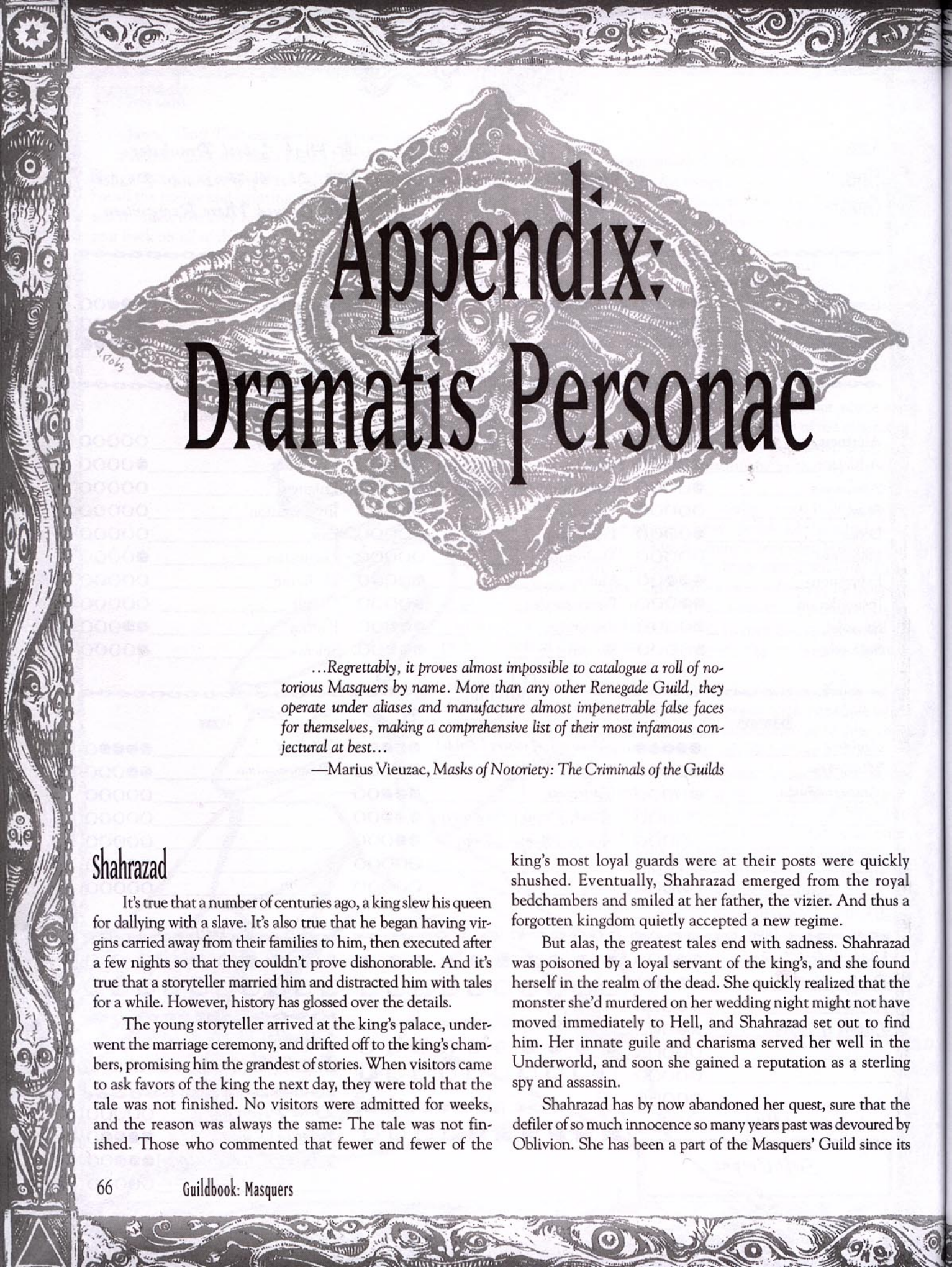
When you hit the other side, things actually started looking up for you. Sure, it was a whole new place where people felt they had to be like everybody else. You disdained joining Renegades, Heretics and Hierarchy alike, preferring instead to keep solo. Then one of the more interesting wraiths, a man whose skin seemed to be made of playing cards, made you an offer: You'd have the opportunity to be whatever, whoever you liked, no matter how surreal or disjointed. It probably freaked them out when you started giggling halfway through your initiation.

Concept: You are the paragon of what the Masquers should be, at least in your own mind. Now you have the power to show people what individualism really means, and the unparalleled canvas of your own Corpus is the ideal vehicle for your new art.

Roleplaying Notes: You are a master of the surreal, not the gross. Your murder tugs at you occasionally, and you are very capable of being businesslike, but the rapture of your newfound talents often overwhelms you. Moliate yourself often and extravagantly — and never, ever repeat yourself.

Relics: Swiss army knife, roll of duct tape





Appendix: Dramatis Personae

...Regrettably, it proves almost impossible to catalogue a roll of notorious Masquers by name. More than any other Renegade Guild, they operate under aliases and manufacture almost impenetrable false faces for themselves, making a comprehensive list of their most infamous conjectural at best...

—Marius Vieuzac, *Masks of Notoriety: The Criminals of the Guilds*

Shahrazad

It's true that a number of centuries ago, a king slew his queen for dallying with a slave. It's also true that he began having virgins carried away from their families to him, then executed after a few nights so that they couldn't prove dishonorable. And it's true that a storyteller married him and distracted him with tales for a while. However, history has glossed over the details.

The young storyteller arrived at the king's palace, underwent the marriage ceremony, and drifted off to the king's chambers, promising him the grandest of stories. When visitors came to ask favors of the king the next day, they were told that the tale was not finished. No visitors were admitted for weeks, and the reason was always the same: The tale was not finished. Those who commented that fewer and fewer of the

king's most loyal guards were at their posts were quickly shushed. Eventually, Shahrazad emerged from the royal bedchambers and smiled at her father, the vizier. And thus a forgotten kingdom quietly accepted a new regime.

But alas, the greatest tales end with sadness. Shahrazad was poisoned by a loyal servant of the king's, and she found herself in the realm of the dead. She quickly realized that the monster she'd murdered on her wedding night might not have moved immediately to Hell, and Shahrazad set out to find him. Her innate guile and charisma served her well in the Underworld, and soon she gained a reputation as a sterling spy and assassin.

Shahrazad has by now abandoned her quest, sure that the defiler of so much innocence so many years past was devoured by Oblivion. She has been a part of the Masquers' Guild since its



inception, and enjoys traveling across the Shadowlands to collect lore and valuable information. Her age and experience command her much respect from her Guildmates, and when she occasionally “comes out of retirement” to accept some particular spywork or “housecleaning,” the resulting story is often the talk of the Guild for years thereafter.

Molière

When Jean-Baptiste Poquelin collapsed after his final performance in 1673, France mourned the loss of one of its greatest theatrical talents. The playwright and actor who called himself Molière had managed to gain tremendous popularity among court and commoners alike. France mourned — but the Shadowlands rejoiced.

When word spread that Molière lingered on as a wraith, the representatives of several Guilds attempted to cajole him into their ranks. The Sandmen in particular sought to induct him into their dream theatres, and so he followed with them for a space. However, it wasn't long before his restlessness and eye for societal politics got the better of him. Searching for more ways to dabble in Stygian society, he eventually wound up speaking at length with Shahrazad, and through her, the Masquers. The chemistry between the sharp-witted old playwright and the irreverent, duplicitous Guild was nothing short of magical.

Although not the most warlike or deceptive of Masquer elders, Molière is still a dangerous wraith to cross. He has numerous friends in Hierarchy and Guilds alike, and is possibly the best-loved senior member among the Masquers. Those who threaten harm to the jovial soul often find themselves wearing Barghest muzzles, reshaped into spittoons or worse.

Slander

Slander is the infamous monarch of the Anonymae. Records of Slander's business dealings indicate no apparent allegiances, no driving goals, nothing but a loose loyalty to the Guild. And yet, despite the fact that there's no such thing as “Slanderesque” behavior, all the Masquers instinctively know when the master has struck again. No matter what the task, be it theft, assassination (of wraith or mortal), spywork or political sabotage, Slander always finishes the job with a certain elegant, undefinable *something* that acts as an ethereal signature. Nobody knows exactly how the Masquers recognize such unsigned work. One theory, though, posits that if any other Masquer completed a task with such refinement, pride would certainly demand for it to be signed.

Slander is at once very difficult and childishly easy to hire. For one, Slander charges heavily, and accepts only Pathos in coin. In addition, the Masquer apparently has access to powerful Fatalism, and he makes himself available to employers at roughly the same time they've decided to seek the Anonyma's services. Not everyone meets Slander's tastes, however, and only the most intriguing tasks are likely to merit



the shadowy Masquer's attention. Folk say that Slander's been hired by Deathlords and hapless Lemures alike, for whatever they can offer (and sometimes even less than that).

Of course, the rumors are only secondary to the truth. Slander is accomplished at practically every form of elegant skullduggery, and he has been so for at least the last century. It is certain that Slander is only one person, and not several Masquers operating in concert. Fearsomely intelligent and unremittingly professional, Slander keeps an edge sharper than Nhudri's blades and a reputation that rides on the posting winds to all corners of the world.

Cicely Grimaldi

A recent addition to the Masquer ranks, Cicely has exhibited an uncanny talent for Moliate and a great deal of supernatural knowledge. These both relate to her mortal life, which she spent as thrall to one of the terrible fleshcrafting vampires, the Tzimisce.

Cicely was born from a liaison between a human schoolteacher and a pureblooded Grimaldi revenant (for details on the Grimaldi, see *Storytellers Handbook to the Sabbat*). She was soon given into the care of the vampire Anastasa Zhukov, who carefully trained Cicely in the arts of espionage. Over time, Cicely became bound to Anastasa's will over all other concerns. She learned Vicissitude from her mistress, and utilized it to infiltrate many sects of vampires and even magi. However, eventually her lies caught up to her and a Brujah gang beat her to death.

Once in the Shadowlands, Cicely found that her mistress' pleasures no longer concerned her. Freed from the shackles of vampiric blood, she began to pursue the goals of her personal life. But just as her servitude prevented her from achieving her ends in life, the Shroud kept her from her goals in death. At some point after this revelation, she joined the Masquers.

Cicely is an oddity among the Guild. She can be extraordinarily cruel, but she is tender to her close friends. Where most advise leaving the mortal world as it is, she encourages her Guildmates to learn more about the supernatural denizens of the physical world. Her knowledge of vampires is second to none, and she is rapidly learning all that she can about the Garou and magi. She has also learned some of the secrets of a few other Guilds, and she often Skinrides humans in order to meet with fleshly supernaturals. If she continues to gain influence, she may well bring the Masquers a new group of contacts among the inhabitants of the World of Darkness.



Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature:
Demeanor:
Shadow:

Life:
Death:
Regret:

Attributes

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

Abilities

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

Advantages

Backgrounds	Passions
_____○○○○○	_____○○○○○
_____○○○○○	_____○○○○○
_____○○○○○	_____○○○○○
_____○○○○○	_____○○○○○
_____○○○○○	_____○○○○○
_____○○○○○	_____○○○○○
_____○○○○○	_____○○○○○

Arcanoi

Corpus

Specialty

_____○○○○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____
_____○○○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____

Willpower

Favorite Clients

_____○○○○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____
_____○○○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____

Guild Marks

Pathos

_____○○○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____
_____○○○○○	_____	_____

Soft Corpus



History
Life



Death

Pertinent Details



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

SHADOW

Psyche:
Shadowguide Player:

Archetype:

Thorns

Angst

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

Psyche Willpower

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Dark Passions

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○



Expanded Background

Allies

Hierarchy/Renegade/Heretic Status

Eidolon

Guild Status

Contacts

Status

Memoriam

Mentor

Notoriety

Wealth

Artifacts

Relics

Studio Description

Guild Secrets Known



Merits & Flaws

Merit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Cost

Fetters

OOOOO
 OOOOO
 OOOOO
 OOOOO
 OOOOO
 OOOOO
 OOOOO
 OOOOO
 OOOOO
 OOOOO

Experience

Total:
 Total Spent on:

Ancient/New Arts Known

Favorite Shapes

Guild Standing & Contacts

Standing
 Rank
 Guild Contacts

Apprenticed To:

Combat

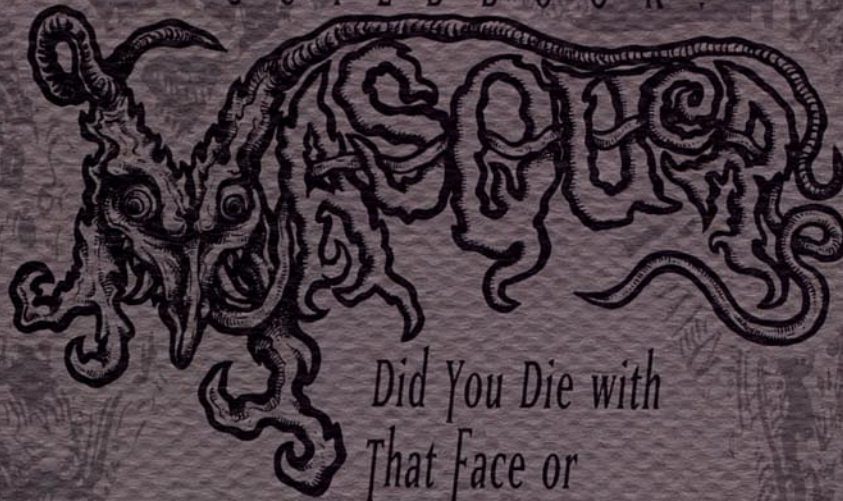
Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Conceal	Range	Rate	Pathos

Braving Table

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

Armor: _____

GUILDBOOK



TM

Did You Die with That Face or Because of It?

*First thing you have to realize is that you're not meat anymore.
You're plasm, son, and you know what I can do with plasm?*

*I can do anything I damn well please. I can make you look
like a movie star, turn your hands to knives or twist you into a black-
velvet painting of Elvis. And if you can't decide what you want to be,
heck, I'll decide for you. Hold still. This won't hurt a bit.*

O! That This Too, Too Solid Plasm Would Melt...

Pity the poor, misunderstood Masquers. Even among the outlawed Guilds, they're distrusted. And why? Just because they can change their faces in an instant, mold fearsome weapons from the plasm of their bodies, transmogrify other wraiths into tapestries and transform ordinary wraiths into the dreaded barghests, some (dead) people are afraid of them. And yet, they all *seem* so nice....

Guildbook: Masquers is the third in the series of Guildbooks for **Wraith: The Oblivion**. Take a look inside the Guild with a proud reputation for treachery, deceit and impeccable taste. You might even like what you see. After all, when Masquers can look like anyone or anything, everyone they meet is either a potential client — or a potential resource. Go ahead, they're just *dying* to meet you.

Guildbook: Masquers also includes:

- New arts for the Arcanos Moliate — everything you ever wanted to know about soulshaping but were afraid to ask.
- Helldivers, Idunn, Fetches and all of the other Masquer specialists who make life in the Underworld more interesting.
- The Masquers' fearful initiation rites, deadly combat secrets and more!

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