

The background of the entire image is a dark, textured blue. It is filled with a repeating pattern of various antique-style keys. The keys are rendered in a lighter, slightly glowing blue color, creating a subtle, repeating motif. The keys vary in design, including some with ornate, circular heads and others with more simple, functional shapes. The overall effect is one of mystery and historical intrigue.

GHOST

THE
SIN-EATERS™

A single, detailed golden key is positioned in the bottom right corner of the image. It has a prominent, circular head with a small ring at the top, and a long, slender shaft that tapers towards the bottom. The key is rendered with realistic shading and highlights, giving it a three-dimensional appearance. It stands out against the dark background and the repeating key pattern.

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GEIST
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GHOST

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RUM IS THE DRINK THE DEAD LIKE BEST

They hear the sounds coming from above, from Apartment 303. A woman weeps, the sounds of her bawling carried through pipes and mortar. Something falls over, a dull thud. A glass breaks, or maybe a plate. These things are not enough to draw Ben and Marie's attention, because the couple upstairs, they fight all the time. Tooth and nail. Like it's the end of the world.

But the sounds continue. The sounds change.

The woman screams. Then, it's the man that weeps. Great guffawing sobs.

Then, soon after, a noise rises — quiet at first, just a dull whining hum. Marie looks to Ben across the kitchen table. She mouths the question as if someone is listening: "Call 911?"

He shakes his head. Not yet, not yet.

The low hum becomes a thrum, and soon it reminds them of something that it cannot be: flies, the sound of a fly's wings buzzing, multiplied a hundred times. Or a thousand. It's coming from upstairs, but even here, Ben and Marie can feel it in their ears, an echo boring its way to the brain.

Ben draws a deep breath. He tells Marie he's going upstairs. She tells him she's going with him. It's a mistake for both.

The door to 303 is water-stained. Rust-water. Red like blood, almost. They don't hear the sound anymore, which makes them hesitate. Maybe it's over. Maybe it's done.

Ben knocks anyway. Of course, the door's not properly closed, and it drifts open like a yawning mouth. The apartment is dark. Ben and Marie take a step inside. Behind them, the door closes — not a slam, but a tight *snap*, as if shut by a deliberate and invisible hand.

The sound in their ears rises anew — fly wings, a thousand, a *million*, and when their eyes adjust, they see. It doesn't make sense. The ceiling is carpeted with them, fat black beads, jostling for attention, flies, all flies. The walls are wet, dripping, and the air sits suffused with the smell of saltwater. Furniture lies in pieces. In the center of the floor three figures wait, two of them dead. The couple who lived here lay arranged in an awkward circle, their fingers clasped together. Their bodies are bloated, gray, with hair like seaweed. They look drowned, which is appropriate, because that is precisely how they died. Lungs bloated with brine.

Sitting in the middle of this corpse-circle, a young black boy, no older than 12. He looks up with innocent eyes and wipes wet hands on his Superman T-shirt.

Ben and Marie don't know what to say. They want to help this boy, whoever he is. They want to take him far from this place, but their feet won't move and their mouths cannot speak, cannot scream.

The boy speaks, instead.

"You all don't look too good," he says. He shrugs. "Old Salt says that sometimes, people just have to *go*, like they're overstaying their welcome. You folks ever feel that way?"

They didn't before, but they do now. Marie sneezes — saltwater and blood. Ben screams but it's choked off by a knot of bile and seaweed. The boy changes, seems to grow taller without standing, a great black shadow with anchors for eyes and fishhooks for teeth, and then it's all over for Ben and Marie. The flies are still hungry. Old Salt smiles.



Cason stands apart. He always did, and always does. Right hand resting on an old Singer sewing table, one of the few pieces rescued from the fire so long ago; left hand curled around a brown paper bag, clutching it tightly; eyes drifting over the room, over all the mourners gathered in their black suits and gray dresses, except for that one asshole who wore jeans and a button-down flannel shirt. Probably some cousin of a cousin.

Occasionally, one of them drifts over to him. They offer him condolences. She was a beautiful lady, they say. She was a smart woman, they whisper. A good mother, they explain, as if they're trying to convince him.

He feels Cassie before he sees her, but that's been true since before the fire. Been true since day one, really. Twins work like that, sometimes.

She is, of course, in a red dress. Lipstick the color of oxblood. Around her wrist, an elastic cord from which tiny charms dangle: two silver skulls, one golden Saturnian sickle, three runes of Tyr. On her neck, a tattoo — a fat-bellied snake biting its own tail. Pinned to her dress, a red poppy on red fabric, colors so close they're lost in one another.

Cassie walks — no, slinks — over, and slides her arm across her brother's shoulders. It sends a chill down his spine.

"Welcome home, Cass," Cason says.

"A little Southern Horse Brutality, huh?"

"Yup. Been a while."

"A year, now," she says. She kisses him on the cheek. "Shame about our dear mother."

"I think so. But do you?"

She doesn't answer, and that's probably good of her. "Last time we saw each other was..."

"Tampa," he says, but he knows that *she* knows damn well when they met last.

"Oooh, right, Tampa. The Bucs are, what, four games up?"

His hand tightens around the brown paper bag. "I don't dig the football, sis."

"Still? Always the brooding artist, you. And yet, despite your refined tastes, you still dress like shit." Cassie starts going over him, fingers like pecking hens. "Houndstooth jacket with elbow patches? You a forty-year-old professor, or a young, vibrant sculptor? And this tie — burgundy? With an oil stain on it? You have to be fucking with me, little brother."

They were born 30 seconds apart, but she came out first. Cassie relished that.

She relinquishes her grip after scowling at the buttons up and down the jacket.

"Anyway, Tampa," she said. "That went well for you. I hear Charlie Mars is still alive and kicking, that ol' corker."

"No thanks to you."

"I suppose not. I did try, didn't I? Came so close." Cason can't help but think back: Charlie Mars with his wrinkled bulldog face, screaming as Cassie stands over him, and she's stuffing a fistful of lavender and licorice root into his mouth with one hand, a gleaming black sewing needle in the other. "But, you had other ideas. Figurin' on going against the *natural order* of things."

Cason doesn't say anything. He just watches the mourners mill about. From his vantage point, he can't see much of his mother — just the end of the casket spotted through a doorway. Her permanent home, now. At least for her body.

"Come back to me, space case," Cassie interrupts, snapping her fingers in front of his face. "Get out of your own head. Isn't good for you, never was. You hear the news? I'm fixin' on putting together a new krewe."

He sniffs. "I heard."

"Exciting."

"That's one word for it." He thinks on keeping quiet, but he can't. The bouncers that guard his mouth must be asleep, because words just start streaming through the doors. "You know what? I don't

want to talk about your fuckin' — about your damn krewe. I want to talk about Mom, Cassie. Mom's dead, case you thought she was in there having a quick little lay-down from a hot day in the garden. She's dead. She's dead too young, and I know you have certain feelings in that regard but this is *our mother* I'm goddamn talking about, and you come in here looking like a, a, an I don't know what. Mom's dead. You get that? You feel me, *big sister*?"

Cassie goes quiet. It doesn't happen often. Her face droops. She casts her gaze toward the other room, and gnaws on her painted lip. Cason can see when it hits her: it's like an invisible mask drops off, revealing the real Cassie, if only for a moment.

She swallows, and when she speaks, her voice croaks a little.

"I see a brown paper bag," she said, blinking back something that might be tears, something she hasn't felt in so long she thinks they might burn trails down her pale cheeks. "You have what I think you have?"

"The good stuff. Angustura, dark. Aged 12 years."

"Cemetery, then?" she asks.

"Best do it before she's buried," he says, his voice quiet. He pauses, thinks for a minute, and then decides: "On the way, I'll tell you how she died."



They burn the fields here in Jalisco. It's how they harvest the sugarcane. The fire strips the leaves, leaving the stems intact. Manny Ofrenda darts through a part of the field where the fire has not yet caught. He's not a tall man, and the sugarcane towers above him. He laughs as he runs, drawing in deep the smell of smoke, which in turn smells of molasses, which in turn reminds him of his mother's flan. His machete swings hard: cane stems slice in twain before him.

His pursuers aren't far behind. RJC: *Raja Jaliscos Criminales*. Gang thugs. And, for Manny, old family. But times have changed since Manny caught a bullet in the lung and almost died. No, he thinks, times *haven't* changed. Times have changed *him*.

He hears them crashing through the cane. Cursing as they do. One fires off a few rounds from a cheap Russian Bizon knockoff, but it's just a threat — the submachine gun chatters a hollow warning, bullets dancing skyward.

Manny — still laughing because he's genuinely enjoying this, loving the rush — skids to a halt at the edge of a small clearing in the dead center of the field. Plumes of dark smoke rise above. The fire will be here, soon.

The *cholos* come barreling into the clearing. One catches a foot on a broken stem and tumbles onto his ass. The other three (Manny only knows two of them, Paco and Alonso) are caught off guard by their fourth's ineptitude. It's just one more excuse for Manny to laugh. He drops the machete and holds up his hands, but not before wiping some tears out of his eyes.

"You lovable idiots," he says, shaking his head. "You always were great fun."

They aren't caught off guard for long, and they raise their guns up at Manny, creeping closer, as if that matters.

"I know what you did to me," Manny says, "I know about the betrayals. You thought to have me killed because our fearless *líder* was going to favor me, make me his *carnal*, his brother. But here I am, friends!" He pats his chest, right where the bullet took him, punching a hole in his lung. "*Good as new*, yeah?"

Paco and Alonso share a look. They really don't understand. They watched Manny die. Didn't they?

"Look around you," Manny says, sweeping his arms in a wide gesture. Hesitantly, they do. Manny registers their confusion, and happily explains: "*Cempasuchitl*, marigolds, each the color of fire. A cup of clean water, and a plate of salt. Over there, you'll see the feast — tamales, *arroz rojo*, lemons, oranges, bananas. The cigarettes are next to the *pan de muerto*, but you won't get to smoke them or to partake in the meal, my old friends. They are offerings, you see, *ofrendas*, just like me." All the offerings sit on bamboo mats and white tissue paper.

The *cholos* grow tired of this game, and they raise the guns. This time, they intend to finish what they started. Manny interrupts them one last time with hands clasped, as if in prayer.

"But the offering wasn't complete until you showed up," Manny says with a wink. "*Por vida*, old friends, *por vida*."

The ghosts come out of the smoke and out of the cane, moving fast. They are insubstantial, as much a part of this world as they are not a part of it at all. Gray mouths open, silent screams, and Manny's old friends and betrayers die on their feet. The bodies topple, and the specters move onto the feast, the famished dead consuming all that has been left for them. Manny waits for them to finish before he tells them what he needs them to do.



This is what Cason tells Cassie:

He tells her that the cancer moved fast. It was lung cancer, but it was everywhere: tumors in her hip, tumors inside and above her colon, and worst of all, it had crawled its way deep into their mother's brain, a worm boring deep to the heart of the apple.

He tells her he was alone with her when it happened. Up until now, he didn't know it had gone to her brain, and she only told him when she started feeling it: her thoughts became muddled, her words confused. Sometimes she'd just seize up, going rigid, drooling. A low whine came from the back of her throat. She wasn't a big woman

before, always frail and bird-like, but now she looked skeletal. A vulture's skull tottering on a crooked broomstick.

He tells her how she stood up suddenly—odd, given the brain tumor and the fusillade of drugs firing in her body—and said she wanted to sew something. He tried to stop her, tried to get her to go lay back down, but she was adamant. She sat down in front of the Singer table, opened the top, and pulled the dusty black relic from within its shell. Her trembling hand traced the lines and curves of the sewing machine. Their mother put her foot on the wrought iron pedal beneath. And then she died.

He tells her it happened fast. She just... crumpled. He caught her head before it hit the edge of the table. For as close as he was to death, he said it surprised him. Death takes hold swiftly, he explained: the skin goes swiftly gray. The body stiffens. (Not that Cassie doesn't know this already, given her path. But she lets him speak, anyway.) Cason felt for a pulse and found nothing. It shocked him, then, when their mother's head reared and she took a deep gasp, like some part of her was trying to get back to this place, back to the world of the living. It happened two more times, just like that. Him holding her, her body ashen and still, and then: *deep sucking breath.*

He tells her how, minutes later, when she had no more breaths to take, he picked her up in his arms and carried her into her bedroom where she laid until the coroner came. Her skin had gone from gray to yellow. Waxy. Papery. Life, he says, is something altogether

undefinable, even for them. The soul is a thing well beyond his understanding, despite his supposed insight. They always were strange children, he and his sister, able to see things — they could always make the Ouija move, could always sense the cold spots and the dark shadows. And now they were in a place to know so much more, but even this, Cason says, didn't prepare him for his mother's death. The body when it's done is just a lifeless husk, a swaddling of meat around unmoving bones.

He tells her he did all the paperwork. He watched them carry her out in a black body bag. He opened the moldy, dusty curtains to watch the hearse pull out of the long, gravel driveway.

Then he sits quiet for a while, watching the trees pass outside as Cassie drives, fumbling with the bottle of old rum in his hands.

Cassie sits quiet, too. But soon, she speaks.

This is what Cassie tells Cason:

She tells him that their mother can go fuck herself.



•She's whistling Garth Brooks, because it's what's on her iPod. She sings, too: "I've got friends in low places, where the whiskey drowns and the beer chases my blues away, and I'll be okay..."

Ella stops, though, when she finds what she's looking for. The flashlight's beam falls onto the old water access tunnel (Water Tunnel #4, to be specific), a sandhog tunnel started in the late 1960s that wasn't meant to be finished until just last year.

"But," she said to no one, unscrewing the white buds from her ears, "shit inevitably happens." That, it had. The sandhogs — the urban miners of the Big Apple, the ones responsible for everything from the Brooklyn Bridge to the entire subway system — ran into a problem, here, and had to end the tunnel. She didn't know why, because the Local 147 didn't really talk to her much. She knew some of the Sin-Eaters among their ranks (it's only natural), but wasn't too friendly with them. They were their own people; a cult, really. And Ella, well, she didn't get along with people like that.

Sometimes, the only "person" she got along with was the Hanged Librarian, who wasn't really a person at all. Truth was, she didn't know what the Hanged Librarian was. All she knew was that, when she closed her eyes, she saw her: eyes missing, a tongue made of book pages, hair done up in a tight swirl, and a moccasin-red rope burn around that pretty porcelain neck.

In fact, for kicks, she closes her eyes right now and sees the dead woman floating in the black morass of her mind's eye, backlit by dull flashes like those of distant lightning. It causes Ella to feel the scars around her own neck.

"I know, I know," Ella says, "I'm on it."

The beam shows her what she needs, two symbols painted onto the dammed up tunnel: the first, *Khet*, a lamp hanging from a crook with its flame emergent. The second, a symbol that looked a bit like a two-handled umbrella, the symbol for *Amenta*.

The Underworld.

She takes a deep breath, then goes rooting through her messenger bag. One by one, she pulls items out, naming them as she does.

"A love letter I wrote when I was fifteen. A copy of my favorite Judy Blume book, no, not *Are You There God*, but *Starring Sally J. Freeman As Herself*, thank you very much — signed by Blume, too. So, bonus. And finally, bones. Cat bones. From my cat, Mister Pym's. No, I didn't kill him, feline leukemia did that just fine, and no, I don't know who I'm talking to."

That last bit's a lie, because she damn well knows. She's talking to *her*, to the Librarian. That's the thing about having someone or something like that with you all the time. It's hard not to talk to them. Even if they don't all talk back.

Ella grabs a bottle of Everclear, pours it onto the items, and sighs. She doesn't want to do this, but she needs to do this because information doesn't come free down here. She has souls to find. Souls to punish. Wincing, she lights a match and tosses it into the pile. They go up. They burn. It stinks.

When the flames flicker and fade, leaving behind a pile of ash, it happens.

The wall that had been closed to her is no longer shut. The earth moves. The bricks part. All without a sound. Ella steps into shadow and calls the name of who she seeks — she doesn't want to have to go deep, doesn't want to have to cross the rivers and pay the price, so she hopes her connection is good enough. She thinks of it like a hotel lobby: she can stay at the front desk and summon one of the residing guests to her, here.

It works. Out of mist and darkness, the gray ghost arrives.

She is a woman, beautiful but for her rotten midriff. Everything else is perfect: blonde hair with perfect curls, a diaphanous robe barely covering a pair of wineglass breasts, pursed lips, deep green eyes. But her midsection... Ella shudders. The skin is rotten and puckered, shriveling away from a pile of dusty guts ill-contained by a few meager webs of leathery flesh.

The ghost walks before her, but in a blink, appears behind her. She traces a finger along Ella's ear.

You find me beautiful, the ghost says without speaking.

"I do," Ella replies, swallowing a hard knot.

I find you beautiful, too.

"It's not me you find beautiful. It's her. The Librarian." She clears her throat. "Don't be fooled, I'm just a dumpy girl in cute cat's eye glasses. You don't really like me."

But I do. Stay with me. We can be together, for a time.

Ella can't stifle a nervous chuckle. She smells perfume and decay. A smell not unlike funeral flowers. "Can't. Sorry. Need information. Need it fast, before the sandhogs show and realize I'm, uh, pooping in their nest."

I have no information to give. Come with me, girl. Come.

An icy hand runs under Ella's shirt, crossing her stomach and leaving a trail of goosebumps in its wake.

"I have something you want. I know who killed you. Shotgun blast to the stomach, 1972. I also know who the clumsy fools were who pried your beautiful hands from this mortal coil and sent your spirit here for a permanent vacation."

The ghost woman hisses, and retreats to shadow. Her beautiful hands idly play with her own intestines.

You... know these things?

"I do." Ella feels her heart beating hard. "And you know the name of somebody who needs to die. Care to make a trade, then?"



•They're standing graveside when Cassie finally apologizes.

"Sometimes, my mouth moves and I don't really want it to. I know what I said was stupid, so, yeah. Oops and all that shit."

It's a piss-poor apology, and Cason tells her so.

"It's just — well, we are what we are because of her," she says.

"I know."

They don't need to go over the story, but it doesn't stop them from thinking about it. Their mother was a drunk many years ago. She fell asleep, bottle in hand, cigarette dangling from a dry lower lip. Eventually, the cigarette fell, rolled to the carpet. It didn't catch fire right then. In fact, their mother woke up at one point and, realizing that her bottle was unmercifully empty, grabbed the keys and went to the liquor store without telling her two children where she was going. Cason and Cassie sat playing in the other room: Cason grumpily animating a Barbie doll (as his sister always dictated the games) and Cassie chopping off their hair with scissors and shoving their plastic bodies into dresses she herself had sewn. They smelled the smoke too late. The doorknob was scalding hot. The curtains caught fire, then the carpets, then the couches.

The two children died that night. Not from the fire, but from the smoke.

But death, as it were, needn't be permanent. They were pulled from the brink, resuscitated by EMTs. Both with new friends that lived — if "lived" is the word — as part of them. Cassie with her Red Seamstress, and Cason with the Griefstruck Surgeon. (The joke later became: "Both are good with needles.")

"Not like she meant it," he says. "She got better. Quit drinkin'. Went to church."

Cassie clucks her tongue. "Sure, but not before she almost killed her kids."

"Did kill her kids."

"Right. I never forgave her, is all. I loved her. But I hated her, too."

"I know."

They both stand there over the empty grave. No stone yet, but that was good; that meant no anchor, no memorial to keep their mother here. In the distance, amongst the stones and meager daylight, Cason and Cassie can see specters milling about. Some were held fast to their graves, pleading silently. Others wandered — "roamers," those with a little more freedom, but bound here just the same.

Cason uncaps the Angustura rum.

"Rum is the drink the dead like best," Cason says, watching the distant ghosts. "I forget who said it. Might've been Billy, he's always saying dumb stuff like that. Nobody really knows why, but I guess they got theories. Some say it's because Baron Samedi, that old loa, loves the stuff. I've also heard it's because so many sailors went to their watery graves with nothing but rum in their bellies. You ask me, I think it's just because it's so sweet. Not like the dry, medicinal taste of whiskey. Drinking rum makes you feel alive, and that's what the dead want most. To feel alive again." He shrugs. "'Course, it doesn't really matter. It's like the sun shining. Doesn't matter why it shines, only that it keeps on shining."

"Aren't you philosophical?"

He grunts, and upends the bottle into the grave. It soaks slow into the overturned earth.

"Wish I could've had a taste of that," Cassie says, smacking her lips. "It's funny, you know. You're the morose motherfucker, but all you want to do is save people. Me, I'm the good-time girl, but all I want to do is see people die. How's that for philosophy?"

"That's no philosophy I want a part of."

"I'm just saying, we're a fucked-up pair. You bring salt?"

He shakes his head. "Don't need it. I made sure Mom was in her favorite dress, but I kept that dress in a chest of salt overnight."

"Good boy, little bro."

"Thanks, big sis."

A wind kicks up. Like rough fingers, it runs through their hair.

"Do we need to say anything?" Cassie asks. "Final words and all that?"

Cason thinks on it. "We better not. Hate for it to be this way, but we don't want to give Mom any real reason to stay. I said my peace when

she was alive. You probably should've taken the opportunity."

"Probably." She comes over closer to her brother. He sees her face has changed. She's still sad, but he catches a light behind her eyes, a strange and vibrant joy. "You know how I was saying about getting a new krewa and all?"

"Uh-huh. I caught wind of it on the Network a few months back."

"News travels slow on the TN, baby brother, but, I actually already recruited them." She doesn't need to point — just an arch of the eyebrows and a light nod of the head tells him where to look. And look, he does. Cason sees a mulberry-colored conversion van slide into the cemetery's drive, a cough of black exhaust billowing out the back. On the side, Cason thinks he sees a colorful decal of the Grim Reaper surfing a crystal blue wave.

"That's a classy ride," he says. "Bet the back has a little sticker of that kid Calvin peeing on a skull or something."

"No, but that's a right nice idea, Case. I'll look into that. Van belonged to some band, some classic rock cover junkies. Zeppelin, Motorhead, all that. Guess one of them was a PCP freak, decided one night his bandmates were all monsters, and he went at them with one of them mini Black & Decker chainsaws. Then he put it on the ground and lay on it, so it took his own head off. Fuckin' cool, right?"

Cason blanches.

"Anyway," she continues, "it's a hot ride. Still has some of the original blood stains. You should see it."

The van slows to a stop, and the doors open. Cason's surprised to see a young black boy, maybe in his early teens, hop out the passenger side. His bright blue-and-red Superman T-shirt stands out. Driver's a short little Latino guy, his arms inked from wrist to shoulder. A husky girl climbs out the back: even from here, Cason can see the hot pink cat's eye glasses on her face.

"Well, aren't they a bright and shiny bunch," Cason says. "So it's official. You finally got yourself a bunch of like-minded folks."

"Reapers to the last." She calls over to them. "Manny, hold up one sec!"

Cason tenses. "So, this is it. First order of business with your new friends is to off me here, at Mom's grave."

"And dump you in a conveniently-dug grave?" Cassie grins. It's a wicked thing, that smile, a razor boomerang that'll cut a man's throat.

"Don't think I won't go out fighting. Me and the Surgeon, we have our tricks and our knives. And I promise, I won't bother with those oddball buddies of yours, I'll go right for you. Because when I go out, big sister, I'm taking you with me."

Cassie laughs and claps a hand on Cason's shoulder. "For someone so nice, you're so freakin' angry, Case. We're not here to take you down. Not today. They're just my ride. I wouldn't punk you like that, not here, not this way. I love you too much, and believe it or not, I love Mom, too. Today, we both get a free pass. We get to put our story aside."

"That's mighty white of you."

She kisseas him on the cheek. "But tomorrow? It's game on again. And it will be until you either come to my way of thinking, or until you meet your proper end. It's not my choice, that's just the way it has to be. The Seamstress tells me what the right path is. I don't always listen, of course: right now, she wants me to stick a needle in your eye. But not today. I'll miss you."

"Back atcha, Cass."

She backpedals away, her arms cartwheeling, her eyes bright. Cassie's playing at having a good time despite everything, but Cason knows that isn't exactly true. Her mask is back on, that's all it is. It's not a physical mask, not like the one he has (the one that looks like a surgeon's mask marked up with old Sumerian sigils), but it's a mask just as real.

She yells "toodle-oo" one more time before she hops in the back of the van, and it disappears down the drive, the tires kicking up stones, the exhaust pipe belching black. Cason turns, looks down at his mother's empty grave, and says a quiet goodbye. Then he sets up shop just to make sure her ghost doesn't come around.

Credits

Initial Concept and Design:

Russell Bailey, Kelley Barnes-Hermann, Jason Bolte, Joseph Carriker, John Chambers, Aileen E. Miles, Erhan Skemp, Richard Thomas, Aaron Voss, Zack Walters, Eddy Webb and Chuck Wendig

Written By:

Alan Alexander, Jess Hartley, Jesse Heinig, Wood Ingham, Matthew McFarland, John Newman, Christopher Simmons, John Snead, Malcolm Sheppard, Travis Stout, Chuck Wendig and Stewart Wilson

Developer:

Ethan Skemp

Creative Director:

Richard Thomas

Editor:

Scribendi.com

Art Direction and Book Design:

Craig S Grant

Interior Art:

Joel Biske, Jennifer Frison, Craig S Grant, Craig Henderson, Jeff Holt, Coz Koniotis, Kyri Koniotis, Justin Norman, Richard Pellegrino, Federico Piatti, Matt K Smith, John Wigley

Cover Design:

Craig S Grant

Keys: Robert Dixon

Playtesters:

Alan Alexander, Brad Allbritton, Dawn Andrews-Lynn, Luke Boswell, David Bounds, Charles Burk, Kat Burrell, Stephen Carpenter, Anwen Eslinger, Rodney Eslinger, Frank Frey, Martin Henley, Matt Heslin, Elgin Howell, Jamie Jackson, Laura Jackson, Matt Karafa, Lori Karpinecz, Steve Karpinecz, Eloy Lasanta, David Martin, Frederick Martin-Shultz, Adam Maxwell, Josh G. C. Maxwell, John Olvey, Chris Simmons, Matthew McFarland, John Newman, Joshua Smart, Andrea Steyer, Brian Wade, Eddy Webb, Michelle Webb, Chuck Wendig, J. T. White



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Storytelling System, Vampire the Requiem,

PRINTED IN CANADA

GEIST

THE SIN-EATERS™

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It feels like when I died, all over again.

I can feel that I'm afraid, but it's a faraway sensation, like I'm looking down on it from a high bridge. My fear is down there, drifting slowly on the river, real but not reachable.

Everything goes slow. I realize that my watch has stopped: I can feel the cold metal back against my wrist, and there is no tick of the second-hand to beat out in time with my pulse.

My pulse has stopped, too. I am between heartbeats. The stillness is rising up in me, a perfect wave of cold motionless.

Its fingers rest on my shoulders. Again, I don't flinch at their touch. I didn't then because I didn't know any better. I don't now because its fingers are a part of me, like my hand moving on its own.

I see the three men in front of me, now gray and indistinct. The Caul is over my eyes — shapeless, but casting a shadow in my mind, a shadow shaped like a key.

The voice rushes in my ears, a tumble of dry leaves and mouse bones.

Let me.

I nod, and I turn the key.

INTRODUCTION



PIATTI®



Nothing informs life more than the shadow of death. Each appetite that sustains a living being is a counter-reaction to the inevitable end. Hunger is a warning of the death of starvation. Sexual drive is rooted in the instinct to leave offspring so that the bloodline may endure when the body has finally run down — and indeed sex itself has been called “the little death.” Even our higher drives such as art and spirituality can be seen as a desire to find something that may outlast the death of the individual. The shadow of the Reaper is what gives life meaning.

In the World of Darkness, none are more keenly aware of this dichotomy than those who have died and returned to life. Not undead, not revenants, not ghosts — but living human beings who have been bound with ethereal chains to the forces of Death itself. They carry *geists* inside them, spectral shades that are more than ghosts. They are the Sin-Eaters, the keepers of the keys.

Geist is a game about their stories.

A Storytelling Game of Second Chances

What would you do if you were returned from death’s door? How would you spend your second life? This is the question all Sin-Eaters are asked just by virtue of the Bargain: a somewhat understated term that is used to describe a near-death experience, or more frequently, a true moment of death. In a flash, an old life vanishes. And in a pause, a fragment of oblivion that lasts for moments and seems to last forever, a new life is offered.

The catch is that the thing offering that new life is not a god, or an angel. It’s something like a ghost and something unlike one, a specter that is as much the embodiment of a form of death as the remnant of a human consciousness... perhaps even more so. The offer has come from a *geist*. And when its offer is accepted, everything changes.

With the return to life, you are now irrevocably tied to the world of the dead. You can see ghosts all around him — and you can hear their pleas for help or howls of anger. The *geist* within you can manifest its own sepulchral might to protect you, conjuring phantasms, smashing objects with terrible poltergeist strength, or forming even more surreal changes. You have power, although it’s not entirely yours. And you have a second lifetime to do what you need to do.

A *Geist* chronicle doesn’t just involve this motif as it involves the player characters, though. To some extent, their *geists* are also entities starving for a second chance. Each *geist* thirsts to achieve things left unfinished. It may wish to avenge or set right wrongs from its life, or it may have developed needs tied to its peculiar nature. Each Bound has two sets of motivations, two sets of urges.

And then there are the quick and the dead. With the power of a Sin-Eater, one can protect others, giving them second chances of their own — or one can take them away. A Bound knows what it’s like to die. He may want to protect others from a too-sudden death, giving them a second chance just

as he received. Ghosts are even more vulnerable in their own way. A ghost is trapped in repetition, unable to pass on from its state unless someone intercedes, either to destroy it or to free it somehow. Enter the Sin-Eater. By moving to assist the ghost, he is effectively “eating the sins” of the ghost, allowing it to pass on. But what mortals are worth the intercession? Which of the restless dead need or deserve help most?

What is a second chance worth? And how do you keep from wasting it?

Theme

On the broadest scale, the obvious theme of *Geist* is death. The Sin-Eaters are born when they die; the dead cry out for their help or come storming in to menace them and their loved ones. But humanity deals with death in countless ways, and addresses it through countless metaphors.

Among the many aspects of death as a theme is that of transition. We speak of it in terms of boundaries and doors. “Beyond the grave” establishes the grave as a dividing line; “at death’s door” speaks of a threshold. Even in the traditional Tarot deck, the Death card is said to represent not an end, but a significant change from one state of being to another. The Sin-Eaters, as protagonists of this game about Death, are those who walk the path of transition. They stand with one foot on either side of the boundary. They may cross back and forth from living to dead, though at some cost.

As an extension of this theme, the question is inevitably asked: “What would you do with a second chance at life?” The Sin-Eaters have an ever-evolving subculture that stresses the importance of wringing the most out of their extended lives, but it also stresses the responsibility thrust on them by their unique station. If you almost died — if you *did* die, but only for a moment — how would that inform your life?

*But at my back I always hear
Time’s winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.*

— Andrew Marvell, “To his Coy Mistress”

Mood

The mood of a **Geist** chronicle is informed by morbidity, but not shackled to it. The protagonists are alive, given a second chance and the ability to experience the worlds of both living and dead. And like many people around the world, in this age and every other, they look on the specter of mortality and laugh. *Eat, drink and make merry*, as the adage goes, *for tomorrow you may die*. **Geist** is informed by *Dia del los Muertos* and *Carnivale*, by Halloween festivals and solstice fires.

Of course, not all those who look upon Death choose to live as a *bon vivant*. Some act with desperation; others act out pageants of wrath and revenge or a grim, final justice. They may laugh at gallows-humor and make love furiously into the night, or they may choose to walk by themselves at night, finding beauty in the stillness and dark. But they *are* alive, every last one.

This is the emotion that fuels the Bound. You have died. You will die again — you know this. Death surrounds you wherever you look. The multitudes of the dead are your cohorts and your responsibility. But you are alive, and can pursue whatever life means to you. *Live*.

How to Use This Book

The first life of the Sin-Eater can be detailed with the **World of Darkness** rulebook: everything that comes after the Bargain is detailed here. The information is loosely organized as follows:

The **Prologue: Rum Is the Drink the Dead Like Best** and this **Introduction** are snapshots, images and notes pinned to the wall to give you a glimpse of life among the Bound. Here you'll also find a lexicon of Sin-Eater terminology, and some recommended sources of inspiration for your game.

Chapter One: At the Cemetery Gate discusses the setting of the game, from the details surrounding the genesis of a new Sin-Eater to the artifacts of their cannibalized culture and their contact points with the rest of the World of Darkness.

Chapter Two: Character Creation outlines the process of creating a Sin-Eater character, **geist** and all. Here you'll also find the Manifestations and ceremonies they use to pursue their ends.

Chapter Three: Systems elaborates on the peculiar rules that govern the Bound: their newly remodeled mortality, the supernatural power inherent to a *krewe*, and the *mentos* that are a major source of their power.

Chapter Four: Storytelling is designed to help the Storyteller put together a **Geist** game, whether an off-the-cuff one-shot or an extended chronicle. A number of Storytelling techniques are discussed and a plethora of antagonists are also provided to keep a *krewe* heavily occupied.

Appendix One: Descent to the Underworld details the land of the dead — why the Bound may need to descend to the Great Below, how they take the journey, what they may find there, and what may try to keep them there forever.

And **Appendix Two: The Modern Gomorrah** offers some initial ideas for a chronicle setting: New York City, a metropolis with millions of living, millions of dead, and a history that engenders many a ghost.

Sources and Inspiration

Many, many, many works may prove inspirational in telling a story about the boundaries between life and death. As mentioned before, it may be the one single subject matter that informs all other areas of human interest. The following works are only the tip of the iceberg; if we've omitted a particular favorite, forgive us.

Non-Fiction

Greg Palmer's *Death: The Trip of a Lifetime*. A somewhat humorous look at death rituals around the world: the very sort of thing Sin-Eaters cannibalize for their ceremonies and culture.

Fiction

M. R. James' work. James is hailed as one of the truly great authors of the ghost story.

Tim Powers' work, especially *Expiration Date* and *Strange Itineraries*. Powers' approach to the modern ghost story is well worth a look, fusing realistic mundane detail with vividly surreal supernatural concepts.

Ray Bradbury's *The Halloween Tree*. A children's classic that explains and celebrates our very human tendency to find joy and laughter in the shadow of death.

Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. A true ghost story classic.

Christopher Moore's *A Dirty Job*. A human-inducted-as-reaper story, full of death imagery and in the darkly humorous vein.

Film

The Sixth Sense. A well-made look at what death-sight brings with it, and why it might compel a sense of responsibility toward the dead.

Thirteen Ghosts. The titular ghosts have the sort of iconic status that befits a **geist**, and their unusual appearances might serve as inspiration for the core of a **geist**'s visual design.

Intacto. A film about people who buy, sell, and steal luck, then test their luck against one another in bizarre games. An interesting meditation on fates averted or stolen.

Flatliners. Why the gateway to the Underworld shouldn't be a revolving door.

Final Destination. Sequels optional. The trappings of a ghost story, but with Death rather than the dead as the haunter.

Television

There's been a rush of ghost-oriented television shows of late; one might be spoiled for choice. *Dead Like Me*, *Six Feet Under*, *Medium*, even shows like *Tru Calling* and *The Ghost Whisperer* all blend the theme of character development





with the episodic storytelling of a new ghost story every week. Take your pick.

Cities of the Underworld. Not about the mythic Underworld, but various subterranean complexes and catacombs that lie underneath modern cities. Strong inspiration for the theme of descent in an urban metropolis, with a myriad of ideas for cenotes, Haunts and Avernian Gates.

And of course, any police procedural or mystery show will often provide all sorts of ideas for interesting deaths. The average murder mystery is specifically about death and unfinished business: the unfinished business is usually “bring the killer

to justice,” but other threads may emerge as well. Even sensationalist works like *CSI* might provide some interesting ideas for Thresholds.

Video Games

Grim Fandango. A classic, wonderfully humorous and poignant.

Persona 3. An extended meditation on death, inevitable mortality, and what can be accomplished in life. Any of the games in the *Persona* series may contribute interesting visual designs for a geist, but this one in particular addresses many of the themes of *Geist*.

Lexicon



Aspect: The archetypal name and nature of a geist; that portion of its makeup that is more iconic than personal. Usually revealed through the course of binding a krewé.

Autochthonous Depths: The highest and most shallow region of the Underworld.

Avernian Gate: Another term for a cenote, specifically one used to travel directly to the Underworld.

Bargain, the: The moment of death and rebirth where the geist bonds with its mortal host to create a Sin-Eater.

Bound, the: Another term for Sin-Eaters. Refers to the bond with the geist, but frequently takes on a secondary connotation of being bound to fate, chance, a second life, or whatever the speaker believes to be the purpose of her rebirth.

cenote: A place where the wall between the living world and the Underworld is naturally weaker.

ceremony: A ritual invoking the Bound’s power as medium to achieve mystical results involving the dead and the Underworld.

Charm: A lesser form of memento.

Charonite: A Sin-Eater dedicated to the support and transmission of the Twilight Network.

Codex: A cache of lore and secrets recorded by a krewé and used by another to access supernatural benefits.

conspiracy: The largest and most influential type of krewé.

cooler: Slang term for a freshly dead ghost; derived from “still-cooling body” and the low temperature of a morgue.

cult: Another term for a small, intimate krewé.

Dead Dominion: A subregion within the Lower Mysteries of the Underworld.

deathlord: One of the legendary rulers of the Underworld; their existence is unproven.

deathmask: A memento forged from the remains of a destroyed geist.

Erebus: A classical term for the Autochthonous Depths.

Event, the: Another euphemism for the Bargain.

faction: A krewé large enough to have several cliques within itself; often spread over more than one city.

fetter: A memento made from the anchor of a ghost.

Flesh Fair: A common term for a Sin-Eater gathering.

geist: A bizarre form of ghost, part human remnant and part archetype. Formal plural is *Geister*, but English-speaking Sin-Eaters tend to use the less correct “geists.”

grand carnival: A particularly large and formal Sin-Eater gathering.

Great Below: Another term for the Underworld.

griever: Slang term for a human who still remembers a given ghost, and may potentially be an anchor.

Haunt: A cenote or “low place” that has been claimed by a Sin-Eater, krewe, or other entity.

Horsemen: The five archetypal figures of Sin-Eater mythology and symbolism that represent the five Thresholds.

Kerberoi: Ancient guardians of the Underworld, bound and dedicated to enforcing the Old Laws or punishing transgressions against them.

Key: A supernatural affinity for a particular aspect of ghostly power.

keystone: A memento specific to one particular geist, symbolizing its bond with the Sin-Eater.

krewe: A group of Sin-Eaters united by a common purpose. Usually ritually bound as well, which allows them certain advantages through a channel to the Underworld.

low place: An informal term for a cenote.

Lower Mysteries: The deeper, less accessible portion of the Underworld.

Manifestation: One of the ghostly powers at the Sin-Eaters’ innate command.

memento: An object steeped in the power of death, able to activate given supernatural powers in the hands of one of the Bound. Also called *memento mori* by more formal Sin-Eaters.

memorabilia: A memento associated with a person, place, or thing of great fame or infamy.

ofrendas: Offerings to the dead.

Old Laws, the: A code of rules that governs the Underworld; laws that govern interaction with the dead. Kept by the Kerberoi.

plasm: The immaterial pseudo-matter of which ghosts are made; fuel for a Sin-Eater’s power.

Psyche: The base measure of a Sin-Eater’s supernatural power.

Sacrosanct: A Sin-Eater that strives against his fellows out of dangerous beliefs.

Sin-Eater: A human being who has died temporarily and returned to life, or suffered a near-death experience, and bonded with a geist during the moment of death. The name refers to the implied burden of the sins of the dead, as well as the potential duty to serve as a medium.

Synergy: The measure of psychic unity between a Bound mortal and geist.

Tartarus: A classical term for the Lower Mysteries.

Threshold: A “type” or resonance of death; a loose category by which Sin-Eaters can identify certain aspects of death.

Twilight Network: The eclectic network of coded and underground communications Sin-Eaters use to keep in touch with one another.

Underworld, the: The realm of the dead.

unfettered: A geist that is not bound to a mortal host.

Upper Reaches: The Autochthonous Depths.

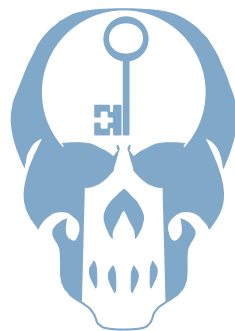
Vacant: A former Sin-Eater who has been severed from his or her geist.

vanitas: A memento crafted deliberately by a Sin-Eater.

wake: A gathering of Sin-Eaters for the express purpose of socialization and celebration.

Wretched, the: Bound that have been brought back from death one time too many, serving as empty shells for their geists to manipulate.

yellowbones: Slang term for a particularly old ghost.



We'd only gotten into half the bottle when Ali got back. It's always polite to wait. Monica reached it over to him as he slid down into a crouch in the circle. There was room on the sofa next to her, but you had to admire Ali: all business. Didn't even take a drink yet.

"Got word for us?" I said.

"Yeah, I made contact. News ain't so good. It's a yellowbones."

"Ah, *fuck*," breathed Zita. "I thought we were gonna have an easy one for a change. Obits only going back a week, grievors still thinking about him."

"You knew it was gonna be work when you heard about the ruckus it was causing," I said. She didn't look like she heard me.

Monica leaned over a bit. "How old?"

"Six hundred."

We all sat up straight at that, and half of us were cursing. Brin's "Holy shit, *what*?" was the loudest, and he was quick to follow up like always. "Six hundred *years*?"

"Naw, motherfucker, six hundred minutes. What you think I meant?"

"You're *shitting* me," protested Brin. "You said this was a white guy."

"I told you the first time, *shitting* you's against my code." Ali took a long drain on the bottle, and Zita grabbed it back out of his hand.

"Well, what the shit?" she said. "There weren't any white guys around here six hundred years ago, unless some Viking got seriously lost. Was it a Viking, Ali? That'd be all we need, some fucking six-hundred-dead Viking."

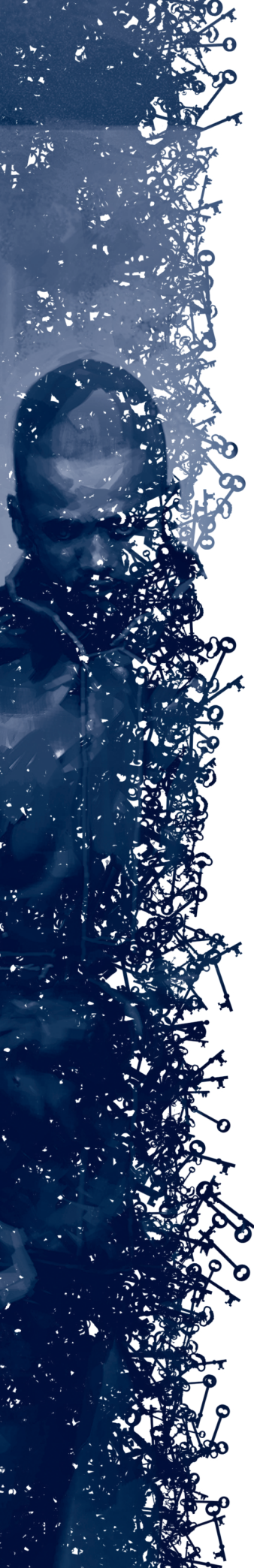
"Shit, listen to you." He shook his head. "Naw, he's white, and he's six hundred, and like all you genius motherfuckers figured out, he ain't local. And I wasn't gonna get any closer without giving you the news first."

"Holy God." So much for Brin saying he didn't believe in appeals to a higher power. "Well, what the hell's he doing here?"

"Whatever the answer," I said, "it's bad."

CHAPTER ONE: AT THE CEMETERY GATE





A man driving on a deserted road late at night sees a girl standing on the shoulder. She's all alone, dressed like she's going to her high-school prom. He stops to give her a ride — she tells him her car broke down and her boyfriend went to get help hours ago. They talk as they drive, about life and love, about holding on to people past their time. The man assures her that sometimes the best thing to do is to let go of them, to let them move on. He tells the girl her father loves her very much, and that he will always remember her. As the car passes by a cemetery, the man looks over at his passenger only to find that he is alone in the car. The man smiles, whispers a prayer to speed the girl's soul on her path, and drives on. There are more lost wanderers who need to be guided home.

On a moonless night in the old churchyard, three men and two women gather with shovels and lanterns like bit players in a Frankenstein movie. The man buried here was a very bad man in life. In death, he became even worse. The five are in agreement: there can be no redemption for this man, no resolution to his tale. There can only be an ending. One of them clutches a box of salt while the others begin to dig.

They say the old van der Meer house at the end of the street is haunted. Old Man van der Meer was a sorcerer and a cannibal, they say, and his wife cheated on him with the Devil himself. She bore a son twice as mean as his daddy, and one Halloween night the boy fetched his father's favorite knife and went on a rampage. He killed his father first, and then his mother. Then he stalked the servants through that maze-like old house and killed them all. One. By one. By one. When it was done, he followed the old deer trail out to Hangman's Cliff where his mother had conceived him that night thirteen years before, and he threw himself into the river and drowned. As you stand outside the ruins of the old van der Meer house, the thing in your head whispers in the voice of a thirteen-year-old boy:

Home again, home again, jiggy jig.

Have you ever told a ghost story? Maybe huddled around a campfire in the dark woods, spinning yarns of the hook-handed phantom that prowls the forest looking for children to devour. Maybe in a pitch-black bathroom, chanting "Bloody Mary" into the mirror in fear (and secret hope) that she might appear. Maybe even sitting around the table with friends, telling shared stories of the unquiet dead. We love ghost stories, and not just because they scare us — although the thrills are undeniably part of the fun. More than that, though, we love ghost stories because, in a perverse way, they give us hope. If our souls can haunt the world after we're dead and gone, that means there's *something* after this life. It might not be the shining paradise our religions promise, but at least it's something, some sign of continued existence after our frail mortal bodies cease to be.

At the same time, most ghost stories are strongly colored by the fact that the ghost *wants* something. Unfinished business is what keeps a ghost lingering in this world, a yearning need for something from its former life. It might be to see her children grow up safe, or it might be to get her first novel published at last, or it might even be something as simple and direct as revenge on the person who killed her. Ghost stories remind us to savor life while we have it, because even if we do continue beyond the grave, whatever comes after is at best a pale echo, an imitation of what we have while we're alive.

Geist: The Sin-Eaters is a game about that kind of ghost story. It's a game about death, to be sure, but it's also a game about vibrant, passionate life. It's a game about endings, but it's also a game about *resolutions* (and no, they aren't necessarily the same thing) and fresh new beginnings. It's a game about

the dead, but it's also very much a game about the living and how a close proximity to death can supercharge your life. It's a game about risk-taking and thrill-seeking, about *memento mori* sugar skulls and drinking rum at the crossroads. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Stare oblivion in the eye and spit in it.

Born With a Caul

Those who will become Sin-Eaters are different almost from the start. One girl has an imaginary friend in childhood. Her parents don't think anything of it, until they realize that when the girl describes her "friend," she's describing the grandmother that died three weeks before she was born. A boy is committed to a mental institution for increasingly-frequent panic attacks. Medication doesn't work — no anti-anxiety pill can shut out the barrage of hellish whispers, of dry sepulchral voices howling demands into his ear. Another is shunned throughout elementary school for being a creepy loner. It's not until she's thirteen that she realizes it's not normal to be able to see exactly when and how someone will die just by looking at them. By then, it's far too late to convince herself it's just her imagination.

Every single one of the Bound manifested some sort of supernatural connection with the energy of death before the Bargain. Sometimes it's present from birth (like the old wives' tale that babies born with part of the amniotic sac covering their eyes will be able to see ghosts and spirits), sometimes there's an event that triggers it (perhaps an echo or a precursor to the Bargain that binds them to a geist, or maybe an encounter with some supernatural force), and sometimes it just starts happening one day and

KHAQQ calling Itasca. We must be on you but cannot see you. Gas is running low.

— Amelia Earhart, last confirmed radio transmission

the proto-Bound has no idea why or what it means. This second sight (or third eye or ESP or whatever you want to call it) puts these individuals in a unique position in the World of Darkness, in that all of them have had at least a glimpse of the supernatural world before they're thrust kicking and screaming into it. Unlike, say, a vampire, whose first brush with the hidden occult world was probably when his date grew fangs and started chewing on his neck, Sin-Eaters come out of the Bargain with at least some awareness of what's really going on in the world. They certainly don't have all the answers, and even the answers they do have might be incomplete or outright wrong, but at least they have *something* to lessen the trauma.

Sometimes, the mortal is intensely curious about her ability. She might believe it's a gift she must understand in order to use, or she might be driven purely by a desire to know *how* this is possible. She might try to communicate with the dead in some way (which, given that she lacks the full gifts of a Sin-Eater, is likely to be imprecise and prone to cause more trouble than it solves), try to help them resolve whatever keeps them here, or her actions might be motivated more by personal gain or other petty motives. She might delve into the occult, seeking an explanation for her abilities. Her investigation might even lead her to some of the stranger denizens of the shadows: a pale young man with bewitching eyes who tells her the answers to all her questions lie in the blood; a group of urban primitives that claims it can speak not just to the dead, but to Death itself; the parish priest who tells her to be wary of deceiving demons — after she tells him about the ghosts she's seen, they disappear.

Others withdraw from their ability, seeing it not as a gift but as a curse. It might be due to upbringing (many religions teach that trafficking with the dead is a mark of evil), or being unable to reconcile ghosts and hauntings with the apparently rational world around them, or just because what they see and experience is too horrific. Not many people can stand seeing the ghastly, mutilated forms of ghosts everywhere they look, or tolerate hearing the bone-dry susurrus of their whispers. Some go mad — as much as they might like to deny it, they *are* experiencing these things, and trying to deny them won't make them go away. Some try to medicate the sight into oblivion, but even when it works it leaves them nothing more than shells of themselves (and unless they're very, very careful, it can easily end up being the Bargain that sends them across the Threshold). Some accept it as reality, but just try to ignore it.

How the nascent Sin-Eater reacts to their "gift" often determines how they use the greater powers that come with binding their souls to a geist. The girl who talks to her Nana's ghost withdraws into herself after her violent near-death at the hands of an abusive boyfriend; now she's more comfortable with the dead than the living. The boy grows up and leaves the mental institution, but the voices aren't gone. After he slits his own wrists, he can hear the voices more clearly than ever before — only now he has the power to *make* them shut up. The girl who sees people's deaths realizes she can use that for her own ends: she becomes the perfect black widow, and the police can never finger her for the deaths of her husbands because she doesn't kill them. She tells herself she's doing a service, giving these doomed men a few months of pleasure before their time is up. Padding her bank account is just an added boon.

One Foot In the Grave

On a frozen lake, the ice suddenly cracks with the sound of a gunshot. A young man falls in, and by the time rescue workers pull him out, his body temperature has dropped to 86 degrees Fahrenheit and he's not breathing.

A crackhead corners a woman on a deserted street. He wants her money, but he needs a fix more than anything. His hands are twitchy; as she's handing over her purse, the gun discharges. The candy-apple red on the woman's lips isn't make-up. The junkie runs, leaving her to bleed out on the filthy pavement.

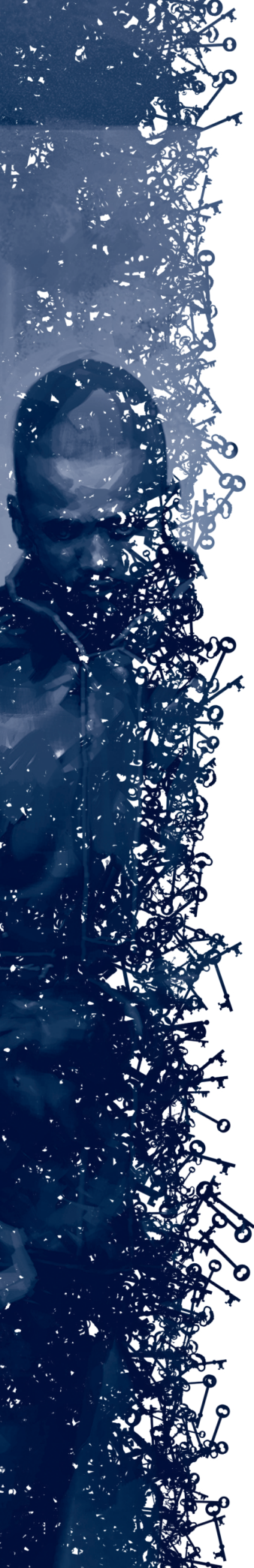
In a hospital ward, a man hisses his last breaths through a machine that ticks and beeps at regular intervals. The cancer has practically liquefied his organs, but he fights for every single breath. He's not done living yet.

All of these people should have died—in point of fact, all of them *did*. At least, for a moment. But where most people would just pass on quietly, or perhaps linger as a restless ghost, something very different happens to them. As their souls loosen their bonds and make ready to shuffle off the mortal coil, a combination of the burning desire to not go gentle into that good night and the peculiar death-touched nature of the Sin-Eater's soul sends up a kind of call — a call answered by a geist. More than ghost, less than god, geists occupy a peculiar place within the realms of the dead. Though each geist was once a living mortal man or woman, they have taken on a mantle greater than any individual identity. The geist catches the soul before it departs forever, and makes an offer: a second chance at life in exchange

THE SIN-EATER'S GIFT

The precise nature of a proto-Sin-Eater's "gift" is left intentionally vague. The most common form it takes is an extrasensory ability to perceive ghosts or the imminent energy of death, but that can take many forms. The Unseen Sense Merit, found on p. 109 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, is one possibility, as are the psychic powers and thaumaturgy presented in Second Sight. In some cases, the gift might be wholly external to the individual in question: she might have been enspelled by a mage to serve as an acolyte, or she might have tasted the blood of a vampire with a rare ability to command ghosts. The only restriction is that the character cannot have possessed a major template before the Bargain: only mortals, albeit supernaturally-touched mortals, are spiritually "open" enough to bond with a geist.

One final note: these preliminary psychic powers don't need to be accounted for on your character sheet, as they're assumed to be a part of your character's backstory and are subsumed by the addition of the Sin-Eater template.



for giving the geist an earthly, physical body once more. Sin-Eaters refer to this as “the Bargain,” or sometimes in typically dry fashion “the Event,” and it is the pivotal moment of their creation.

It is, of course, possible to refuse the offer, but few do. In order to attract the geist in the first place, the Sin-Eater had to be possessed of a truly fierce desire to keep on living (that doesn’t preclude suicides from becoming Sin-Eaters: sometimes coming up hard on your own mortality can make you realize just how much you didn’t want to die after all). Once the offer is accepted, the geist and the Sin-Eater undergo a kind of merging: like two trees growing together, the two become one. Life surges through battered limbs, collapsed lungs take in air once again, and a frozen heart begins to pump. Medical personnel declare it a miracle, the likes of which they’ve never seen. Family and friends weep with relief and praise God, while the newly-born Sin-Eater looks out at the world with eyes no longer entirely her own.

A Sin-Eater Born

The Bargain is usually the most traumatic experience in the psychic’s life. Suddenly playing host to an alien, quite possibly insane specter, let alone the trauma of a near-death experience and whatever events led up to it, is enough to fundamentally alter the worldview of the host. She is no longer just a mortal with a sensitivity to the energies of death; she is in a very real, fundamental sense, reborn. She is now a Sin-Eater.

It’s a curious phrase, “Sin-Eater,” and not one that immediately suggests the nature of the person it describes. What does it mean, and out of all the terms that could have been applied to these geist-haunted souls, why was it chosen? The term itself comes from medieval England, and originally referred to a man who would, when someone passed on, perform a brief ritual over the corpse, eating bread and drinking ale to symbolically “eat” the dead man’s sins, allowing his soul to speed on to heaven rather than linger on Earth. The sins of the dead were thus passed on to the still-living sin-eater, who damned himself for the good of others. Similar practices can be found in ancient cultures around the world, from the Aztecs to the Egyptians.

Exactly when the term came to apply to men and women who bound their souls to geists remains unclear, but the name goes back at least to the 17th

century, and likely spread with the rise of the British Empire. Sin-Eaters see the name as emblematic of what they do, if not precisely correct in its technical details. Whether they act as advocates or judges, messengers or avengers, Sin-Eaters bring a kind of peace to the dead and allow them to move on from this world. Whether or not they damn themselves for the good of others is a fiercely debated question.

There’s also a more literal, less pleasant shade of meaning in the name. The fact of the matter is that geists are not, as a rule, pleasant entities. Even the most benign and human-seeming ghosts can be subject to strange compulsions or fits of emotion, and geists are far more alien than most shades. Their goals can range from the inscrutable to the outright horrific: a geist of guns and urban violence might only want its host to stir up a little panic by emptying a clip into the air in a residential neighborhood, or it might decide it wants to ride along while its host executes a dozen young men and women with the gun that killed it. Even Sin-Eaters who have achieved a measure of synergy with their geists wonder — and fear — what the spirit might do if it were cut loose to indulge its every whim. In that sense, the sin that the Bound has eaten is the geist itself, keeping the entity in check and channeling its urges to (hopefully) constructive ends.

After Life, Not Undeath

Sin-Eaters are not undead. Although they technically died (or in some cases came very close), and it was the intercession of the undead geist that brought them back from the brink, Sin-Eaters very literally come back to life as part of the Bargain. They continue to eat, breathe, sleep, and do everything else living men and women do — including suffer and bleed.

The Bargain brings the Sin-Eater surging back to life, but it doesn’t exactly heal her. Whatever injuries brought the Sin-Eater to the brink of death linger; whatever disease killed her goes into remission but doesn’t vanish overnight. Many Sin-Eaters come to understand what they’ve become while lying in a hospital bed, recuperating. A rare few, especially those who died far from civilization, return to life only to succumb again to starvation or exposure (which isn’t the end for a Sin-Eater — see p. 173 for information on how the Bound can cheat death again).

How is it that a geist, a creature of pure living death, can bring life back to its Sin-Eater host? The

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Sin-Eaters sometimes call themselves “the Bound” as well, in reference to the bond between the host and the attendant geist. There is a subtle difference in meaning between the two terms, though, and it’s one a lot of Sin-Eaters aren’t too fond of talking about. “The Bound” refers, collectively, to *all* those who carry a geist inside them, but “Sin-Eater” is properly used only for the Bound who use their gifts to lay the dead to rest, whether by destroying them, banishing them to the Underworld, or resolving their anchors. Some of the Bound choose a different path: they deny what Sin-Eaters see as their responsibility, whether out of fear, laziness, or greed. Depending on what use (if any) they *do* put their powers to, these Bound might be figures of pity or contempt — or deadly enemies.

answer is bound up in the fact that the Bargain doesn't heal the Sin-Eater's wounds. Geists cannot actually restore life or heal a living mortal, but as archetypal figures of death, they *do* have an ability to manipulate death itself. In essence, the Bargain, and the attendant merging of the human soul with the inhuman geist allows the shade not to give life, but to *take away death*. This concept seems baffling, especially to humans who are accustomed to thinking of death as the absence of life, but Sin-Eaters recognize that death has a powerful energy of its own. By pushing that energy away from its new host, the geist staves off death long enough for the living body to repair itself — whether that be fighting off the disease that ravages it or knitting together bones and organs shattered by gunfire.

There *are* limits to what a geist's power can do, and what the human body can endure and recover from. A geist of violent accidents might be able to keep death at bay for a man mangled by an industrial accident, but that man isn't going to regrow his shredded limbs no matter how long the geist staves off death for him. Likewise, the human body can't regrow brain tissue: a woman shot point-blank in the head with a large-caliber round who loses most of her gray matter is going to be a vegetable even if a geist steps in and keeps her autonomous system from shutting down. Since most geists don't want to regain mortal existence to spend it lying in a hospital bed pissing into a tube, they usually only answer the call of mortals who could, with time, recover more or less fully from the Bargain.

(None of that is to say you can't play a Sin-Eater who was mangled in an industrial accident or shot in the head; the human body is a remarkably resilient machine, and especially with a geist's power holding death at bay, it can recover from some truly astonishing injuries.)

The geist's ability to hold death at bay isn't limited to the Bargain itself. Sin-Eaters are extraordinarily resilient thanks to the plasm coursing through their bodies, and thanks to the geist nestled in their souls. No matter how grievously injured, a Sin-Eater never falls unconscious due to wounds, and should the inevitable end occur, the geist can, albeit at great cost, perform the same trick from the Bargain again, pushing back the power of death long enough for the Sin-Eater to recover. Chapter 3 presents more information about a Sin-Eater's recuperative powers.

Merging, Not Possession

To the layman's eye, it appears that the creation of a Sin-Eater is a simple case of possession: perhaps by something a fair bit stranger than an ordinary ghost, but possession nonetheless. That's not an accurate representation of the process, though: The geist does not fully control the mortal, nor can the geist be exorcised or abjured or otherwise driven out of the Sin-Eater. By the same token, though, the geist is not merely a passenger riding along, slave to the mortal's whims. The traumatic nature of the Bargain actually causes the two essences to partially merge. The degree to which this merging is complete and total depends greatly on the geist and the mortal host in question. Most Sin-Eaters describe their geist as feeling something like

the voice in the back of their head: not *quite* a complete, separate personality, but more like that part of your own mind that tells you sleeping with your secretary is a bad idea or that you really should stop to help that stranded motorist. The geist is like a conscience: subtle, persistent, and sometimes insidious, it can guilt-trip you or make you feel like a million bucks depending on whether or not you listen to it. The only difference is, unlike your conscience, the geist has its own agenda that may or may not include your best interests.

Some see their geist as an external figure, an ever-present guardian angel looking over their shoulder, a hallucination only they can see. It might speak to them like any mortal man or woman (though perhaps in a voice no human throat could replicate), or it might "speak" through other means. Perhaps its voice manifests as EVP (electronic voice phenomena) in the hiss of a dead TV channel, or maybe it rearranges the words printed on signs in the Sin-Eater's vicinity. While seeing the geist as an omnipresent but still separate companion might be more comforting for the Host, it's all in her head: her geist is every bit a part of her soul as the geist who whispers in the back of its host's mind.

Sin-Eaters who are in tune with their geists (see Synergy, p. 83) can communicate with them on a higher level. Some geists communicate with words, but others dump fragmentary images, emotions, or ideas directly into their hosts' minds. Given that geists are even farther removed from humanity than other specters, this communication is often fragmentary at best. Some Sin-Eaters make it their goal to piece together their geist's history, to find out who it once was and what kept it in the mortal world after it died. They might even try to resolve their geists' anchors and let them pass on to whatever afterlife awaits. Whether such a feat, if it's even possible, would be a release from the Sin-Eater condition or tantamount to suicide is a hotly debated topic.

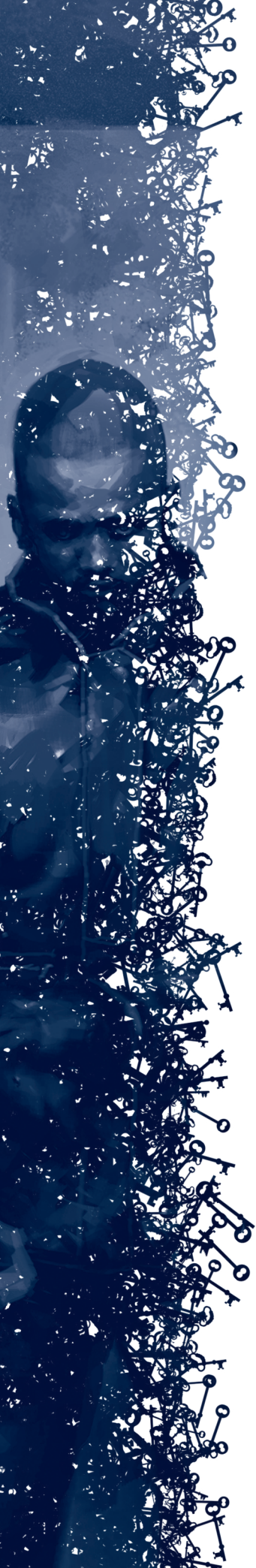
Geists

A vast, black shadow of a man is clad in the blood-soaked colors of the street gang he once ran with. His teeth are spent shell casings, his eyes two perfectly symmetrical bullet holes. He smells of cordite and smoke, and he speaks with a voice like cracking gunfire.

An emaciated figure, so malnourished as to become androgynous, she (it?) has no face, only a drooling, toothless mouth. Dozens of needles dangle from the veins of her arms, like the quills of a porcupine. She communicates with sensations of a desperate, aching hunger.

A grinning skeleton in a purple tuxedo dances a lewd jig. His cane is smooth, polished black wood, held like a phallus between his legs. He whispers in your ear that tonight is the night to party, to drink and snort and smoke and fuck until your body gives out. He whispers the same exhortation every single night.

If the Bound was touched by death before his Bargain, it is the geist that turns that touch into a full-blown embrace. It is the necromantic power of the geist that tears away the



matt SMITH

veil, that fans the Sin-Eater's gift into something truly more than human, that not only lets them speak with the dead, but command their powers and walk their roads as well. It is the constant companion, sometimes the willing ally, sometimes the terrifying *other*, a shadowy passenger lurking within the Sin-Eater's psyche.

What is a geist, exactly? Where do they come from, and how do they become something more than a mere ghost? Born of dead men, reshaped in the crucible of the Underworld, and given new flesh by the promise of the Bound, they are the hungry, lustful dead, given over to urges and desires inscrutable to mortal men and women. More than just ghosts, they are "small gods" of death, each one embodying an archetypal force of nature as well as the soul of a dead man. The truth is, even Sin-Eaters aren't entirely sure how geists are created, and the geists themselves don't seem particularly willing (or able) to explain in greater detail.

All ghosts are bound by their passions and inability to let go of the mortal world, but geists are even more so: unwilling to slip into the Underworld forever, they find secret paths to claw their way out of the lightless realms below and find the land of the living once again. As near as the Bound can piece together, geists have found a way to break the laws of death that send ghosts screaming to the Under-

world when their last anchor is destroyed. Through processes not wholly understood, a geist manages to replace its missing anchors with something *else*: something archetypal. They become as much a symbol as a specific individual, an embodiment of an aspect of death itself. Some style themselves gods, others liken themselves to the *ghede* of Vodoun religion: ghosts who have taken up iconic roles within the pantheon of the *loa*. Sin-Eaters often use this iconography as a kind of title: a geist that ties itself to the concept of revenge from beyond the grave might be called a "geist of vengeance," while one that takes on the mantle of a plague god is called a Tlazoteotl geist, after the Aztec goddess of filth and disease. In any case, the geist becomes something more than merely the shade of a man — and yet, in some ways, also less.

Anchors are what ties a ghost to her former humanity, and by replacing them with quasi-mythological iconography, geists begin to lose that connection. A weak or young geist that has only replaced one of its anchors is still mostly the person it was in life: perhaps it gains some strange new powers or an otherworldly aura beyond that of a normal ghost, but it still retains most of its memories and ability to relate to humans. As more anchors are lost and more of the geist's ties to this world are filled in by the archetype, the shade becomes more and more

alien, both in appearance and demeanor. Nobody knows what happens if a geist loses the last of its anchors, but the geists themselves regard the prospect with a terror like unto Faust realizing Mephistopheles has come to collect his due. This may be why part of the Bargain entails the creation of a keystone memento (q.v.), which creates a sort of safeguard against the destruction of the final anchor.

Nature of the Beast

Sin-Eaters don't really know *how* geists tap into these archetypal concepts, but given that geists can be found in the Underworld, it seems likely that that grim realm's powerful death energies play a role. Nevertheless, some rules seem to apply, even if the Bound don't understand why.

First, the archetype a geist taps into is always related in some way to how it died. This isn't always a literal "cause of death" correlation: the ghost of a man killed in a botched mugging might, upon becoming a geist, tap into the iconic power of firearms, becoming a geist of shootings, but it might just as easily tap into the terror the man felt in his last moments of life and become a geist of fear — but it's unlikely the shade would become a geist of untempered lust, even if the man was a shameful philanderer. His lust simply doesn't carry enough resonance with his death to replace one of his anchors. If, on the other hand, he was shot by the jealous husband of one of his many lovers, that iconography might apply. In some cases, especially if the geist's life was closely tied to death, it can break this rule — the former leader of a South American death squad who dies peacefully in his sleep might still become a geist of murder, and a child molester murdered by the parents of his victims might become a geist of fear.

Second, the geist's archetype is always tainted by death in some fashion. There are no "geists of water," for example — water by itself doesn't carry the resonance of death. A geist who taps into the archetypal concept of water will find its own dead nature twisting the connection; it might become a geist of drowning, or a geist of storms. A geist torn apart by a vicious dog might become a geist of animals, or even

dogs specifically, but any manifestation of that connection will be savage and terrifying, all blood-flecked foam and vicious, snapping jaws. A geist of lust or gluttony embodies not just excessive consumption, but the deadly excess of those sins: men who eat their way to a fatal heart attack at thirty-five or take countless anonymous sexual partners, uncaring of the risk of disease.

Third, geists usually only embody a single archetype, or sometimes two closely-connected ideas. A geist of knives almost certainly carries a related aspect of blood and pain and terror, but isn't likely to also become a geist of poison. Some geists manage to display this level of power, but they are in the distinct minority. Even still, there are innumerable shades and manifestations within a particular archetype, and two geists who embody the same concept might do so in radically different ways. A geist of disease might manifest as an avatar of Tlazoteotl, or as the squalor and filth of a medieval plague town, or even as the coldly antiseptic agony of wasting away in a modern hospital.

Finally, having to do more with the mortal host than the geist itself, most geists will try to bond with mortals whose Threshold (q.v.) "matches" their resonance. Our Tlazoteotl geist is far more likely to bind itself to one of the Stricken than the Torn or the Forgotten, for example. This seems to be more of a preference of the geist than an actual rule, and particularly in cases where the geist's archetype isn't closely tied to a cause of death there can be variance. A geist of fire might bind itself to a man burned alive as a witch (yes, there are parts of the world where they still do that), becoming one of the Torn, or a hiker caught up in a forest fire, becoming one of the Prey. Some geists, particularly those who remember enough of their mortal lives to recall how they died, seek out potential hosts who died in the same fashion, even if their Threshold would otherwise seem at odds with the geist's nature. A geist of sorrow who committed suicide might be drawn to an ex-cop who eats his own gun after working a particularly unsettling case, even though the cop's death marks him as one of the Torn and the concept of despair is more associated with the Silent.

SHADOWS AND DUST

Players familiar with other **World of Darkness** sources, like **World of Darkness: Book of Spirits** or **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, might recognize that geists share aspects of ghosts and of spirits, the ephemeral denizens of the Shadow who embody everything from plants and animals to abstract concepts like hope, fear, and hate. That's intentional: for all intents and purposes, geists are ghosts that have found a way to "hybridize" themselves with spirits.

Exactly how they do this is a mystery: it could be that Sin-Eaters are right, and it requires a trip to the Underworld — Avernian Gates certainly exist that open into the Shadow as well as the physical realm, and it could be that ghosts must find their way to one of these gates to devour a spirit. Maybe the Underworld journey isn't always necessary: spirits do enter the physical world sometimes, and a ghost in the right place at the right time could catch one unawares and absorb it. On the other hand, maybe it works the other way around: maybe a spirit of disease finds the resonance of a ghost that died of leukemia appealing and consumes it, thereby absorbing the fragmentary human consciousness into itself.

Whatever the "truth," it's largely irrelevant from the Sin-Eater's point of view; the Bound have no means of interacting with the Shadow, and unless they're extremely well-schooled in obscure occult lore, they probably don't even know it exists, or that animistic spirits inhabit everything in the World of Darkness. They simply explain what they observe as best they can.



Dark and Twisted Passengers

It might seem staggeringly obvious to state that geists aren't human, but it bears repeating: *geists are not human*. Even their memories of humanity are blurred, distorted, and fractured by the archetypal mantle they assume. A geist of fire is more than just a ghost that can manifest fire-related powers; on some level at least, it is fire. It doesn't *want* to burn, it *needs* to burn, because burning is what fire *does*. More so than ordinary ghosts, geists cannot be reasoned with, cannot be bargained with or talked down. They do the things they do because they have no choice in the matter.

Does this make geists monsters? Put bluntly, yes. At least, most of them. Geists, left unchecked, are usually the sorts of specters that end up as the antagonists in ghost stories. They're the drowned children forever seeking playmates down at the old swimming hole. They're the hook-handed killers who appear every ten years to stalk and slash and kill until their bloodlust is sated. They're the revenants whose killers went unpunished, taking out their rage on the family that moved into their new home.

And yet, if geists were purely alien beings, driven entirely by their archetypal natures, it would be easy to write them off as mere demons, monstrosities inimical to human life that should be destroyed at the first opportunity. That's not an entirely accurate portrayal, though; geists *were* human at one point, and at least a small part of them remains so. That small part of a geist's psyche, symbolized by its key-stone, is what allows the symbiotic bond between geist and host to be what it is, rather than a simple case of possession. While that human aspect might be largely buried beneath the visage of a wrathful death god, it is there, and it surfaces from time to time. The Sin-Eater sees a pretty girl at a bar and feels his geist yearn to feel a lover's soft embrace. Rum burns the throat as it goes down, and the geist relishes the ability to *taste* it for the first time since it died. Some Sin-Eaters believe they can bring out more of their geist's human side by learning about who it was in life; by connecting with their geist's mortal identity, they remind the geist of who it was, and help it to balance its nature and perhaps find peace.

Geists are not necessarily "evil" in any philosophical or cosmological sense of the word (although for every innocent victim driven mad by an unjust death there's certainly one nasty son of a bitch too mean for hell to hold): "elemental" might be a better term for them, or perhaps "amoral." Unlike ghosts, who retain some vestige of their human mores in the form of a Morality score, geists have no such empathy. They are motivated purely by their own natures, both the archetypal mantle they wear and the remnant of the human it once was. A geist of

car crashes doesn't cause freeway pile-ups because it enjoys seeing humans suffer, it does so because it is the unliving embodiment of car crashes, and causing accidents is simply what it must do, just as the wolf must hunt the rabbit or the salmon must swim upstream. The vengeful geist visits torment and terror on its killers and their families not because it is a sadistic monster, but because vengeance is *what it is*, and that vengeance is directed by human memories of its murderers.

Two Souls, One Flesh

That's where the Sin-Eater comes in. A free-roaming geist is free to indulge its strange desires as it will, hampered only by its ability to physically manifest and influence the world of the living. Bonding with a Sin-Eater allows the geist unparalleled ability to influence the world of flesh, but that ability comes at the cost of control. While the geist is bound into a mortal host, the host is in control. All the geist can do is nudge and tempt and whisper — with the rare exception of Sin-Eaters whose Synergy has dropped perilously low, the geist cannot exert direct control over the shared body.

Once they realize that they are in the driver's seat (something the geist often tries to prevent as long as possible), Sin-Eaters must decide what they're going to do about that fact. Some try to ruthlessly suppress their geists, never indulging its nature in even the smallest ways and resolutely pretending that voice in their head isn't there. Most give the geist some amount of free rein, checking the darker extremes of its desires but otherwise cooperating with it. The Sin-Eater who carries the Burning Woman inside him might take a road trip to California when the wildfires start burning, or he might purge a haunted house by burning it down, but he stops short of dousing his enemies in kerosene and lighting them up. Then, of course, there are some Sin-Eaters who willingly indulge their geist's every twisted whim. They might do it because they themselves are sick, depraved bastards, or they might do it because they're weak-willed cowards who are just happy to have *someone* to tell them what to do; but whatever their motivation, they're undeniably dangerous.

Sin-Eaters often accord each other respect and status commensurate with the power and danger of their attendant geists. Much like soldiers comparing battle scars, the Sin-Eater whose geist is perceived as the nastiest motherfucker of the bunch is generally agreed to be a badass not to be trifled with. It's a completely arbitrary measurement and doesn't necessarily have any bearing on who is actually more powerful or skilled (just like having the bigger scar doesn't automatically make one man a better soldier

than his compatriot), but there's an undeniable mystique around someone with the willpower to keep a particularly vicious geist in check. The Pale Driver might try to urge its host to cause a pileup on the freeway every now and then, and he's a good man for telling it "no way in hell," but when some out-of-towner rolls through and the word on the Twilight Network is that she's carrying the Red Hand Killer locked up tight in the bowels of her soul, people sit up and take notice.

Faces of Death: Thresholds

For all that death is the one true certainty in existence, it remains a multifaceted thing. Each death is so intimate, so profoundly personal, that to simply lump it in with every other is a gross oversimplification at best and an insult to the deceased at worst. Sin-Eaters recognize the unique resonances of death the same way a musician recognizes the notes in a chord or a painter recognizes the subtle admixture of light and shadow: and although there are notes in infinite diversity, the chords they play come together into similar motifs, an endlessly-repeating cycle of unique similarity. Sin-Eaters call these motifs Thresholds, and recognize them as the fundamental building blocks of death, as it were.

While the term "Threshold" refers in part to the manner in which a Sin-Eater first walked with Death during her Bargain, it is also used in a wider context when referring to the energy of death. A Sin-Eater who fell from a 57th-floor balcony is one of the Forgotten, but so is the memento of a tragic accident: a charred teddy bear pulled from the ashes of a fatal house fire, for example, or the blood-stained flywheel of an industrial machine that mangled an unlucky workman. A Sin-Eater has a Threshold determined by the manner in which he died, but so does his geist, which might not be the same Threshold as the Host. Even living people have a Threshold, though they don't know it until the moment of their demise: Sin-Eaters can sense imminent death as plain as day, and a man two days away from being stabbed to death over a card game is no less one of the Torn than the Sin-Eater who took a bullet in the lung.

The Torn: Death by Violence

They are called the Bleeding Ones, and the Victims of Malice. When death came for them, it was not the peaceful end of old age or the lingering agony of disease. The Torn end their lives in blood and screaming, bleeding out their last in shock and terror. They are the victims of muggings gone bad, of abuse that went too far, of hate crimes and petty wars and crimes of passion and the sheer bloody-mindedness of their fellow man. Small wonder that Torn Sin-Eaters tend to be angry sons of bitches and mementos tied to this Threshold seem to radiate malice and danger. Torn Sin-Eaters have a particular affinity for Passion and Stigmata powers, their blood and emotions alike filled with life and death energy that allow them to affect living and dead.

The Silent: Death by Deprivation

They are called the Starved Ones, and the Victims of Neglect. When death took them, it was not swift or painless, though perhaps it could be called merciful. The Silent end their lives in suffering and in desperate, aching need. They are the miner trapped in a cave-in, waiting for the inevitable as their oxygen runs out. They are the bloat-bellied children in refugee camps who haven't seen food in months. They are the girl who, spurned by the love of her life, downs a bottle of her mother's pills and a half a bottle of vodka. The Silent are true to their names: Sin-Eaters with this Threshold tend to be somber and laconic, and mementos bearing the mark of the Silent are easily overlooked, even in plain sight. The Silent have a knack for powers of Stillness, abilities that let them fade from perception, or the Cold Wind, empty and heartless as their deaths.

The Prey: Death by Nature

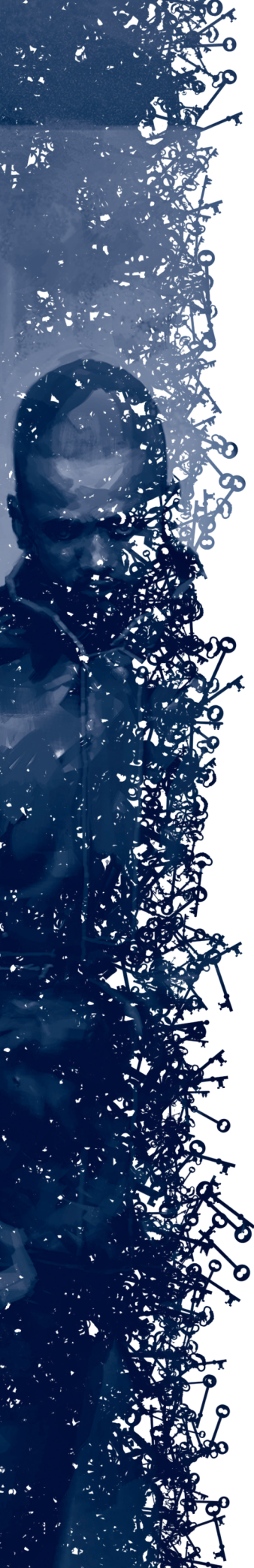
They are called the Eaten and Drowned Ones, and the Victims of the Elements. When death called them home, it was not man's viciousness or his callousness that claimed them, it was impartial nature of the red tooth and bloody claw. They are the homeless who freeze to death every winter, the sailor swept overboard during a nor'easter and lost to the deep. They are the hiker mauled to death by wild beasts, and the sleeping drunk, too deep in the bottle to notice when the cigarette falls from their lips and ignites the carpet. Their deaths open the Prey to a more primal and (they would say) more *true* view of the world, where man is the hunted and death is the apex predator. Mementos with this Threshold seem primal and primitive, heady with death and sex and the mysteries of the ages. Some of the Prey are attuned to Primeval powers, those that draw upon the ancient cycle of life-death-rebirth, while others are gifted with Grave-Dirt powers that echo the deadly strength of the earth itself.

The Stricken: Death by Pestilence

They are called the Ravaged Ones, and the Victims of Plague. When death's icy touch finds them, it is the failure of their own bodies that dooms them. They are the cancer-riddled child, dying by inches in a hospital ward. They are the diabetic who accidentally injects too much insulin, and the Doctor Without Borders, dying in some third-world hellhole of the cholera he went there to cure. The Bound of this Threshold are no longer content to endure hardship: they challenge it, setting themselves against enemies and seeking out mysteries with the persistence of a dedicated physician. Mementos with this Threshold seem unclean, redolent of open sores and other loathsome things. The Stricken are blessed with Phantasmal gifts of illusion and hallucination, and with the Tear-Stained command of cold and lifeless waters.

The Forgotten: Death by Chance

They are called the Lightning-Struck, and the Victims of Misfortune. Death does not seek them out; rather, it stumbles upon them at random, wholly unpredictable in its whimsy.



They are the man struck by lightning out of a clouded sky, the man decapitated by an ill-maintained piece of factory machinery. They are the one-in-a-million odds, the medication that interacts with a bit of this and a bit of that and suddenly becomes a deadly poison, the clumsy slip that turns into a fall that ends with a neck twisted at an impossible angle. The sheer caprice of their demise gives the Forgotten a sense that life is nothing but a gamble and that they should throw the dice as often as possible. Forgotten mementos, even the most innocuous-seeming ones, give the impression that they could at any moment be the cause of a tragic, inconceivable accident. The Forgotten share their capricious nature with the sometimes random-seeming whims of technology and fire, giving them a connection with Industrial and Pyre-Flame powers.

Riding the Flatline

While the five Thresholds are distinct, as with anything as nebulous as death, there are plenty of cases where one death seems to overlap two or even more Thresholds. A woman with a congenital heart defect is attacked on her way home from the office; in the midst of the fear and the violence and the surprise, her heart gives out, and she falls stone dead. When she makes a deal with the Black Valentine and comes back from the brink, does she fall in with the Torn (because of the violence of the attack), the Stricken (because it was her heart defect that killed her), or the Forgotten (because, let's face it, dying of fright because of a freak medical condition in the middle of a mugging is pretty much the definition of freak happenstance)?

The truth is, there is no hard and fast rule; it depends largely on the individual in question. Some imprint most strongly on the actual cause of death, while others imprint more on the circumstances surrounding the death. A woman whose compact car is t-boned by a semi and who is left little more than a

red smear on the asphalt might arise as a Forgotten geist since it was a random accident, or she might become one of the Torn, because even though there was no malice on the truck driver's part, it was a spectacularly gory means of dying. Likewise, a man drowned during a Mob interrogation might fixate so strongly on the terrifying sensation of being unable to breathe that he comes back as one of the Silent, even though murder is typically the purview of the Torn and drowning falls under the Prey. Sin-Eaters aren't entirely sure exactly what determines a Threshold — it can't be purely the psyche of the victim, because there are items out there with Thresholds as well. It's one more aspect of the Underworld game that tends to engender more superstition and ritual in addition to careful inquiry.

Dead Man's Culture

Some of the denizens of the World of Darkness have an ancient, secret culture, stretching back hundreds or thousands of years. They boast traditions as old as civilization, or call upon occult truths long since forgotten by mortal men. Not so the Bound: once upon a time, the world might have been ruled by vast conspiracies of grim and terrible purpose, *grand guignol* kabals bearing ancient mysteries from the dawn of time, but those days are long gone if they ever even existed in the first place.

No, Sin-Eater culture is a glorious riot of color and sound, of traditions stolen from countless sources, cobbled together, and sometimes shamelessly altered from their original. It's morbid, yes, but it's also brimming with passion and vigor and *life*. Let others mourn the dead with requiems and dirges and solemn remembrances; the Bound will be drinking the night away at a New Orleans jazz funeral and dancing in the streets wearing papier-mâché skull masks.

A DELICATE MATTER

It's perhaps awkward to talk about, but the question of where suicide fits into the Thresholds, and how attempting suicide reconciles with the Bound's fierce desire to go on living at the moment of death, bears some discussion. That's a question that's difficult to answer without belittling the decisions that can lead to such a truly momentous choice or without insulting those who have lost loved ones to suicide.

As with similar causes of death that sit on the borders of their Thresholds, where suicide falls depends largely on the means and motivation for the act. Many suicides fall under the Silent Threshold, as "deprivation" can mean a lack of love and affection and human contact as much as asphyxiation or starvation. Others belong to the Torn, especially those who end their lives in a violent manner or whose motivation was driven by anger. A few might fall under the Stricken or the Prey, if the means by which they killed themselves imprints strongly. Accidental self-inflicted wounds might fall under the Forgotten, but that's a very different thing, psychologically, from deliberately ending your own life.

Finally, it bears stating that some attempted suicides *do* come back as Sin-Eaters. It might be because, at the moment of death, they experienced a realization that they weren't ready to die yet, or perhaps they perceive in the bonding an opportunity to redress whatever drove them to suicide in the first place. Whatever the case, remember that, as with anything, it comes down to the individual character.

justin NORMAN

For the most part, Sin-Eaters are completely open (more conservative occultists might say “shameless”) about their practices. A krewé takes a trip into the Amazon rainforest where its members meet a tribe of natives whose religion has survived completely untouched by modern civilization. When they get back to their home city, it goes up all over the Twilight Network: “hey, check out this funerary rite we saw in South America!” Maybe it’s even accompanied by a cell-phone video. Something about the rite catches on, and within a few weeks it’s become a fixture among the local krewés. Maybe in six months somebody creates a ceremony that invokes portions of the ritual and immortalizes it, or maybe interest in it fades, and the rite (and the symbolism it represents) falls out of the common culture of the Bound in that city. (Yes, just as new elements are frequently incorporated into the “canon” of Sin-Eater culture, older elements can be and are often forgotten.)

To an outsider, it might look like Sin-Eaters are childish in their beliefs, adopting rites and customs based on the “rule of cool” and discarding them just as easily. While some krewés appear to be genuinely interested in finding “the truth” and devote a great deal of time and energy to trying to find the hidden occult meaning within them, most seem to just cobble together something that seems aesthetically pleasing. What kind of culture does that?

The answers are as varied as the customs themselves. Some Sin-Eaters with a philosophical bent say that rigid, established traditions with the long weight of history behind them feel just a little *too* much like death — far better, they say, to *honor* death, but to remind it that we’re not quite ready to go yet, thanks. A constantly-changing, evolving culture celebrates the Sin-Eater’s second shot at life while still resonating with the death energy that gives them their power. More pragmatic ones point out the obvious, but often overlooked, fact that it *works*. Let the “real” occultists worry about whether the *Pseudomonarchia Daemonum* is a legitimate work or a late-period forgery; when a Sin-Eater performs a ceremony to open an Avernian Gate using a syncretism of Vodoun (with a heavy focus on the quasi-Catholic elements of the religion), funerary rites from the Tibetan Book of the Dead, and something he read in a comic book once... the gate opens. When a krewé holds a midnight party in a graveyard to honor the dead that echoes Carnival with a healthy dose of Daoist funerary rites and inner-city gangsta culture, the ghosts and the Bound alike come out of it refreshed and invigorated.

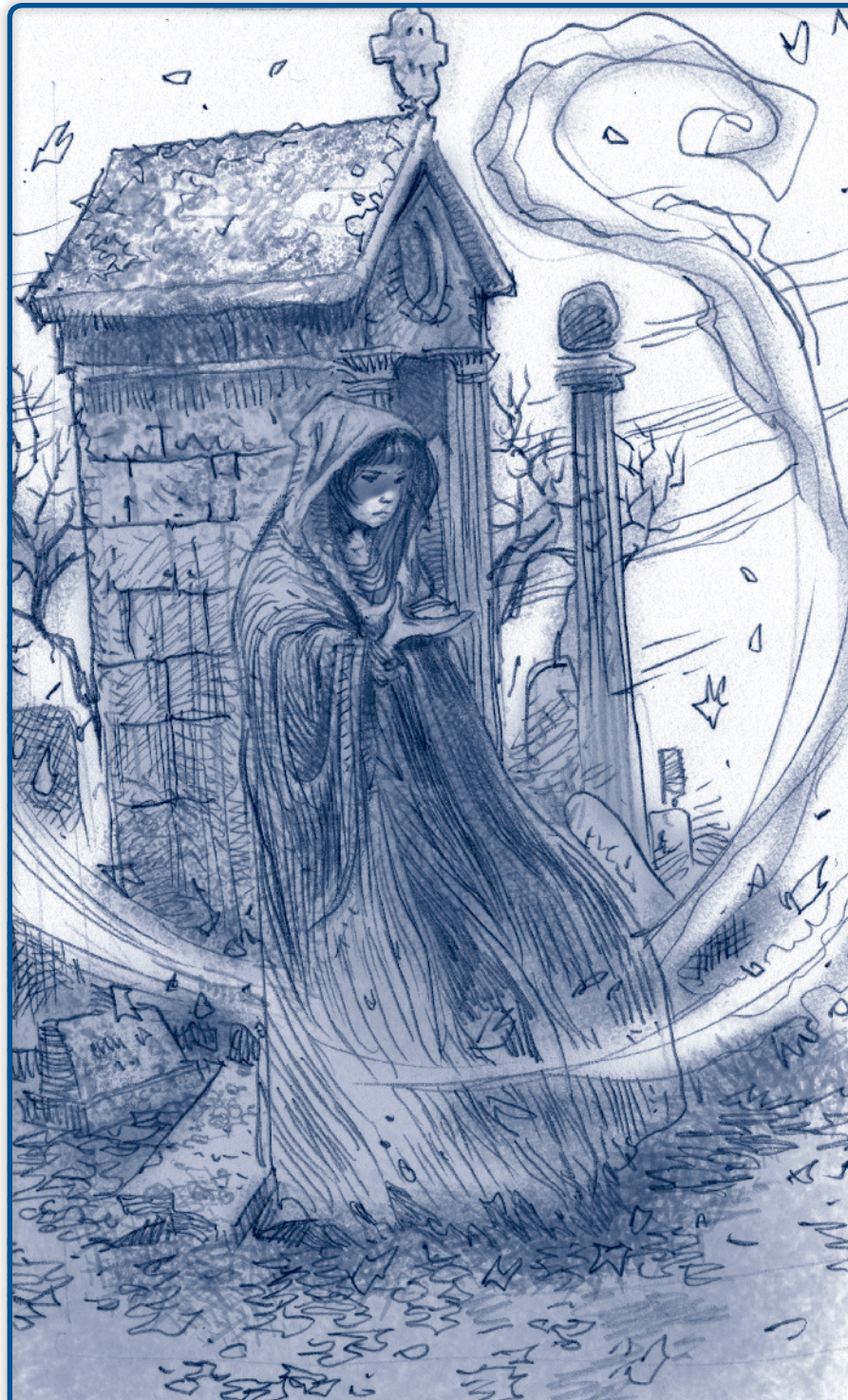
Nobody really knows why this jumbled mish-mash of culture should actually be imbued with genuine mystic power, but there are theories aplenty. Some say the energy of the Underworld cares more about intent than form, and that as long as the Sin-Eater is trying to invoke it the Underworld doesn’t care how it’s invoked. Others say there’s a tiny glimmer

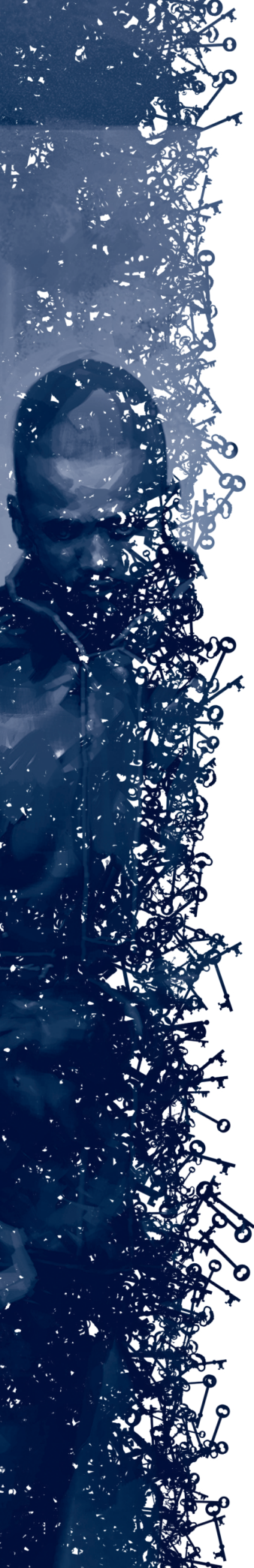
of deeper truth hidden in all occult practices, religion, and even popular culture, and that Sin-Eaters are just putting the pieces back together, like blind men doing a jigsaw puzzle. Still others say that it all comes from the geist, and the trappings are just for show.

Given this wildly eclectic culture, Sin-Eaters from different countries (hell, even from different parts of the same city) can be all but unrecognizable to each other, but there are still some common themes that find expression in the practices of the Bound.

Death Imagery

Sin-Eaters are a morbid lot, and they tend to enjoy invoking the imagery of death in their day-to-day lives as well as their rituals. Some dress in goth fashions, others adorn themselves with fune-





real imagery in the form of jewelry or tattoos. Nearly all of their ceremonies and rituals incorporate elements of this, whether it's a handful of sprinkled grave dirt as a ritual component or a requirement that it be held in a place associated with death. While some Sin-Eaters embrace the ennui and existential gloom of death, far more prefer imagery that celebrates the fleeting joys of life rather than the endless nihilism of death: dancing skeletons, sugar skulls, and the like are popular motifs.

⌘achronisms

Sin-Eaters like old things. One might carry an antique pocket-watch instead of a digital wristwatch, another favors corsets or waistcoats as part of her style. A lot of them like to drive vintage cars (classic American muscle cars being a particular favorite), and most would be happier living in a house built in the late 1800s — faulty wiring and plumbing and all — than a brand-new mini-mansion in a just-created suburb. Old things have a history, a sense of weight about them that echoes the balance Sin-Eaters feel between life and death. They aren't Luddites; most Sin-Eaters today probably have cell phones and computers with Internet access, and they aren't walking around town in full Edwardian costume (well, some might be), but they tend to find something comforting in carrying a piece of genuine history. Of course, there's a pragmatic side to this as well: the older an object is, the more likely it's been touched by death at some point and has the potential to become a memento. Industrial Manifestations (see p. 111) likewise work better the older a machine is.

Religion

Lots of Sin-Eaters are, or were before the Bargain, deeply religious. There are a lot of explanations for that: even before the Event, they possessed supernatural abilities that many would define as gifts from God (or turn to God to take away from them). While there are certainly atheist and agnostic Sin-Eaters, many of the Bound grew up in poor communities where religion is an important part of life. Religion speaks to salvation and damnation and what happens to us after we die: that alone gives many of them an inescapable resonance with death, to say nothing of more direct analogies (the Crucifixion springs to mind, as does the old Buddhist adage that to achieve enlightenment one must kill one's parents, one's teacher, and finally oneself). Even if she's cobbled together an eclectic worldview and mystical tradition around her krewes, a Sin-Eater often retains a core of the religion in which she was raised, and reflects that in her life. She might tattoo herself with intricate portraits of the saints she identifies with or wear a white top hat in honor of Baron Samedi, or she might not show it externally at all, but it's usually there nonetheless.

Dia de los Muertos and Carnival

In the last century, the imagery of the Day of the Dead festival (*Calaveras*, sugar skulls, *pan de muerto* and the like) have gone from relative isolation among krewes in the Americas (particularly Mexico and the southwestern United States) to a nearly-universal component of Sin-Eater culture. While the actual holiday may or may not be celebrated (and even if it is, it may end up wildly different than its roots among mortals), Sin-Eaters wearing skull masks in the style of José Guadalupe Posada can be found from Mexico City to Tokyo.

Likewise, the Carnival festival held throughout the Catholic world is a source of inspiration (not to mention the term “krewes”), particularly in the Americas. Sin-Eater wakes often feature samba music, elaborate and brightly-colored costumes, and king cakes in a synthesis of Carnival traditions from around the world.

The Horsemen

A common motif in the occult lore Sin-Eaters assemble around themselves is the image of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (actually *five*, as explored in Chapter Two). Rather than being heralds of the end of the world, though, in Sin-Eater eschatology, the Horsemen are more personal figures, who lord over each of the Thresholds as patron saints, avatars, or perhaps even gods of death. They are sometimes represented in the traditional style of supernatural riders, sometimes as different-colored chess knights, and sometimes by the icons of a sword, scale, bow and arrow, sickle or scythe, and a pair of dice showing snake-eyes. They are invoked in ceremonies and fashion, and are frequently used as code to call out a Twilight Network message.

Krewes

Sin-Eaters form *krewes*: alliances designed for mutual protection, occult study, political power in the Twilight Network, or a mix of all of these. Time was most krewes were hallowed secret societies: groups with private drawing rooms, special handshakes, and signet rings. Some of them still play with the elitist conspiracy trip but for most Sin-Eaters, the 21st century is an age of improvised alliances and strange revelations. The modern krewes is half a street gang and half an eccentric religion, customized to fit its members' newfound obsessions. When two krewes meet, things don't go down according to ancient protocols because there aren't any, save for those strong or trusted krewes impose on the area. The closest thing to a binding, universal Sin-Eater

sect is the Twilight Network, but it's not a structure that decides who the boss is.

This section concentrates on the basics of krewes in Geist's setting. Krewes are different from other character groupings, however, in that there are specific systems that players and Storytellers use to design them. See Chapter Three for more information on rules for krewes.

Loose Customs

It would be a lie to say that Sin-Eaters have no common customs at all, no strange words or symbols to tell each other apart, or say things designed for outsiders to ignore. There's definitely a scene between the krewes, and matters of etiquette that don't have the weight of conscious traditions, but are more like basic assumptions. From time to time, amateur anthropologists among the Sin-Eaters have sketched rules out and local strongmen have tried to turn them into laws, with varying success. Here's what a new Sin-Eater might get told.

Babaloa Louis on the Nature of Krewes

There are krewes, and there are krewes – know what I'm sayin'? You can make friends, forge a truce with some other Gs but that ain't no deep krewe, studyin' the Big Black together, getting the geists to spit up some of the real secrets. You'll know those krewes when you meet 'em. They're the ones with money, connections, and maybe a bit of madness in 'em. They've got a spark in 'em – a revelation from the Great Below that makes them.

In a real krewe, a deep krewe, you got three kinds of Gs: S-E's who founded the krewe and their successors, Gs who are initiated, and associates. You're an associate. I'm Babaloa – that means I've got the Old God in me. Wanna move up?

"Krewe" is a general term for any group of allied Sin-Eaters, but more powerful krewes are almost always bound by ceremony. They were founded by the Krewe Binding ceremony and have superior, ordinary, and mystical resources at their command. Some Sin-Eaters spend their lives as lone operators or as part of loose associations. Few frown on that, but a ceremonially-bonded krewe almost always has more power and prestige.

The Speaker of Persephone on Property and Territory

Looking through records of our sect's relations with others, I can identify three things a Sin-Eater might call his property: his mementos mori, his krewe's Haunt, and his geist. Certainly, we would deliver real death to anyone who presumed upon these. It is often customary to ask before entering territory or making use of mundane organizations that a krewe marks for its own use. Violating these boundaries is considered rude, at least. Other subjects are less clear. When we take the dead under our wing we brook no interference, but that's merely our preference: one we have the strength to enforce.

Everything rots and fades away, but that doesn't make the Bound less materialist than other people. It's just not a part of the essence of living with a geist, and knowing the dead. Somebody steal something? Other krewes don't

care unless it has mystical significance. Stealing mementos is frowned upon; so is hijacking a Haunt. These both happen, but krewes generally cooperate to punish offenders. Attempting to sever a Sin-Eater's bond with his geist or otherwise manipulate it is a more serious crime. It's part of some internal krewe rites, but if an outsider tries it and the Twilight Network finds out, the already vague protections of custom vanish. Anybody can take him out and nobody but his friends will give a damn.

Babaloa Louis on Secrecy

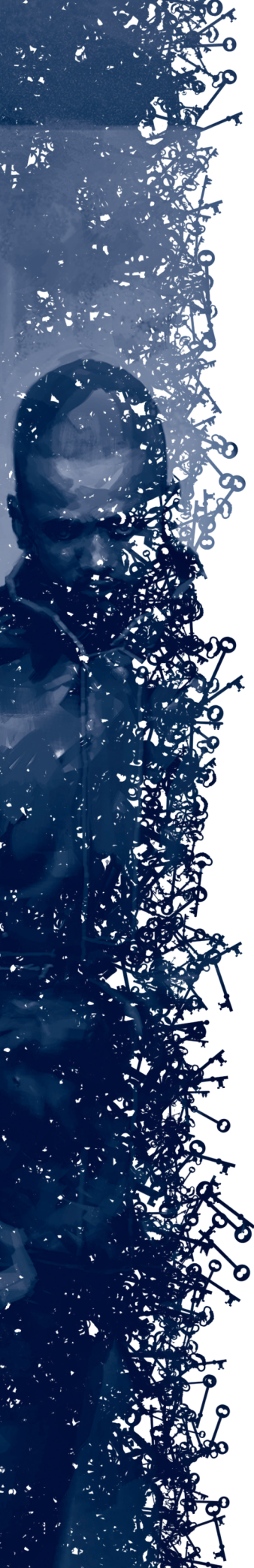
Are you crazy, man? We don't tell this shit to anybody who hasn't seen the Big Black for themselves. When you notice the dead, they notice you. You think it takes a freak to really see ghosts, but when you tell them the truth, you turn them into freaks. I've seen it happen. Plus, if people really knew about the Great Below, what'd they do? Kill themselves? Kill us? Try to make more of us with fucked up science experiments? I heard the government's pushing purer H on the streets and then kidnapping the addicts who survive. Real black ops shit. S-E's don't agree on much, man, but if you shoot your mouth off, expect to see the Black again for good.

It's hard for the average person to find conclusive evidence of life after death, and Sin-Eaters aim to keep it that way. The reasons vary, but the conclusion is virtually unanimous. Most Sin-Eaters don't want to be singled out as a special caste in human societies or attract attention from potential enemies, including would-be necromancers, governments, and religious figures. Letting the truth slip isn't necessarily a capital offense, but if a krewe kicks the shit out of you for doing it, most Sin-Eaters would call that a compassionate response. On the other hand, not every krewe defines "initiation" the same way. Many krewes allow themselves small cults of followers, or peripheral secret societies that know when to keep their mouths shut.

The Speaker of Persephone on Murder and Revenge

Murder is an interesting subject, since it is, among us, reversible. In 1799 the Eighth Speaker advised the Twilight Web that there should be a body-price for murders that are undone, but this was not widely adopted. Indeed, it seems that in the current age, all killings are punished equally, though if the victim returns in the flesh the community may advise a krewe to moderate its thirst for revenge. In all such situations, krewes have historically left violent conflict to the parties involved, declining to intervene, lest the situation consume us all. We think it permissible to help an ally that has been unjustly assaulted, as long as we have announced the alliance as a deterrent beforehand. Of course, we have other allies, too. Pull on one thread, and you drag the entire rope across your neck.

Sin-Eaters know that everyday authorities won't be able to catch them for murder and as a group, punish offenders as much as any other mob would: savagely and inconsistently. Where custom really matters is when the Bound kill each other. Sin-Eaters punish murder with murder, but in the past, krewes would lessen the punishment to mutilation, a beating, or a fine if the killer made it easy for the victim to be resurrected. Few modern krewes use such discriminating



judgment. For them, the main issue is to keep the cycle of retribution from affecting everyone. That's why krewes frown on Sin-Eaters helping outsiders with vendettas. It's more acceptable to make an alliance known through the Twilight Network first. That way, anyone who triggers your wrath should have known it was coming. This tradition doesn't work very well when krewes are deeply enmeshed in alliances, as offending one krewe sparks activity all the way across the web.

Babaloua Louis on Signs and Colors

You gotta learn which tags and signs to respect. Every krewe has 'em. That ain't a gangsta thing either. Some krewes front with black dragons and shields and Old World shit, and some, like mine, go for a little hint of the true religion. See this? Looks just like another dime store skull bracelet, right? You won't find a copy of it out of our hands. You use signs to mark yourself, mark what's yours and to steady the power, once you know the rites. Plus, it's about the team. Everybody has their own style, but look too different and you're just some shift, eccentric motherfucker. You won't change your shoes for the cause, how the fuck do I trust you to have my back?

Krewes use special symbols to identify themselves, mark their turf and honor their beliefs. Krewes take their symbols from internal traditions and the culture around them. They're adept at hiding them in plain sight. Graffiti, jewelry, hand signs, and clothing are all used to express the krewe's identity.

Sin-Eaters usually keep a subtle sign of their krewe visible on their persons most of the time, and often

have alternative ritual dress for special occasions. Leaving aside practical considerations, the Bound are social creatures. They have their own fashions and the same tendency to conform to their peers' expectations as anyone else.

The Speaker of Persephone on Language

Older societies like ours use our own names for the Underworld, the dead and the hidden powers of both. We guard these names and signs; they are our unique science, honed over centuries. Nevertheless, you should always be aware that outside the sect, names go in and out of style. Vague labels are the rule and while you must learn them, don't let them infect your outlook. Even the term "krewe" is foreign to us, but it is so common and useful that we have brought it into our nomenclature. It is acceptable to use vulgar slang when you must, but don't take language's vicissitudes so seriously that you forget the teachings.

From the outside, Sin-Eater slang looks messy, even self-mocking. Krewes represent such diverse beliefs that most names for things are either cast-offs that Sin-Eaters don't take seriously, or parts of ancient traditions that have become universal. A few terms are just fads that stuck.

The name "krewe" is indicative of how language changes. Before the late 1700s there were cults, mysteries, sodalities — nothing called a krewe. But the Flesh Fair or *carnivale* was a common part of European Sin-Eater culture, where they met, reinforced the early Twilight Network, and raised a bit of Death's power. When these transformed into the

SUPERNATURAL TRASH CULTURE

Sin-Eater culture is an apparent contradiction. Their traditions look so obviously artificially constructed that an outsider might wonder if krewes really are all that sincere. If the average krewe is a house of culture, the paint on the doors is still wet; it uses rituals devised by its creators instead of an ancient tradition. New ideas fly thick and fast in a young krewe as it builds an edifice of ideas about the dead.

Worse yet, krewe culture is a cultural salad. Sin-Eaters mash together incompatible religions and see what comes of it. They grab discredited science, fringe history, mistranslated hieroglyphs, fake holy books pushed by long-dead hucksters, back issues of dubious anthropology journals. They even get the occult "wrong," since they use more from 1960s paperbacks, crumpled religious tracts, and fairy tales than the contemporary, "postmodern" occult culture. To many of them a witch isn't a nice person practicing a reconstructed nature religion, but a stranger with an ugly face who poisons your well, gives your relatives cancer, and generally fucks your shit up. (In fact, in many krewes, Sin-Eaters want to be *that* kind of witch.) They cut up the world's superstitions and extreme beliefs, paste it together, and try to read something coherent from the whole. It begs the question: *why would anyone take it seriously?*

Sin-Eaters take it seriously because their geists do. When a krewe is sanctified through ceremony, it receives a revelation about the nature of life and death. To the founders, this is a profoundly personal experience because the revelation seems to come out of their psyches. The result isn't something they always agree with, but it's something that holds intense meaning for them, even if it's built from all the spiritual trash gathered over a life of pop culture, spiritual musings, and hidden superstitions. It may not be *the* truth, but it's enough to build on with holy days and secret names of power. That channel is enough to command the dead and invoke the gods — to experience a truth more essential than any catechism can provide.

New World's traveling shows and celebrations, Sin-Eaters took up the names of their organizing bodies. While most Sin-Eaters are cognizant of the word's origins, they now use it for little other reason than they can write it down so that the initiated know what they're talking about and speak it without raising suspicions.

Some other terms are almost as widely used as the word "krewe," but many are known only to a cluster of krewes, or are part of the ceremonial terminology of a single group.

Positions

Even though a krewe's internal positions are often unique, it's useful for most of them to follow a consistent custom when they deal without outsiders. Furthermore, in spite of their diversity, all krewes deal with common needs. This shapes the expected ways in which people define themselves in a krewe, leading to the following positions. Note that while the names below are common slang in the United States, they, like the positions themselves, are not part of a consistent tradition as much as a practical habit — when a krewe doesn't need a Conjure Man, for example, it doesn't have one. Different versions and variants of each title are presented in parentheses. In most of North America, using one of the titles below will help a strange Sin-Eater understand who you're asking about.

Old One (Leader, Babaloo, Bishop, King, Matriarch, Patriarch, Queen, Senex): This is the krewe's leader. Most krewes choose leaders based on an informal mix talent, experience and charisma, but elections, designated successors, and duels for power can be used as well. As long as it stays inside the krewe, nobody else cares. Almost every Old One is a krewe founder or his successor, and of those that aren't the majority rule with the approval of the founders.

Founder (Consigniore, Knight, OG, Vizier): Most founders enacted the ceremony that created a ritually consecrated

krewe, but in a few older societies, the current title holders are either the designated successors of the originals or have stolen succession from them with various forms of political intrigue — and occasionally, cannibalism (see p. 192). Founders have access to unique abilities, channeled through the mythic figures the krewe reveres. The founders' geists act as representatives, or *Aspects* of these gods, holy ancestors and other legendary beings. If a krewe is large enough to contain members who aren't founders, the founders are almost always leaders, forming a council that directs the krewe — and when they disagree, it can tear a krewe apart.

Hand (Lieutenant, Houngan, Mambo): This position only exists in larger krewes: ones big enough to support multiple cliques (a Tier Two faction: see p. 31). The hand is the highest ranking member of a clique outside the krewe's founders. His name comes from the idea that he is an extension of the founding leadership — or the "hand of the Old Man." Some big krewes split their founders up among the cliques, but rarely use the founder and hand titles together — the position of founder takes precedence.

Hex (Bokor, Brujeira, Curse Man or Woman, Enforcer, Torpedo, Witch, Warlock): The Hex is part soldier, part black magician — and when it comes to doing her duty, all malice. Sin-Eater vendettas aren't pretty. The Mob might kill your family; Sin-Eaters kill your family and send them to kill *you*. The average Hex is equally skilled in ordinary violence and malicious Manifestations, but she's also good at containing violence through the precise application of force. Sin-Eaters avoid escalating violence when they can, for fear one dispute can turn into a wildfire of necromantic warfare.

Conjure Man or Woman (Cunning Man or Woman, Maga, Magus, MC): The Conjure Man keeps the krewe's mystic ceremonies (see Chapter Three). As healing is traditionally a ceremonial purview for Sin-Eaters, this is also his responsibility, and as his knowledge requires a superior

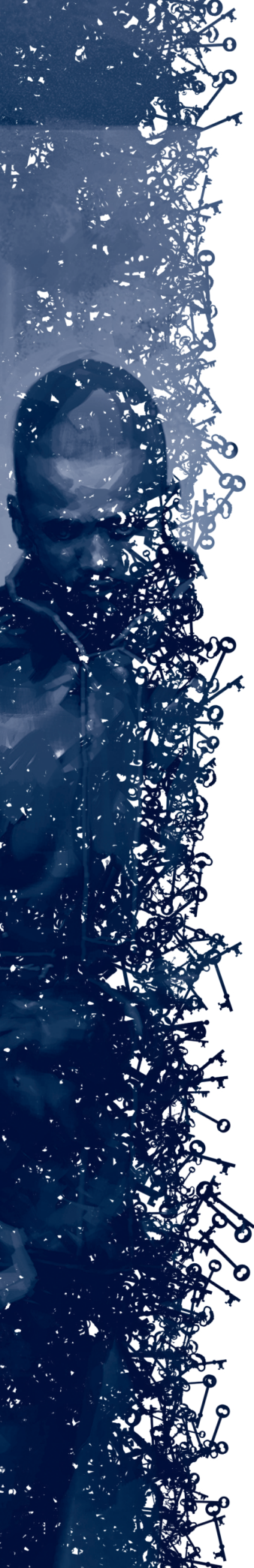
DEAD BROKE NO LONGER

One quietly pervasive influence in Sin-Eater society is that the demographic skews slightly to less privileged backgrounds. Poor people lead more dangerous lives. More danger means more early death — and more of the near death experiences that create Sin-Eaters. Poor people get shot. They overdose. They get diseases like TB that rich people pretty much stopped getting a century ago. Most Bound are unaware of this trend. Plenty of them still come from rich backgrounds and in any case, nobody's ever surveyed Sin-Eaters about their families in a systematic fashion.

Still, the trend leaves a mark on krewe culture. Sin-Eaters aren't squeamish about material acquisition — they like to get paid. Only a minority have romantic spiritual or political ideas about the virtues of poverty. They've got the power to make money and use it when they can get away with it. They enrich themselves, their friends, and their families. Some krewes have a regular entourage of friends and loved ones who help out in exchange for money and favors, but letting ordinary people get too close skirts the bounds of what most Sin-Eaters consider acceptable conduct. People who know too much about the Great Below tend to get there ahead of schedule. Still, newfound wealth makes them a stronger community and helps drive krewes to stay together.

Krewes also tend to be skeptical of authority, education, and mass culture. They know the world's a stranger place than anybody's going to say on TV. They don't trust preachers asking for money or degree-laden intellectuals asking for respect. On the other hand, many Bound lack a formal education and have a worldview informed by rumor and folklore, not science, theology, or politics. Some are naïve, or even crackpots who believe all kinds of conspiracy theories. Remember though, that this is just a bias in the culture, not a hard rule. Krewes can have any attitude you want them to have.





understanding of the occult, he's usually consulted whenever unknown supernatural phenomena present themselves. In some krewes, the Conjure Man and the Hex are opposite figures — one is the black magician and the other, the white. Depending on the krewe's beliefs, this makes them ritual rivals or natural allies.

Initiate (Acolyte, Foot Soldier, G, Hounsi, Made Man or Women): This is a “non-position position” that refers to any ceremonially initiated member of the krewe who isn't a founder. Many small krewes have no initiates at all — everyone's a founder. When the position applies, the initiate is usually near the bottom of the heap. The best she can do is become the hand of a small clique unless she maneuvers her way into the founders' line of succession. That's why many of them split off and form their own krewes instead. This keeps Sin-Eater society fractured and diverse.

Pledge (Apprentice, Associate, Fish, Fresh Meat, Newb): Some Sin-Eaters never take the plunge and ceremonially join a krewe, but they regularly associate with one for political reasons or simple friendship. Most krewes do expect these hangers-on to eventually join, however, so this position usually consists of mentoring between senior Sin-Eaters and new pledges along with tests of character and loyalty. If initiated members feel the pledge is worthy, the next step depends on the krewe, but it generally boils down to three options: free choice, join or leave the krewe's scene, or join or die. The last option is rare but not unheard of among more paranoid krewes.

Size and Scope

Krewes come in three basic sizes — well, two, really, since worldwide Sin-Eater conspiracies are said to be extinct. Leaving aside these legends, most krewes are young — one or two generations old. Sin-Eaters are often torn between the desire to expand the krewe and the strong individualistic streak that runs through their cultures. They get their power from personal relationships: with each other, their geists, and the ghosts around them. When a krewe grows, its members unearth new mystical secrets. They work together to grab more power over the living world, too. Members guarantee each other's wealth and prestige.

Not everyone wants to bother with the political burden of a bigger krewe, however. Some Sin-Eaters don't give a damn about the local pecking order. They're more interested in individual freedom. Some of them also suspect that the krewe's traditions, as handed down by the founding geists, are a front for a subtle agenda, drawn up in the depths of the Great Below. They think that the bigger the krewe gets, the more it's drawn to that agenda.

Cults

The basic krewe is sometimes called a *cult*. It consists of a maximum of about ten Sin-Eaters. They share a common mission, ethos, and internal mythology. Sin-Eaters who are interested in studying krewes in general sometimes call the whole corpus of krewe



Justin NORMAN

lore a *channel*, implying a common way to listen to and communicate with the Underworld. This often makes the “cult” moniker basically accurate, but not every Sin-Eater calmly follows her krewe’s channel. Some wrestle with it. Some even despise it, but they value their bonds with other Bound too much to leave, or can’t help but admit that as much as they hate the channel, something in it calls to them.

In the krewe creation rules in Chapter Three, cults are referred to as Tier One krewes. The majority of Sin-Eaters belong to them. In fact, they usually founded the krewe themselves after finding a Haunt and using the Krewe Binding ceremony. Most members are krewe founders. Hierarchies are either nonexistent or depend on individual talents. The Sin-Eater who leads the way in the Underworld might not be the one to deal with local ghosts. One might play the Old Man or Woman for the krewe around outsiders, but inside the krewe he or she is just the smooth talker.

Factions

When a krewe gets big enough to form internal cliques, it becomes a *faction* — a Tier Two krewe according to the systems in Chapter Three. The founders become a privileged minority, either dispersed among the krewe’s sets or collected in some kind of ruling body. Most members enter the krewe through the Krewe Binding. Factions are more formal than cults. The Old Man is a real leader, not a

mouthpiece. His “hands” run cliques based on his policies, along with those of the other founders. Titles and protocols creep into internal communication. This isn’t necessarily a conscious process. If the faction is to survive at its new size it needs to organize.

If the faction is the only krewe of its size in the area it usually dominates the local Sin-Eater scene unless smaller krewes can get their acts together and form some kind of collective front. It’s tempting for the bigger krewe to turn the screws, laying claim to every Haunt, memento, and other resource it can get its hands on. Most factions aren’t that aggressive, however. The benefits are usually short lived. Besides, slighted Sin-Eaters are often very, very good at inflicting payback. They learn all kinds of nasty tricks by calling up the ghosts of people who’ve been hit by them.

Conspiracies

They say there used to be great societies of Sin-Eaters: secret death-religions that spanned continents, with half-dead founders who ruled from the Underworld. There used to be missions to prune diseased societies, or kill them of completely. There used to be a world where a secret sign or strange word marked a Sin-Eater as a brother to people who didn’t live in the same country or speak the same language. Some krewes lay claim to being the successors of the old conspiracies. A few Sin-Eaters even say they still exist and that their agents hide in small krewes around the world. And of course, some krewes aspire to global influence. If

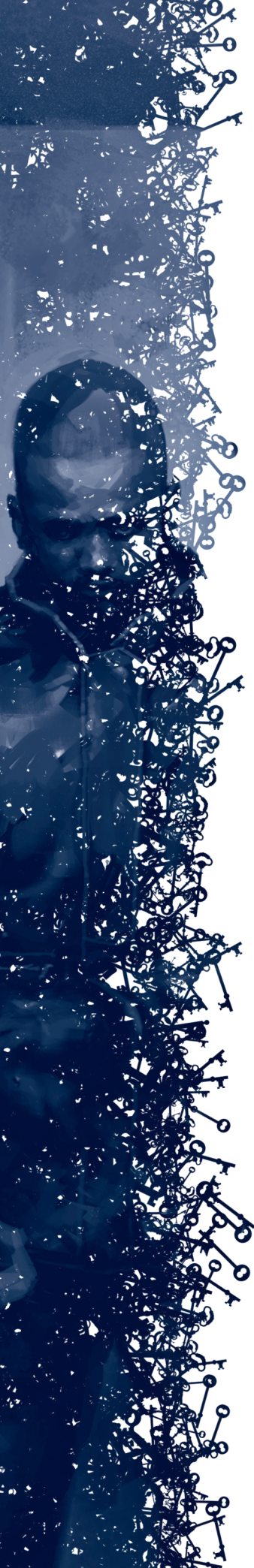
DEAD CONSPIRACIES

There are probably almost as many legendary krewes as living ones, but the following groups are so widespread in Sin-Eater folklore that many assume they must have existed at one time or another. These aren’t the only conspiracies that a large number of Sin-Eaters know about. Feel free to invent others.

The Dzimba Woye: The “Venerated Houses” was purportedly a society of African Sin-Eaters that took their name from the Shona term for chieftains’ graves. The Dzimba Woye protected the ghosts, tombs, and grave goods of notable individuals across Africa. The sect went by a different name in every nation, but members considered themselves part of a common alliance. It is said that every member was trained in the construction and protection of tombs. They designed labyrinths and lethal traps to keep grave goods out of the hands of thieves. Many modern krewes lay claim to the Dzimba Woye’s heritage, tracing their mythology to one offshoot or another.

The Kapalamukhi: The “Skull-Faced Ones” were Sin-Eaters from India and Southeast Asia. The title does not, as some believe, refer the Shaivist Kapalika ascetics, who carried a bowl made from a skull to honor Brahma — specifically, the occasion where as Bhaivara, Shiva cut off one of Brahma’s heads. Instead, the name refers to the skull itself, which symbolizes the geist’s permanent bond to its Sin-Eater. The Kapalamukhi supposedly claimed people guilty of terrible crimes and through an unknown method, forcibly made them into Bound to perform penance by punishing evildoers in ways that would influence their future incarnations. The youngest evidence of them is at least 200 years old. Most Sin-Eaters believe this sect is truly dead, but possessed an unmatched knowledge of the Underworld; making them worth investigating.

The Sharaska: According to legend, the Sharaska (Soviet slang for a secret research group) began with hypothermia and drowning experiments during Stalin’s regime. By 1950, researchers supposedly discovered a way to produce Sin-Eaters with controlled NDEs at a 1% success rate — and a mortality rate of at least 75%. The Sharaska produced its so-called “Vodyanoy” agents by drowning them in freezing water under lab conditions. The test subjects were political prisoners. They used their abilities to secretly take over the project in the 1970s. Vodyanoy fed false intelligence to their handlers and systematically wiped out every record of their existence. There are numerous rumors that the conspiracy still exists, with agents spread across the world — even that they manipulate other governments into reproducing the original experiments to increase their numbers. The evidence doesn’t live up to the claims. Every self-identified “Vodyanoy” agent has proven to be a fraud.



they succeed, they use the systems for Tier Three krewes in Chapter Three.

It seems probable that the conspiracies used to exist. Some of them left behind evidence: writings and relics that pass on the secrets that were once gathered by a veritable army of Sin-Eaters. Some use these to seize the supernatural powers of dead krewes. The founders of these krewes were supposedly godlike beings who could cheat death and impose their own laws on the Great Below. They were said to be the deathlords' lieutenants, consorts, or even successors. Chapter Three discusses the ways a smaller krewer can learn these mysteries, and an initial selection of abilities that these ancient sects taught their Sin-Eaters.

A Channel to the Great Below

The magic of the ceremony adds a psychological and supernatural bond that defines the krewer as an organization and opens the way to greater powers. Sin-Eaters regularly debate the extent to which the ceremony's effects are magical, rather than emotional, but what is beyond argument is that they open the way to abilities that individual Sin-Eaters never acquire, but flaws that independents never suffer, either.

The ceremony creates a way of life: a channel to power defined by customs and beliefs. These transform participating Sin-Eaters and even alter their geists. Every krewer has unique mysteries: legends of the Underworld, names for its powers and signs that symbolize both. The channel is custom-built for the krewer, and takes its shape from the founders' cultures, beliefs and fears, but the krewer does not *create* it. The channel is a personalized revelation handed down by the founders: geists. Even though it seems to be designed to speak to the founders specifically, those Sin-Eaters don't always agree with what they're given. Everyone believes things that they'd rather not admit. The ceremony draws upon those shames as much as anything else. Some krewes have fanatical devotees, but others just do their best to play within the rules that greater powers have set upon them.

As a krewer grows and ages, its members elaborate on the channel. They add new symbols and ideas. The cult grows, developing articles of faith and an orthodoxy. Not every krewer recognizes the extent of its own devotion — indeed, few of them really think of themselves as religions, really. Krewes conceive of themselves as gangs, research groups, magicians' sects, and revolutionaries, but they all have doctrines. There's a way things *must* be done. It's up to the krewer to justify them.

Mythology

A krewer's founders receive the mythology through ceremonial revelation. Sometimes it comes in a burst of impossible knowledge, but for many, it unveils itself through small, gradual discoveries. Geists reveal their secret names. Ghosts tell cryptic stories and Sin-Eaters discover occult texts and folklore that flesh the mythos out. Part of the mythology is metaphysical: a theory of life, death, and the supernatural. Part of it is a legend cycle that reveals stories about the living and dead.

Perhaps the most important parts of the mythology are the Aspects it transfers to the founders' geists. After the ceremony, geists manifest as ancestors and gods from the krewer's mythos. They become Loa, revered ancestors, saints, demons — even dead historical figures or Sin-Eaters from the past. Sin-Eaters are sharply divided as to how authentic the Aspects are, with some believing they are mere projections geists use to better communicate with (or manipulate) the krewer, and others saying they are, at the very least, avatars of the beings they look like, if not the mythic figures themselves. The Aspects confer upon their founders potent abilities, related to the portfolios the mythology says they possess.

Ethos

The channel also transmits an ethos: a code of behavior the krewer is supposed to follow. This includes both a positive call to action and an admonition against certain forbidden behaviors. In truth, adherence to the ethos is voluntary, but the commitment has some advantages. Sin-Eaters can cleave to it as a justification to mitigate the consequences of hitting a moral breaking point.

IT'S UP TO YOU — NOT THEM

The most important concept to grasp when you design krewes is the separation between players and characters. With Storyteller assistance, players build a krewer to focus the chronicle on particular stories and motifs. They use character backgrounds as inspiration but the *characters do not create the krewer's channel*. In the story, the ceremonial channel is handed down by the krewer founders' geists, but the play group is actually creating it together.

As a player, you should mine your character for ideas that will make the chronicle interesting. In most cases, that means creating opportunities for conflict over wish-fulfillment, mystery over solid answers, and ambiguity over clearly delineated codes of conduct. When these points of contention brush up against the rules, it's the Storyteller's job to work with the players to resolve matters in a way that drives dramatic action forward, usually by making concessions to all interests at the table while adding new complications to explore.

The ethos is more than a guide to action, however. It weaves the krewe's actions into the threads of destiny. It includes a prophecy about the krewe's fate. Founders usually keep this a secret from outsiders, and when they grow to faction strength, sometimes hide it from newer members too.

Krewe Politics

No special rules force krewes to organize in a particular city. For the most part, every krewe wants unencumbered access to the things they claim ownership over and don't want to get drawn into each other's rivalries. Even so, krewes must interact to at least make sure they stay out of each other's way, and when a crisis grips the lands of the dead, it sometimes creates a situation that no single krewe can handle alone. A smaller number of krewes have bigger ambitions. Some Old Men don't just want to be players in the ghost scene; they want to be Kings of the Dead. Sometimes they get their wish. More often, they don't get to be kings — just dead.

The heart of krewe interaction is the Twilight Network (see p 35). Sin-Eaters need a reliable way to safely share important news. Moving beyond practical considerations, the Network also maintains morale. Sin-Eaters carry the burdens of two worlds and often feel cut off from the broader human community. Krewes can provide day to day help, but there are times when *it's* the problem. Talking to Sin-Eaters with different perspectives is one of the best ways to stave off social isolation.

Faction-sized (or Tier Two) krewes sometimes have the numbers to organize something resembling a formal government — one where they hold the most influence. These arrangements don't last long, because smaller, cult-sized krewes eventually tire of faction hegemony. In other situations, krewes send representatives to regular meetings or even hold assemblies where they decide everything by vote, but the Twilight Network is usually a fine medium for krewes to express their wishes about local issues.

Death is Our Country: Other Supernaturals

One of the few things that draw krewes into a unified front is outsiders tinkering with the dead or the Underworld. Sin-Eaters aren't universally opposed to anyone else dealing with ghosts or the Great Below. Eventually, everybody's going to die anyway, so what's the point in screening out

people who want a preview? On the other hand, many Bound feel that the borderland between life and death is their special protectorate, and krewe beliefs usually strengthen and define the attitude. The general feeling is that working with death is a Sin-Eater's *right*, but for anyone or anything else, it's only a *privilege* — one Sin-Eaters have the right to revoke. Even when local krewes don't see much of each other, they usually develop some specific policies through the Twilight Network to deal with outside interest in the dead.

Here are some attitudes about the beings that are commonly protagonists in other World of Darkness games.

Vampires: Vampires are like death and taxes: You can't avoid them, but you can make your peace with them and every once and a while, you can cheat them. Vampire necromancers are best left alone, but they present a real challenge if they cause problems. Vampires have strong social ties to each other. Krewes may form an ad hoc assembly to deal with the undead on equal terms. The nature of vampirism is an interesting mystery, too.

Mages: Along with vampires, mages are the other supernatural beings in this list that Sin-Eaters deal with the most. They can be reasoned with, but any krewe planning on dealing with them needs to demonstrate their superior knowledge right away, lest the "enlightened" necromancer assume that his tradition has it right, and he may as well ignore Sin-Eater advice. Sorcery tends to leave a lot of occult trash around, too; mutilated ghosts and shambling corpses are the least of them. They are the suspected cause of abmortals and other necromantic anomalies.

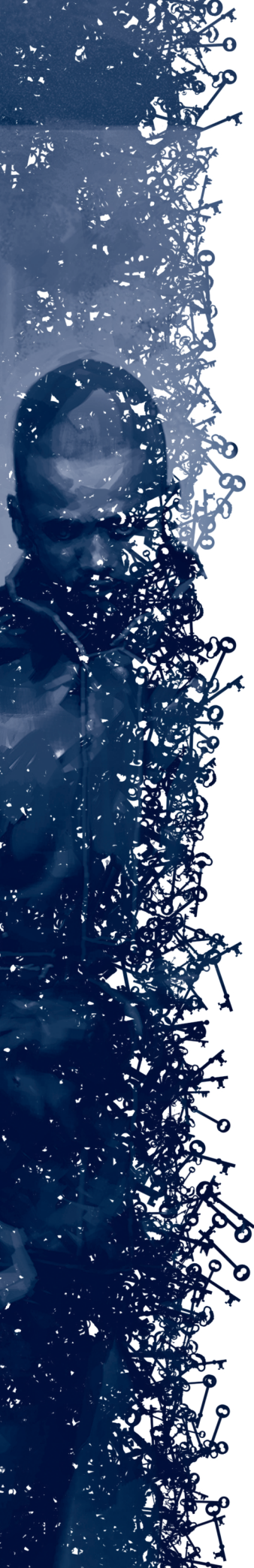
Werewolves: Krewes don't cross paths with werewolves that often. Sometimes, something stalks Twilight that isn't dead, and the wolf-people think it's their job to deal with it. Sin-Eaters are happy to let them do it, and will even help them when something dead gets involved and it looks like they've gotten in over their heads.

Prometheans: Every once and a while, some *thing* might come into town reeking of death, looking like shambling corpse if you see it *just* right and driving everyone — ghost, human, and animal — crazy. Usually, these things — move on. When they don't, it's probably a good idea to help them leave. Still, these corpse-men are intriguing. They don't follow the normal rules for such things. Krewes who learn anything new about them will definitely earn some bragging rights in the Twilight Network.

THE MANY FACES OF GHOSTS AND GODS

There are only so many myths to go around, so inevitably, more than one krewe's going to feature a founder whose geist takes the form of Shango, Demeter, or Jack Kevorkian. Newer krewes are often distressed when they encounter duplicate Aspects or other mythic elements, but once Sin-Eaters have been around for a while they come up with their own rationalizations. They might think they have the *real* channel; the other guy's god is a fake or subordinate. Some have mythologies that allow for it. Voodoo-based traditions accept that the Loa can appear to multiple people at the same time, for example. Sometimes, krewes with similar mythologies even develop close alliances, becoming the same group for political purposes.

There are a small number of krewes who can't abide by the idea of sharing any part of their mythology. Some fanatics even kill Sin-Eaters whose geists claim the same or similar Aspects. Most Sin-Eaters give these so-called Sacrosanct Sin-Eaters (see pp. 53) a wide berth, or even hunt them proactively to keep their krewes from growing.



Changelings: Some Sin-Eaters know changelings are around, but couldn't tell you much about them. They've occasionally heard that it's very easy to get stuck on the wrong end of a deal with them. Many areas have a policy of not making any promises, pacts, or treaties with the Lost.

Hunters: Most hunters are treated like ordinary people. They're not supposed to know about Sin-Eaters and at minimum, should never be sure they have their facts straight about ghosts or the afterlife. But among the revenge seekers, investigators, and superstitious thrill-seekers, there are a few people with special gifts and resources. Sin-Eaters commonly assume there's a government conspiracy that knows something about the Great Below, and some believe corporations are in the thick of it too, but hard information is in short supply. Krewes usually learn what they can and share in across the Twilight Network.

Flesh Fairs

Flesh Fairs are anarchic Sin-Eater gatherings. They serve both ritual and social functions. It's a mutant descendant of the European and early North American carnivals — in fact, the name is descended from its etymology (*carne vale* — “farewell to the flesh”). The old carnivals provided a way for Sin-Eaters to wear ritual clothing without attracting notice, and hid them in the throng or ordinary celebrants. Sin-Eaters brought the tradition around the world, adapting it to local festivals. In some, they even serve a public ritual role. In modern times, it's more common to host a Flesh Fair at a krewe's Haunt, away from mundane onlookers but during one of their celebrations, so that Sin-Eaters can get there without attracting too much attention.

Ordinary holidays and parties also get Sin-Eaters in the mood for the Flesh Fair, because it's rarely a somber gathering. Krewes meet for political reasons, but they also get together to reaffirm their commitment to living. Fleshly pleasures remind attendees how precious life is. Even though they know their spirits can survive death, the mortal world shouldn't be dismissed out of hand. Few Flesh Fairs are drug-

fueled orgies, but some are, and at the very least it's an occasion for Sin-Eaters to stimulate their senses. Some believe these sensations transfer to their geists, giving them a taste of life: payment for what they give their Sin-Eaters.

A given region usually holds at least one Flesh Fair at or around the time of a major local festival, and others when it's necessary or convenient to do so — as often as every week in some places, though these are often criticized for lacking real energy. If it's a mandatory, weekly party, then it's not really a party.

One krewe hosts the Flesh Fair — usually the one that claims the local Haunt. If that krewe doesn't have the money or social acumen to do a decent job, it might cede the honor to another. That krewe sets the tone, provides the entertainment, and often performs ceremonies that benefit it, and invites others to do the same. It's a good time for ceremonies because in many cases, the host's Haunt grows unusually powerful (see p. 185 for the systems that make this possible). Larger krewes even know how to augment this power with the energy of untutored mortal devotion, and actually hold part of the Flesh Fair in public, or in front of trusted devotees.

Other customs vary from place to place, but almost always include a ban on hostilities and a strong suggestion that krewes use the opportunity to settle disputes, and leave on friendlier terms than they entered with.

Grand Carnivals

“Flesh Fair” has come to outpace “carnival” as the standard name for Sin-Eater gatherings ever since “carnival” became synonymous with cheap county fairs and rusty rides. Now, the older term is reserved for a few large, prestigious celebrations: the grand carnivals. Each one takes place within a commonly known festival. Sin-Eaters who don't attend these grand carnivals still observe the associated holidays based on their krewe's traditions or the customs wherever they live.

Flesh Fairs worthy of the name change depending on who you ask, but the following enjoy almost universal prestige.

SETTLING SCORES

Since krewes are supposed to make nice during a Flesh Fair, the period leading up to it is often a time when Sin-Eaters will take care of disputes with each other, one way or another. Methods generally obey the credo of not letting a situation escalate to the point where it consumes multiple krewes. That usually leads to some intense negotiations and favor-trading but if there's really bad blood between two or more Sin-Eaters, the usual course of action is to either run the losers out of town or kill them discreetly. Improvised dueling traditions fall in and out of fashion, too.

When murder's a possibility, some krewes prefer to hit the Flesh Fair first to get an idea of who the enemy's connected to, and who might retaliate if he disappears. If a Sin-Eater thinks she's on somebody's hit list, it's in her best interest to look as popular as possible — and if that fails, she should see if somebody in attendance knows how to bring her back from the dead. If that happens, the murderer is often expected to treat her as if she never came back, and the victim should avoid her enemy at all costs. She's not completely dead — just dead enough.



joel BISKE

Carnivale di Venezia (Venice, Two Weeks before Ash Wednesday): This grand carnival has the longest known continuous Sin-Eater presence thanks to the age of the city and the importance it had to Venetians through the centuries. For most of that time, a series of *krewe*s called the *Mascherari* have hosted the event. They are named after (and assumed to have controlled) Venice's mask-maker's guild. These *krewe*s live up to their name, as they never appear out of disguise.

Dia de los Muertos (Mexico City, November 1st to 2nd): This is the largest and most popular grand carnival – and the most chaotically organized one. In fact, it isn't really one unified event, but several, organized by multiple *krewe*s at their respective Haunts. They say that during the Day of the Dead, old ghosts that can't usually leave the Underworld can come back – and that they're eager to use Sin-Eaters to help them settle long-forgotten affairs.

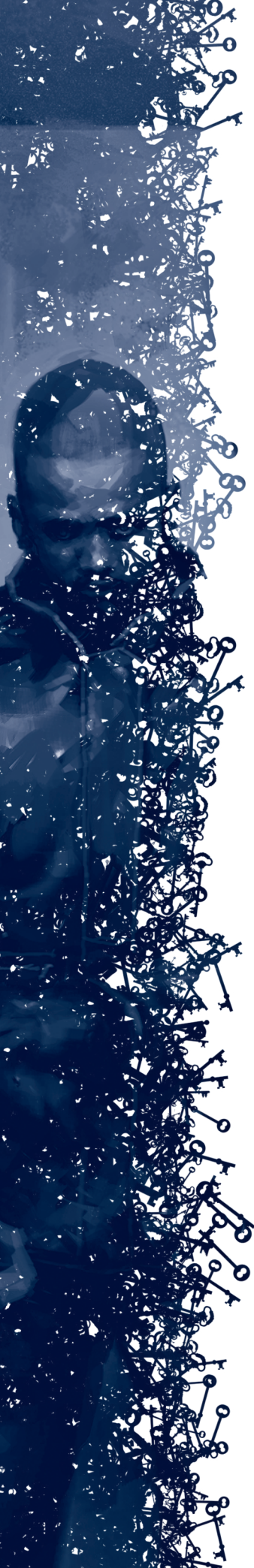
Ghost Festival (Hong Kong, 15th Day of the 7th Chinese Lunar Month): Unlike the other grand carnivals, the Ghost Festival doesn't provide much of an opportunity to blend in, but it does provide an effective cover for dealing with ghosts. Chinese Sin-Eaters and *krewe*s that have cultural ties to cultures that celebrate the festival converge on Hong Kong to exchange goodwill offerings.

In addition to the above, New Orleans' Mardi Gras has long been a favorite occasion to gather, but for various reasons has never been considered a grand carnival. *Krewe*s have dealt with natural disasters, huge, irritating crowds, losing visitors to Venice and occasionally, vampire interference (the city is known to be infested with the undead), halting what should be Mardi Gras' prominence on the Sin-Eater calendar.

The Twilight Network

Symbols drawn in white chalk on a 300-year-old gravestone. Graffiti on a mortuary wall in the bad part of town. A newspaper obituary for a man who never lived. These are the ways in which Sin-Eaters communicate, sharing news and information, stories and requests for help, in a kind of "lingua mortis" colloquially known as the Twilight Network. One part newsletter, one part secret code, one part message service, the Twilight Network is the primary means by which Sin-Eaters chronicle their new lives and the World of Darkness they live in. For the most part, it's a self-sufficient system, passed down by oral tradition – or sometimes less than oral, given that a geist might cohabit with more than one Sin-Eater over the course of its existence and can pass on knowledge rather more directly. Particularly since the dawn of the information age, however, there have been those Sin-Eaters who take it upon themselves to act as facilitators and go-betweens, ferrying information across the Network like Charon ferrying souls across the Styx.

Over the centuries, the Twilight Network has evolved and adapted itself to new media and technological advancements in communication. Once little more than a series of commonly-known symbols Sin-Eaters used as warnings or advice to those that came after them (e.g. "Angry ghost here," "Do not enter after midnight," "Avernian Gate here," etc.), today the Twilight Network is a global communication network that allows Sin-Eaters around the globe to not only pass on information, but also to establish connections and begin to build a truly global culture of the Bound.



Some use the Network out of altruism or a sense of fostered community, others work the angles to benefit themselves, but it's a rare Sin-Eater indeed who lives entirely "off the grid."

History

The earliest known reference to the Twilight Network comes courtesy of a Bavarian geist called the Black Hessian. While bonded to a Sin-Eater in 1764, the Hessian recalls stopping at cemeteries in each new town, checking old tombstones for messages left by "those others who walk the roads by Twilight." The Hessian's memories are fragmentary after so many years, but it recalls a standardized series of symbols used by the Sin-Eaters of central Europe at the time. The symbols were based on various forms of the cross (such as the Tau cross, the cross of St. Peter, and so forth), and could be strung together based on order and orientation to add inflection and meaning to the symbols. A St. Anthony's cross, for instance, meant "this cemetery is haunted," with the orientation indicating the ghost's attitude: upright for a benign ghost, turned 90 degrees clockwise for a mindless drone, or inverted for a hostile spirit.

Whether this was truly the birth of the Twilight Network has yet to be determined, but it seems likely that similar customs would have existed in other parts of the world, even if in a less formalized capacity. Certainly there have been many Sin-Eater conspiracy theories positing that their forebears left them hidden messages contained within great works of art and literature. One popular subject for these theories is Nicolas Poussin's famous painting "The Arcadian Shepherds," which depicts three Greek shepherds in a beautiful, verdant countryside gathered around a marble tomb bearing the inscription "Et in Arcadia Ego" ("I [Death] am also in Arcadia," or possibly "I was also an Arcadian"). Over the centuries, Sin-Eaters have variously interpreted the work as a coded map to an Avernian Gate that leads directly to the deepest levels of the Underworld (possibly to the throne room of one of the Horsemen or even Death himself, if indeed such beings even exist) to a secret message that, when combined with clues allegedly hidden in Poussin's other works, unveils the truth behind the origin of death and the Underworld. Some Sin-Eaters who have crossed paths with the enigmatic and elusive Fair Folk have claimed that the painting was merely a warning not to fraternize with the denizens of Arcadia.

Over the next century, the concept of the Network spread across Western Europe, and thanks to the globe-spanning British Empire, much of the rest of the world. By the mid-1800s, while regional variations and preferences still existed, the symbols were sufficiently standardized that a folio of definitions was actually published in England, thinly disguised as a "Guide to the Gravedigger's Cant." In Great

Britain, the phrases "Cant" and "Digger's" are still popular euphemisms for Twilight Network messages. At this point in the Network's history, a more colorful and expressive variety of signs, beyond chalk marks on lichyard gates, began to enter the parlance. Inspired by the Victorian practice of floriography (a symbolic "language" of flowers and the origin of such ubiquities as red roses for passion), flowers used in funeral wreaths, or left on graves by "grieving widows," became a popular medium for communication.

As newspapers became more prominent in the 19th century, Sin-Eaters graduated from simply leaving messages to actual communication. Euphemistic want ads, letters to the editor, and even obituaries were used to announce the presence of a krewé and to request other Sin-Eaters identify themselves. While these letters helped to increase communication between local krewés, the relatively small circulation of many of those early broadsheets meant that contact with distant krewés was still a rare event. It would take a major communication revolution to make the Twilight Network truly global.

It was also around this time that the Twilight Network began to shift from a wholly passive medium, relying on happenstance and hope, into a concrete idea within the Sin-Eater community. With the increase in two-way communication, and with technological improvements that reduced the amount of time between communications, Sin-Eaters began to think of the Network as an interconnected community rather than a mere system of codes and warnings. Lore and information beyond the bare minimum of warnings and notices began to be exchanged, and older, more established Sin-Eaters used the Network to make contact with the newly-made, offering advice and instruction in the ways of the Underworld. In London, New York, and Paris around the end of the 1890s, Sin-Eaters calling themselves "Charonites" began to appear, devoting their time and energy to actively maintaining and facilitating the Twilight Network. They rented notice boards in prominent locations, started small newspapers (or got jobs as classified editors at larger ones) and, especially in the years before radio, ferried news and information to isolated communities in the hopes of bringing the Network to Sin-Eaters far from the bright lights of the big city.

With the advent of radio, Sin-Eaters could finally get the word out across an entire country (or at least a state or two). Most didn't have their own radio shows, of course, but the ability to call or write in to a radio program and have one's story read out on the air served as a sort of crude bulletin board system. One of the most popular venues for this sort of communication, especially in America in the early part of the 20th century, was the "Church of the Air," a nationally-syndicated weekly religious

program. Sin-Eaters wishing to contact others of their kind or to announce some new discovery or danger to the entire nation, would call in a prayer request to the show for a “family member” who had recently died. By incorporating references to the shared symbolism of death that had developed on the Twilight Network in previous centuries, the message would reach any Sin-Eaters who happened to be listening.

Apart from reaching a wider audience than radio, television didn’t change the Twilight Network’s operations much. Broadcasting was (and remains) heavily federally regulated, which relegates most Sin-Eaters to using the same indirect methods that were used to piggyback on the radio. Some krewes did (and still do) produce local public-access “ghost hunter” shows from time to time. One notable instance was the Detroit-based Tombdiggers krewe, which produced a weekly show called *Motor City Mortis* in which they presented the story of a local haunting, and then asked viewers to call in if they knew anything about who the ghost in question was or what it might want. In at least a few cases, this stunt led to the resolution of an unknown ghost’s anchors.

As it did with so many things, the Internet revolutionized the Twilight Network. Now not only could Sin-Eaters leave each other coded messages, they could communicate in real-time. BBS communities, newsgroups, and later fully-featured message boards sprang up across the world, usually password-protected and invitation-only, but sometimes right out in the open. The Internet is home to all manner of strange groups, after all, and one or two forums devoted to ghosts hardly draw undue attention.

Paradoxically, this globalization of the Network has also led to a resurgence in the oldest tricks in the Twilight Network book. The Internet is a big place, after all, and the odds that other local Sin-Eaters will happen to check any given Web site or message board are slim. When a krewe needs to get in touch with its neighbors, or when a solitary Sin-Eater wants to know whether or not he’s all alone in the world, it’s often faster and more reliable to post a coded flyer on a college bulletin board or scratch some glyphs onto the wall of a mausoleum at the local cemetery.

Form

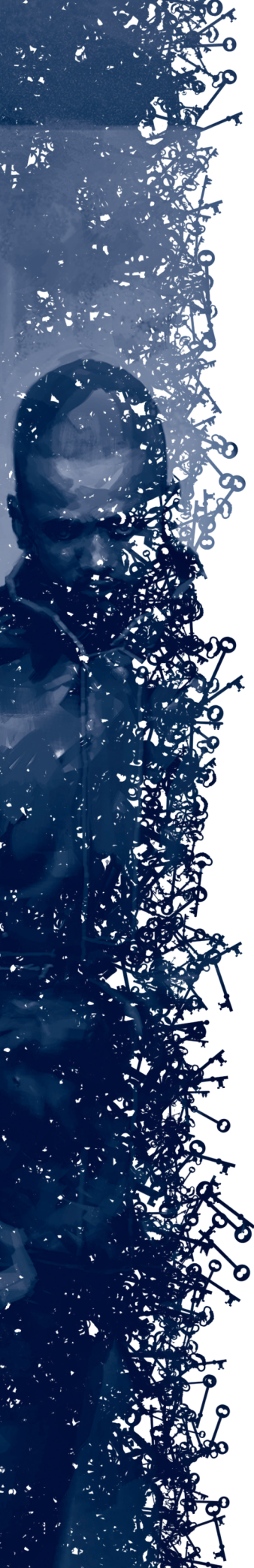
The Twilight Network isn’t a single, cohesive thing. There is no universal mailing list, no www.twilightnetwork.com or global clearinghouse that sorts information and disseminates it to the concerned parties. Much like the Underground Railroad, it is a collective name for dozens, if not hundreds, of channels, venues, and media, through which Sin-Eaters communicate. While some Sin-Eaters (the descendants of the so-called Charonites of the late 19th century) actively put their time and money into providing easy communication between krewes, there are large parts of the world where the Twilight Network remains nothing more than etchings on tombstones periodically updated by passing Sin-Eaters.

Despite its fragmentary nature, a common tradition has evolved that gives Sin-Eaters guidelines for finding and interpreting the hidden messages. The most prominent, un-

surprisingly, is that Twilight Network messages are almost always concealed in something related to death. It might be an obituary column in the newspaper, an Internet site devoted to bizarre deaths or famous killers, or a billboard advertisement for a funeral home, but in almost all cases the message is written on, or encoded to pertain to, that most omnipresent theme in a Sin-Eater’s life. Within a given region, Sin-Eaters often fall into the habit of using one or two specific media for their Twilight Network posts, which helps Sin-Eaters to find relevant missives more swiftly. In much of the rural American South, for example, church bulletins announcing the passing of a parishioner (or a parishioner’s conveniently-fictional relation) are the accepted means of seeking out contact with other Sin-Eaters: the address to which flowers may be sent is the requested meeting location, while the decedent’s age and number of survivors indicate the date and time. In Seattle, flyers for nonexistent bands with names like Red Horsemen, Bonepicker John, and Three-Headed Monster (carefully designed to look as unappealing to would-be concert goers as possible) announce the location of dangerous haunts, low places, or gatherings. The old “cross-code” described by the Black Hessian remains popular in Europe and New England, and in various Asian countries, an intricate and highly structured system of symbolism is applied to offerings left for the dead at shrines.

In cases where a message needs to be posted but no convenient medium can be found (for example, a Sin-Eater wishing to leave a warning that a dangerous Avernian Gate can be found within a building), a prominent death-related image is usually added to catch the viewer’s eye. A simple death’s head motif is the most common, but some Sin-Eaters prefer a less-ubiquitous image, such as the glyph for a particular deathlord or an icon relevant to the local Autochthonous Depths. White chalk (or white paint if a more-permanent message is required) is the most common means of leaving such missives.

On-line communication, unsurprisingly, tends to be a bit freer and less encoded. Hidden behind the anonymity of a screen name, Sin-Eaters are less concerned with keeping their secrets – and to be honest, there are Internet communities with far weirder beliefs than “I almost died, but I came back with a ghost attached to my soul,” so even in-depth discussion of the metaphysics of the Sin-Eater condition aren’t likely to draw much attention. The code is still used on-line, but the intent is usually to identify a particular blog or forum as “the real deal.” Sin-Eaters don’t have a monopoly on Web sites devoted to ghosts and the paranormal, and the simple, unvarnished truth is that most of the people who run such sites are either delusional, lying, or just plain wrong. Working the seal of the Pale Horseman into a Web site’s banner, or opening each blog entry with a quote from a famous poet’s posthumous work, tells the reader that the operator of this Web site has walked the road to the Underworld and knows at least a little bit about what he’s talking about. Even still, information on the Internet, especially on open forums like message boards, should be taken with plenty of salt. Just because the opera-



tor of the site has credentials doesn't guarantee that every poster in the community knows what he's talking about.

With mobile technology becoming more ubiquitous by the day, some Sin-Eaters are predicting that another major shift in paradigm for the Twilight Network is coming. At least one technically-inclined Sin-Eater has written an application for a wildly popular brand of mobile phone that sends out a specific electronic signal while simultaneously listening for the same signal coming from another device. When the phones "link up," they play a special ringtone (the default being Mozart's "Requiem"), thereby, at least in theory, alerting a Sin-Eater that another of their number is nearby.

Function

Sin-Eaters are not terribly common even when compared to other supernatural entities, which results in a lack of a unified, cohesive society. The Bound do not array themselves in hierarchies of lords and vassals or create councils of governance; in most cases, the krewes is the largest unit of Sin-Eater "culture" an individual will experience. The Twilight Network, then, provides a way to link krewes together, to pass the shared lore and culture of the Bound on to new Sin-Eaters. The Charonites leave hints and riddles like a trail of breadcrumbs, following the trail leads an inexperienced Sin-Eater to a mentor or, at the very least, an on-line "primer" of sorts on the nature and the history of the Bound.

Cultural preservation isn't the only purpose to the Twilight Network, of course — indeed, that use has been a relatively recent addition to the Network. Originally, the Network served primarily as a warning system, alerting Sin-Eaters to dangerous haunts, Avernian Gates, and the like. Since communication in the early days of the Network was slow and unreliable, it was seldom a means for two-way communication (beyond the occasional "Is anyone out there?" missive, which might take weeks, months, or even years to garner a response), but with the rise of mass media, the Network has increasingly become just what the name suggests: a true network for communication, dissemination of news, and transmission of culture.

Today, the Twilight Network is used for everything from announcements of gatherings to requests for help in dealing with particularly recalcitrant shades to simple announcements of good news. In a sense, despite their rarity and comparative isolation, the Twilight Network has given Sin-Eaters a more global culture than many of their shadowy fellow denizens of the World of Darkness. Sin-Eater slang has gone global, krewes on opposite sides of the ocean have shared cultural elements, and it isn't unheard of for an inexperienced New York Sin-Eater's mentor to be a Siberian shaman with a satellite link-up.

On a local level, though, the Network still fills those same roles the earliest cross-code glyphs did: keeping the local Sin-Eater community apprised of local events, be they mundane (such as announcing a gathering) or supernatural (mapping the layout of the city's Avernian Gates or posting the Old Laws of a particular Dead Dominion easily accessed from the area (for more information on Avernian Gates and Dead Dominions, see Appendix I: The Underworld). Sometimes it's a warning (e.g. "There's a pissed-off ghost in this brownstone, stay the fuck away!"), sometimes it's a plea for help ("This ghost is too strong and angry for me to lay to rest alone. Willing to trade plasm or mementos for assistance."), and sometimes it's just a useful piece of knowledge ("The wrathful ghost that haunts this place liked carnations in real life, use them in your *ofrendas*.")

Some Web sites that cater to the Bound advertise their services in places usually reserved for the old-school style of Network messages. Usually it's something innocuous like a chat room or forum, but sometimes the services offered are decidedly illicit: Underworld "brothels" that claim to be able to conjure the ghosts of the most beautiful women in history (ever want to fuck Marilyn Monroe *and* Helen of Troy at the same time?), psychotropic drugs made from weird Underworld fungi, and Sin-Eaters willing to engineer a (potentially lethal) haunting for you are all examples of what you can find on the Network if you look hard enough.

Transmission

If Sin-Eaters are so rare, how does the Twilight Network even sustain itself? Surely someone has to teach new Sin-Eaters the secret codes and symbols, how to spot the real hidden messages buried in the dross, to say nothing of the mere *existence* of the Network. Upon undergoing a near-death experience or temporary death and becoming bound to an archetypal ghost-thing, one's first reaction is not typically to scan the obituaries column to see if it contains secret messages from other people who have undergone near-death experiences and become bound to archetypal ghost-things. How can a network of secret communications persist among beings so rare that there might be no more than a dozen in a decent-sized city? Who teaches the new blood?

For starters, the fact of the matter is that the Twilight Network *does* exist most prominently (at least on a local, "hey, let's meet up and compare notes" sort of level) in cities with a large Sin-Eater community: New York, Paris, New Orleans, Cobán, Guatemala, and the like. Little towns in the middle of nowhere don't have much of a population of Sin-Eaters — at least, not usually — and so it's less likely that a newly-reborn Bound will have someone to show him the ropes.

Luckily, there is another option: most geists who bind themselves to Sin-Eaters have done so before, some of them many times. While a geist might not clearly remember everything about its prior incarnations, and might not be able to communicate what it *does* remember with perfect clarity, it can usually provide its new host partner with at least a basic knowledge of the Twilight Network “code.” New Sin-Eaters frequently report feelings of odd *déjà vu* upon seeing a Twilight Network message for the first time, an instinctive understanding of the hidden meaning as though the arrangement of symbols is the only conceivable pattern that makes sense.

This geist-received instruction is hardly foolproof: geists aren’t necessarily bound to geography the same way ghosts are, and it’s possible that a geist might end up bound to a Sin-Eater halfway across the world from its last “host,” where the local Twilight Network traditions are completely different. Some geists simply lack the mental coherence to pass information on to their hosts in this fashion, and some Sin-Eaters (even newly-minted ones) lack the requisite synergy to share information with their geists. In these cases, a new Sin-Eater might very well carry on in isolation, unaware of the global community of his kind until a mentor takes him under her wing.

Keepers of the Network

As much as the Twilight Network can be a self-sufficient entity, in this day and age particularly there must be those willing to devote time, effort, and most of all money to maintaining it. The simplest forms of messages don’t require much upkeep: maybe the occasional bribe to the caretaker to make sure he doesn’t clean off the chalk marks on those headstones, an occasional check of the college notice board to make sure no one’s pulled down or taped over that “concert flyer,” and so on. But the real communities, the effective ways to get the word out far and fast, require more. Internet forums need to be hosted, which requires money and at least a modicum of technical aptitude. Pirate radio stations need equipment, DJs, and the ability to avoid being shut down by the law. Public-access TV shows need licenses, production values, and actual content. Even newspaper ads and billboards stand a better chance of actually carrying the Network’s message if a friendly soul or two happens to sit somewhere on the line from submission to publication.

Since the 1800s, a loose, informal society of Sin-Eaters who call themselves “Charonites” have taken on that duty. Naming themselves after the ferryman of Greek mythology, they see it as their job to make sure the Twilight Network still runs. They aren’t a krew, exactly, they don’t share their own mythos or secret revelations — most of them have never even met. They’re just individual Sin-Eaters who perceived a need and decided to do something about it. They might keep in touch via the Internet with a few of their fellows, and they might have picked up the name “Charonite,” but by and large they operate autonomously. A given community might have anywhere from one to a half-dozen of them, depending on the size of the community and its

connection to the world at large. They don’t typically ask for compensation for their services, but smart Sin-Eaters recognize what a valuable service the Charonites provide and make sure to show their appreciation. It’s a rare Charonite who has to buy his own drinks at a wake.

Even though they operate autonomously on the local scale, the globalization of Sin-Eater culture has led to some curious exceptions when it comes to Charonites. A Charonite in Chicago’s South Side primarily concerns herself with the Network in her neighborhood: she makes sure the flowers left on graves stay fresh so their secret messages can be decoded, she slips the obituaries editor at the *Sun-Times* a hundred bucks a month so he’ll print obits without seeing a death certificate, and she e-mails regularly with her opposite numbers in other neighborhoods to make sure anything really important gets “cross-posted.” But she also moderates an online community for people who have been touched by death, which includes a members-only section that has become a popular hangout for krewes from Los Angeles, San Antonio, and Suffolk. Thanks to her Internet contact with those krewes, she also has a decent understanding of what’s going on in their cities, and can pick up any useful information from them and pass it on to the Chicago Network — or hold onto it for the next gathering and sell it at a tidy profit.

Of course, not all Charonites are altruistic, freedom-of-information types. Some see their duty as not to facilitate, but to *control*, and they see a potential wellspring of power and wealth to be had by controlling access to the only reliable means of communication the Bound have. The best of these simply charge a fee to anyone wanting to put a message out to the Twilight Network — “to cover expenses.” Anyone who doesn’t pay risks their graffiti being cleaned up, their flyers torn down, and their forum account mysteriously banned. Less scrupulous Charonites are more than happy to use the anonymity and secrecy of the Network to frame their enemies for untoward acts or make sure that vital information is delayed just long enough to bring ruin to their rivals. Most Charonites consider this sort of behavior to be reprehensible, and if one of their number is discovered pulling such stunts, other Charonites are quick to denounce him loudly and publicly. Such actions imperil the Twilight Network as a whole — no matter how temptingly profitable they may be.

Dangers

For all its usefulness, the Twilight Network is not without its dangers. It’s an unreliable means of communication, after all, and even if messages are posted in good faith (which is by no means always the case), there’s no way to guarantee that the information is accurate, or even current. A krew might find markings indicating that a particular park is haunted by the benign ghost of a woman who died of a heart attack while walking through the park—but that message might have been left in 1986, and in the intervening decades urban decay has set in and the ghost has turned wrathful and insane as her beloved park deteriorates. Even worse, what haunts the park



might not even *be* the ghost of a woman, it might be something altogether stranger and outside the realm of Sin-Eater experience.

Inaccurate information is one of the most common perils of the Twilight Network, but it's not the only one. Many Sin-Eaters recognize the usefulness of the Network and use it honestly, but there are those who deliberately post misleading or downright false information to mislead their rivals. Krewes can be fiercely territorial, and can come to perceive resources like Avernian Gates and especially-haunted cemeteries as "theirs," and rather than mark them with warnings of potential dangers, keep them secret. In New York in the 1960s, the Coffin Lid krewe was indirectly responsible for the deaths of nearly a dozen innocents when *something* (even to this day, nobody really knows what) came out of an unmarked Avernian Gate they viewed as part of their territory and began killing indiscriminately. Had the gate's existence been known to other krewes, they might have been able to trace the entity back to its origin and closed the gate for good.

Even apart from the dangers of outdated information and malicious intent, the Twilight Network is by no means a foolproof means of communication. Rogue Sin-Eaters, geists in the service of grim Dead Dominions, necromancers, and other threats can all potentially crack the Twilight Network code and

use it to eavesdrop on, or sabotage, their enemies. Even those without a connection to the Underworld and with little or no knowledge of the existence of geists can, with a little luck and curiosity, recognize the hidden patterns in obituaries and mortuary ads, or in the strange graffiti that sometimes shows up on the cemetery wall. In Colorado, a local Twilight Network message board was apparently hacked by someone going by the screen name "WatcherOnTheThreshold," who lured at least three krewes into fatal or near-fatal confrontation with an ephemeral monstrosity that was, in the words of one survivor, "like no ghost I ever saw, not even in the deepest Dead Dominions." The site's administrators banned WatcherOnTheThreshold and deleted all of his or her posts before anyone could trace the IP from which the messages originated.

Gatherings

In an old cemetery on the outskirts of town, two dozen men and women come together to dance and drink and honor the departed. Deep below the city, below the subway lines, below the sewers, they gather before a door that is not a door. Things come to them, things that were, perhaps, once living men, which offer dreadful power in exchange for the scent of a single fresh-cut rose. As an invisible



“locked-room” serial killer claims his seventh victim, two rival gangs set aside their grudges and their Glocks, meeting under a flag of truce to share information about how to stop him. Some like to call them Flesh Fairs, a term laded with the usual amount of double meaning that Sin-Eater culture revels in. They are gatherings of those who know death but still have material bodies, but they’re also often opportunities to indulge in the pleasures of the flesh.

Apart from the Twilight Network, gatherings of the Bound are usually the largest-scale interactions Sin-Eaters have with others of their own kind. Bringing together multiple krewes, sometimes even from multiple cities, gatherings can be anything from riotous, orgiastic parties to tense negotiations between rivals who might otherwise shoot each other on sight. It can be a place for a Sin-Eater to gain contacts, information, or even trade mementos — or it can simply be a place for her to let her geist have free rein, to sample the remembered pleasures of an earthly existence.

In keeping with the lack of an extensive, overarching “Sin-Eater culture,” there is no single accepted standard for the protocols of a gathering. About the only rule that is (usually) enforced is that grudges are to be left at the door — rival krewes are expected to behave themselves and take any serious disagreements outside. In some parts of the world, this admonition is taken *very* seriously: in the Philippines, for example, all of the Bound are considered brothers when a gathering is called, and even krewes in the midst of an ongoing blood feud are expected to buy each other drinks and share a few laughs. In other regions, things are less cordial: throughout the United States, the best you’re likely to see is rivals taking anything more violent than raised voices out back. Beyond that, the rules and etiquette of a gathering are as fluid and flexible as trends among the mortals. What’s considered proper and expected at one gathering might be utterly gauche and taboo a few months later or a few miles down the road. In other words, some, all, or none of the rules and customs discussed here might apply.

Calling a Gathering

There’s no uniform custom regarding who can call for a gathering, though in most cases few Sin-Eaters will pay much attention to an invite from anyone less than the leader of a krewe — and even then, how many will bother to show up depends largely on how influential and respected that krewe leader is. It’s not just a measure of size or raw, supernatural power; even a small, upstart krewe can build up a reputation for putting on a truly epic gathering, which will make a lot more Sin-Eaters sit up and pay attention when it’s time for a wake (q.v.). That reputation can carry over to requests for more somber gatherings as well, so it’s a worthwhile reputation to cultivate.

The traditional way to announce a gathering is to put it out on the Twilight Network and let the word spread, though krewes that are on good terms with their neighbors are increasingly likely to forego the formality and just make a few phone calls. In most of the world, an “open” announcement (that is, a Twilight Network message announcing a

gathering) is considered to be an invitation to anyone who sees it — denying access to someone who found the invitation in good faith is considered tacky in the extreme, not to mention a blatant insult. That rule sometimes extends even to non-Sin-Eaters: usually, the Twilight Network code keeps the riff-raff out, but if an ordinary mortal (or even another supernatural being) manages to recognize and decipher the hidden message, they’re considered invited. How strictly that custom is held to depends on the nature of the gathering: if it’s just the Bound getting together to blow off steam and have a good time, the outsiders are usually let in to attend one of the weirdest parties of their lives. War councils and the like typically turn away thrill-seekers at the door, for their own safety as much as the secrecy of the Sin-Eater community.

Gatherings are typically announced anywhere from a week to a month in advance to be sure that most Sin-Eaters in the area have a chance to see the invitation. Especially urgent matters, like a renegade geist racking up a body count or a necromancer picking off Sin-Eaters for some nefarious occult purpose, might have a shorter “lead time,” and some large, regular gatherings are announced as much as a year in advance.

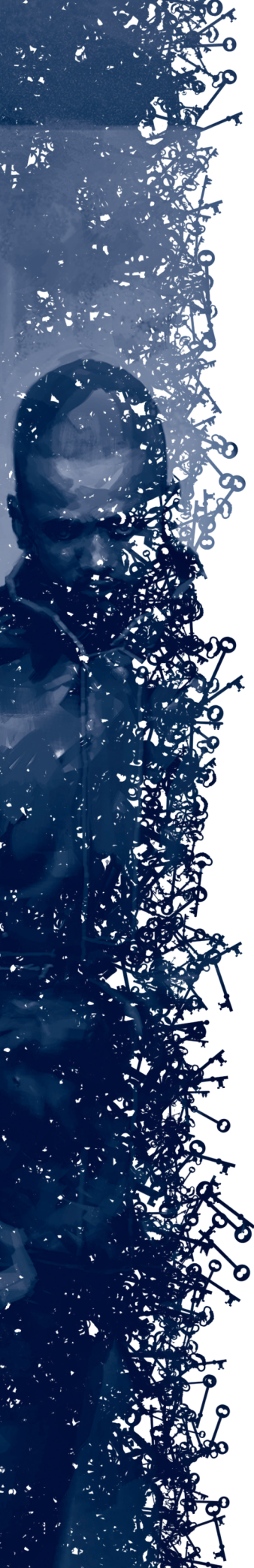
Types of Gatherings

The gatherings Sin-Eaters attend can be, roughly, broken down into a small variety of categories. These aren’t precise or universal; that is, you might not hear a Sin-Eater talking about “going to a wake” or “attending a convocation,” but even without formal names it can readily be seen that some gatherings are for pleasure, some are for business, and some are for survival. Likewise, even without a formal code, it’s easy to see that different rules apply to different types of gatherings. What’s tolerated, even encouraged at a wake is grounds for being ejected from a serious meeting about a rise in hauntings by the wrathful dead.

- **Wakes:** Although gatherings can be called for any number of reasons, the most common is an opportunity to socialize. Sin-Eaters have cheated death once, and that makes all of life’s pleasures that much sweeter. That’s not to say every one of the Bound is a sybaritic pleasure-seeker, but most of them enjoy a good party, whether that happens to be the classic sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll, or refined conversation about the arts over a fine meal. More than that, though, Sin-Eaters crave contact with their own kind: kindred souls who can understand both the trials and the joys of their second chances at life. These gatherings are usually relaxed affairs (although tensions can certainly run high if rival krewes show up), with few rules beyond “don’t start fights” and “don’t puke all over the host,” and even then breaking them isn’t likely to net a punishment more severe than a firm invitation to leave and loss of esteem.

Wakes are aptly named, since they most often resemble the wild, raucous parties often held to send off the dead to the next world. Perhaps once they were quiet, somber affairs of quiet reflection, but today they’re far more likely to be ecstasy-fueled raves, liquor-soaked





revelries, or vibrant, hard-rocking live musical shows — or sometimes an unholy combination of the three. One can expect to see everything from clubkids to candy ravers to disco-dancers to goths to punks and everything in between at a wake. Even straight-laced conservative types can be found pouring out a fifth of spiced rum in memoriam or decorating sugar skulls.

Graveyards are popular places to hold wakes, especially haunted graveyards — the Bound like to bring a bit of joy back to those who have left this mortal coil (or, depending on who you ask, they like to rub it in the faces of the dead). If the cops show up and everybody has to scatter like teenagers at their first kegger; hell, that's just part of the thrill. Most wakes include a separate table for *ofrendas* to the dead, where revelers can burn money or leave food for the ghosts. One particularly famous wake held every five years at a mansion on a hill in Westchester, New York, boasts a full bar stocked with the finest top-shelf booze, staffed by men and women dressed as Victorian-era morticians, solely to prepare libations for the dead. Upon mixing a drink, the bartender simply pours it down a drain, which empties into a small church cemetery at the bottom of the hill.

- **Convocations:** For the most part, Sin-Eaters do what they do on their own time and in their own way. There's no overseeing council making sure Sin-Eaters are laying the dead to rest (and even if there were, it would quickly run into opposition from Sin-Eaters of different Archetypes), and thus Sin-Eaters don't usually concern themselves overmuch with how their fellows use their gifts outside of extraordinary circumstances. Sometimes, though, a threat arises that's too big for one Sin-Eater, or even one krewe, to deal with. Sometimes there's a mystery that can't be solved by the smaller groups, and so a gathering is called. These convocations are usually to deal with a specific issue, whether it's one outside a krewe's means to deal with alone or an issue so large it affects the whole of the local Bound population, but sometimes a convocation is called just to share general news and information that might be relevant. Convocations are usually much more staid than wakes, and funeral etiquette typically applies: be quiet, respectful, and somber. Withholding information at a convocation, particularly information that might be relevant to the issue at hand, is a surefire way to get on the shit-list of every krewe present. Some might even track you down and *educate* you after the gathering is over.

If wakes resemble wild celebrations of life, convocations are more likely to resemble more

solemn funerary practices. The Bound typically forego the more extreme fashions in favor of sober, conservative suits and dresses that make them easily mistaken for a funeral party. If one of the Sin-Eaters hosting the convocation owns a mortuary (a not-uncommon occurrence), the convocation might be held there; otherwise any place with a suitably somber resonance of death can serve: museums dedicated to funerary practices or mass killings, hospital chapels (at odd hours to minimize the risks of patients or their families turning up), or even the site of a particularly noteworthy death (like the St. Valentine's Day Massacre or Ground Zero). An altar is usually laid out for *ofrendas*, as is the norm when the Bound gather, but offerings are expected to be more somber and respectful: burned money, a loaf of *pan de muerto*, a votive candle, or the like.

- **Market:** There's a thriving trade in grave goods among the Bound, from mementos to *ofrendas* to odd bits of flotsam and jetsam from the Underworld. Cities with large Sin-Eater populations often hold semi-regular markets where the death merchants can sell their wares. Smaller groupings of the Bound might only announce a Market when someone has something of particular note to sell, like the deathmask of a renowned and feared geist or a draught that can (supposedly) restore the dead to life. These kinds of markets tend to be more like auctions. Markets in general usually have security, either in the form of the Sin-Eaters hosting it or ghosts bound into service for the task. Markets typically have some of the most stringent rules for conduct of any gatherings: it's impossible to list all the variations of what might be forbidden to sell at different markets, but contraband might include things like Underworld foodstuffs, certain types of mementos, drugs, and the like. Naturally, a streetwise individual can almost always find such things for sale anyways.
- **War Council:** It's not terribly often that all the krewes in an area have to band together to destroy a threat, but it does happen. Something impossibly ancient and impossibly old has found a path back to the world of the living, or a wrathful ghost has begun stalking and killing the children of the men who murdered it, or some similar danger has arisen. While it might seem similar to a convocation at first glance, where a war council differs is in motivation: convocations are held to request assistance or share information, war councils are held to develop and execute a plan to deal with a threat big enough to require the attention of multiple krewes. Much like convocations, war councils

are serious affairs, and those who disrupt them or withhold information or aid are punished severely. Depending on prevailing attitudes, they might be “blackballed” (barred from attending future gatherings or receiving help from other krewes) or, if the krewe holding the war council is powerful enough, they might be fined or even killed. The latter is reserved for the most severe cases, such as betrayal of the council or deliberately withholding support that costs other Sin-Eaters their lives.

Reasons to Gather

Most regions with any kind of Sin-Eater presence hold wakes on most major holidays, with the largest and most extravagant coming, unsurprisingly, on the Day of the Dead. (The massive festival on the Day of the Dead is actually a fairly recent invention, at least outside of Latin America, dating from the mid-20th century. Other cultures hold similar wakes during analogous holidays, such as the Japanese Bon Festival or the Nepali “Cow Pilgrimage.”) Most communities also hold a wake when a prominent celebrity dies, particularly unexpectedly. The Sin-Eaters of the UK supposedly held a wake that stretched across the entire nation and lasted for nearly a month when Princess Diana died, a gathering rivaled only by the New York wakes for John and Robert Kennedy.

Beyond these major events, individual krewes host wakes to celebrate major victories, induct new members, or just because they feel like it. Local traditions play a role as well; one New York krewe whose members operate a sports bar offer free drinks to anyone “touched by death” after any losing Yankees game. In New Orleans, the Mardi Gras wake dwarfs even the Day of the Dead celebration.

Convocations and markets are held less frequently, and usually only by the larger and more prominent krewes in the area. It takes a fair bit of muscle to provide security to keep rabble-rousers in-line and make sure the merchants stay honest, to say nothing of the clout to get people to show up for a gathering without the promise of booze and music. When a smaller krewe needs such a gathering called, they typically find a contact in a more influential krewe to call the gathering on their behalf. Some krewes have built themselves a thriving enterprise around this practice, akin to the old Roman system of patronage. These krewes might also serve as the overseers of the local Twilight Network, giving them yet more ability to monopolize the ability to request a gathering.

War councils are the rarest gatherings of all (and if they're not, it might be time to consider moving), and the reasons to call them are fairly self-explanatory; because they come up so rarely, when one is called it's usually written off as a panic attack on the part of some hapless newbies unless it comes from one of the most powerful local krewes. Even getting to the point of a war council could be a chronicle in itself, as a krewe must first discover the threat, then figure out who has the influence to actually *call* a war council, and finally to convince them of the need to call one.

Sin-Eating

The central feature of every Sin-Eater's existence is the fact that they live in both the world of the living and the world of the dead. As a result, most see themselves as having a responsibility to deal with ghosts who haunt the mortal world, and perhaps even the ghosts who dwell solely in the Underworld. No matter one's ambition, the Bound can never be utterly free from the dead. It's only a question of how they deal with it.

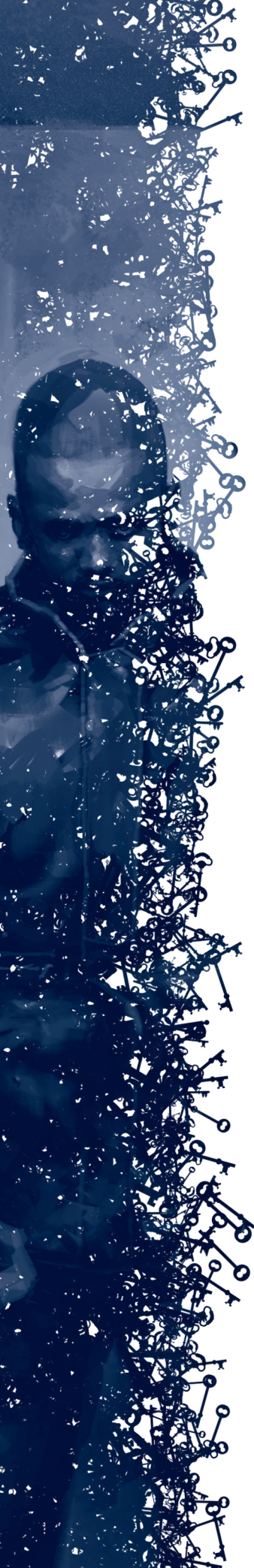
The Responsibilities of Power

By tradition and practice, Sin-Eaters are responsible for dealing with ghosts: helping those who wish to resolve their affairs to do so, preventing vengeful or insane ghosts from ravaging the mortal world and helping ghosts to move on to the unknowable fate that awaits them when they “pass on.” While some Sin-Eaters would eagerly shirk their responsibilities, this is often difficult to accomplish. Sin-Eaters must concentrate to not see the ghosts around them. More importantly, ghosts can perceive both the Bound and their geists. Sin-Eaters are spiritual beacons for ghosts in Twilight and so have great difficulty hiding from them. The Sin-Eater who gains a reputation for helping ghosts may be asked for aid in much the same way that a wealthy-looking person walking down the street is asked for change by the homeless. However, even Bound who turn their back on their responsibilities and ignore the ghosts around them may have to deal with desperate ghosts begging them for help — possibly even attacks by angry shades who resent being ignored.

Sin-Eaters who help the ghosts they encounter can gain various intangible rewards, from simple satisfaction to a sense of justice achieved. However, there are also sometimes material rewards for such help. Some ghosts either have some unfound wealth that they hid away in life or they have noticed the location of some of their enemies' wealth and are willing to share this information with someone who aids them. Alternately, helping the police solve a difficult murder case or assisting someone in obtaining his inheritance can sometimes result in the krewe being given a reward. More daring krewes sometimes end up helping the ghosts of various supernatural beings like mages or vampires. In addition to any possible monetary rewards, Sin-Eaters who help characters can also gain various sorts of esoteric knowledge and occasionally even various forms of items of magical power.

A Life Plagued by Ghosts

Even when they are not seeking to interact with ghosts, most ghosts notice that Sin-Eaters are different from other mortals and many approach them asking for help. Many ghosts are grateful for any help that a Sin-Eater and her krewe can give them. Others, especially relatively new ghosts, see any help as their due, while some are so con-



sumed by their desires that when they find someone able to help them, they can think of nothing else but accomplishing their goal. These ghosts will sometimes attempt to badger any Sin-Eater they encounter into focusing only on helping them. While some ghosts are intelligent, thoughtful, and resigned to their fate, a great many are beings driven primarily by desperation, misery, or undying rage at their helplessness and the horror of their situation. They may wail piteously and continuously for help, demand assistance, or attempt to threaten Sin-Eaters into helping them.

In areas that are heavily haunted, Sin-Eaters may occasionally be plagued by as many as a dozen or more ghosts at a time. Faced with such demands, most Sin-Eaters are overwhelmed and seek refuge. The *Warding Circle Ceremony* (p. 163) is widely used, and many inexperienced Sin-Eaters are happy to pay Sin-Eaters who know how to perform it in either money or favors in return for protecting their dwelling from demanding and potentially hostile specters. However, when they venture out, Sin-Eaters must also learn how to deal with loud and needy ghosts. Many learn martial Manifestations, both to defend themselves from hostile shades and to be able to intimidate loud and needy ghosts into finding someone else to wail their troubles at.

Ghost-Plagued Mortals

In addition to being approached by ghosts, Sin-Eaters also regularly encounter ghosts who are attempting to keep their presence secret. Ghosts with Numina that allow them to fulfill at least some

of their desires in the mortal world know that Sin-Eaters often attempt to put a stop to their excesses. Because they can easily notice the approach of a Sin-Eater, ghosts who are harassing mortals or haunting places fall quiet as soon as a Sin-Eater approaches. These ghosts continue to hide until all Sin-Eaters have departed, and then resume their efforts, often more enthusiastically than before.

The most horrific incidents involve ghosts who are possessing a mortal. To a Sin-Eater, a possessed mortal is instantly obvious. However, dealing with ghosts who possess mortals can be especially difficult, since such ghosts are more than happy to use threats to the mortal's body to attempt to stave off exorcism. Ghosts who manipulate mortals, using their Numina to communicate with unsuspecting mortals while also altering the mortal's emotions, are often less horrific but far more difficult to notice. The most successful of these ghosts claim to be guardian angels, powerful demons, or (perhaps truthfully) departed relatives.

With promises of riches, less tangible, and completely imaginary rewards, like magical powers and with warning that people the ghost wishes to punish are plotting against them, these mortals often become completely dependent upon their ghostly advisor for advice and comfort. The cleverest of these ghosts separate their mortal pawns from all other friends and confidants. If a Sin-Eater takes an interest in the mortal, the ghost informs the mortal that the Sin-Eater is actually a jealous rival or a dangerous threat. The most ambitious of these manipulative ghosts attract small cults of mortals

PASSING ON

One of the most hotly contested aspects of interacting with ghosts is the poorly understood phenomenon of "passing on." When a ghost has resolved all of its anchors, sometimes it simply vanishes from both the mortal world and the Underworld. Its fate remains completely unknown, perhaps unknowable. Religious Sin-Eaters suggest that the ghost has passed on to some sort of afterlife, or perhaps has reincarnated into its next life. Others believe the ghost has simply dissipated and that there is no difference between what happens when a ghost "passes on" and what happens when a Sin-Eater destroys a ghost — only the experiences of its last moments.

While Sin-Eaters agree that the Underworld is a wretched and horrible place, they disagree about what its negative aspects mean. Some believe that it is in some fundamental sense broken, thus their proper duty is to help ghosts free themselves from the horrors of the Underworld and "pass on" to some better, if unknown afterlife. Others are equally convinced that the Underworld is a horrific place because ghosts are innately corrupt and horrible beings. Some believe the living are equally corrupt. Do the good portions of a person's nature die with them or automatically depart for some appropriate afterlife, with the ghost merely a distorted remnant that remains behind? Krewes frequently develop their own shared beliefs about the nature of Death and of their task. The ideologies they devise are often the source of conflict between rival krewes.

A Sin-Eater's opinion on these issues usually determines how he deals with ghosts. While most see the need to rid the mortal world of dangerous or monstrous ghosts, those who consider ghosts to be trapped souls are usually willing to help them resolve any anchors that are practical and non-horrific. Those who are convinced that ghosts are inherently corrupt may be willing to aid mortals that a ghost wishes to protect, but only because they see mortals in need. They consider the ghost's wishes and desires to be inherently suspect and do not hesitate to exorcise the ghost or simply to destroy it.

with promises of holy or dark power. While all ghosts have difficulty communicating with ordinary mortals, even fairly limited communication can allow a ghost aided by one or more devoted, terrified, enthralled or possessed mortals to cause all manner of trouble.

Ghosts who use and manipulate mortals do their best to avoid all contact with Sin-Eaters because they have their own cat's-paws and know that most Sin-Eaters would attempt to free their mortal servants from their thrall. Ghosts who never actually possess any of their living pawns are particularly hard to detect, since even to a Sin-Eater it's far from obvious that a mortal is committing a crime because a ghostly voice that speaks to them in the night told them what to do. When Sin-Eaters do uncover a ghost-controlled cult or any similar situation, they generally either imprison or destroy the ghost; only the luckiest and least abusive of these ghosts will simply be banished back to the Underworld.

Methodologies for Dealing With Ghosts

While many Sin-Eaters are more than willing to help ghosts in need resolve their anchors, some firmly believe that ghosts have no place in the mortal world and focus on either banishing them to the Underworld or destroying them entirely. These three approaches to dealing with ghosts are the cause of much dissension and controversy among the Bound. While almost all Sin-Eaters occasionally use all of these methodologies, individual krewes usually prefer one of these options and use one or both of the others only as a last resort.

Most Sin-Eaters feel a responsibility to keep the mortal world free of dangerous ghosts. A kindly ghost that uses its Numina to look out for the alley cats or lost children in the neighborhood in which it once lived can be safely ignored. But many ghosts have far darker purposes for their continued existence in the mortal world. Some may have perfectly understandable causes, such as vengeance against the person who murdered them. However, ghosts do not always know the identity of their murderer. Many decide to punish their best guess as to their killer or are more than willing to kill every possible candidate. Others succeed in this vengeance, but then wish to extend their vengeance to everyone who the murderer loved or was loved by. Some attempt to kill the murderer's family first, to cause the murder to suffer anguish and loss before the ghost kills her. In such cases, most Sin-Eaters will do their best to either destroy or imprison the ghost or at least to permanently banish it into the Underworld. Some Sin-Eaters attempt to convince a violent ghost of the error of its ways, and occasionally these efforts work. However, many ghosts have become fundamentally inhuman creatures and concepts like compassion and fairness are now lost on them.

To make matters more difficult, the Underworld also contains a few truly horrific and deadly monsters that left human form and human thought behind long ago – and entities that never knew such things at all. Dealing with such specters of rage and death is something few krewes

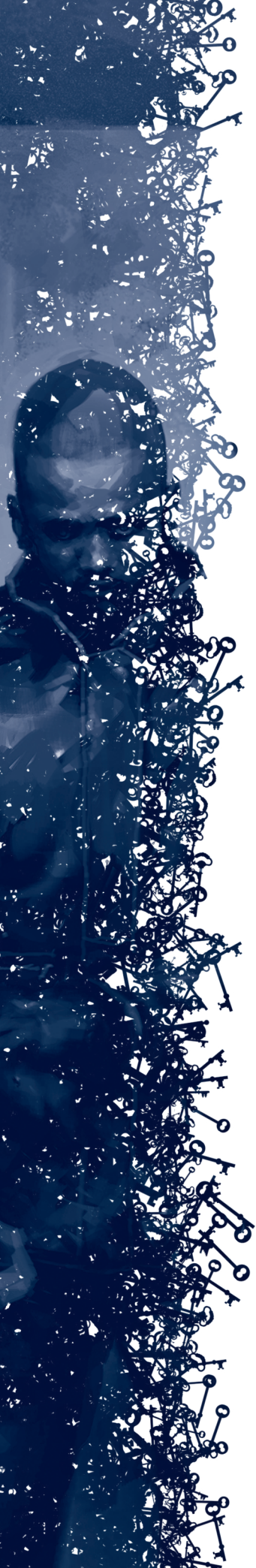
want to face, even if they must. However, more than monsters and murderous ghosts make their way to the mortal world. Sin-Eaters also may encounter ghosts who manage to touch the hearts of the krewes with their pleas to protect their families from poverty or some obvious threat, to make certain that someone they cared about recovers from despair over the ghosts' death or obtains the inheritance the ghost left for them. Sin-Eaters who help such ghosts can simultaneously help out mortals and help the ghost resolve one of its anchors.

Helping Ghosts

Nothing *compels* Sin-Eaters to interact with the dead, but conscience, social ties, or even simple pragmatism drive most to get involved sooner or later. Aiding ghosts comes to give many Sin-Eaters a sense of accomplishment, rewarding their acceptance of a role as intermediaries between the living and the dead. However, there are problems with and limits to this approach. Some ghosts blame mortals for crimes they did not commit. Just because a ghost thinks someone is his murderer, doesn't mean the ghost is correct. Also, ghosts often lie. A ghost who was jealous of a mortal when they were both alive may wish to wreak vengeance against this person, despite that fact that the person's only offense may have been being better qualified for a particular job or having someone the ghost loved fall in love with her. Careful Sin-Eaters meticulously investigate the truth of claims made by ghosts. Those Sin-Eaters who do not conduct such investigations sometimes commit serious injustices against people who are entirely blameless.

Also, Sin-Eaters must regularly attempt to work out questions of fairness. A ghost who died because of a doctor's carelessness may wish for the doctor to die in lingering agony. However, most mortals consider such a punishment for a single careless act as exceedingly unfair. Working out the answers to such questions and then convincing the ghost to accept this answer is often far more of a challenge than simply punishing an obviously guilty mortal. Also, some ghosts are tied to anchors because of their own wrongdoing. Sin-Eaters who wish to resolve these anchors must find some way to help the ghost make amends for their deeds. When working out fair punishments and fair recompense that satisfied both the ghost and the Bound, Sin-Eaters most truly live up to their name. They literally take on the burden of both the injustices committed against the ghost and those that the ghost committed, and attempt to find just and balanced solutions that simultaneously resolve the ghost's anchor and serves the Sin-Eater's own morality.

However, Sin-Eaters are still very human. They are often driven by their prejudices and preconceptions, a weakness that clever ghosts sometimes use against them. The Bound are relatively rare and ghosts sometimes share information about individual Sin-Eaters. If a particular Sin-Eater is known to be especially hard on mortals who harm children, ghosts who wish vengeance against someone who harmed a child often flock to them. Also, other more devious ghosts who seek vengeance against someone that they fear the Sin-Eater will consider to be unfair create stories of



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how this mortal harmed their child or a child they knew. Separating truth from lies forms much of every Sin-Eater's job, especially since many ghosts are sufficiently desperate to resolve their anchors that they are willing to lie to gain aid, even if they are otherwise relatively moral beings.

Although Sin-Eaters who spend much time helping ghosts resolve their anchors often start out idealistic and filled with hope, many grow increasingly cynical. Ghosts often lie and exaggerate, and many mortals that a ghost wronged may seem no better than the ghost who wronged them. As often happens with police and social workers, it is very easy to become overwhelmed with the total amount of vile pettiness that is so common in the World of Darkness. Some Sin-Eaters learn to distrust all mortals and become grim avengers who rarely pause to check a ghost's claims about needing vengeance, because the Sin-Eater has grown to believe that all mortals deserve punishment for something. Other Sin-Eaters come to see ghosts as pathetic and venal liars who treat the Bound as nothing more than their tools and cat's-paws. These Sin-Eaters are inclined to distrust even an appeal from a seemingly selfless ghost who is only seeking to protect his young child from harm.

Also, the process of helping ghosts resolve their anchors is ultimately a temporary one with a potentially problematic end-point. Sin-Eaters who

help ghosts often become close to these ghosts, but once they have helped a ghost resolve its anchors, it eventually ends up devoid of anchors. At this point, the Sin-Eater and the ghost are faced with the uncomfortable prospect that instead of haunting the mortal world, the ghost may be forever condemned to the grim brutality of the Underworld. Although Sin-Eaters who care only about keeping the dead separate from the living often ignore the truth about the Underworld, Sin-Eaters who actually care about the ghosts they are helping are rarely comfortable with adding to the misery of ghosts they have gotten to know and perhaps care about. At this point, the only hope they have to offer ghosts is the unknown promise of "passing on". Some Sin-Eaters lie and promise ghosts some specific afterlife. Others are more honest and present the ghost with the difficult choice of either a known horror, or a completely unknown fate.

Banishing

Some Sin-Eaters believe the living and the dead should remain forever separate. Most Sin-Eaters who specialize in banishing ghosts to the Underworld are perfectly willing to help out a ghost if doing so accomplishes some mortal good like solving a murder or protecting other mortals. However, these Sin-Eaters generally care far more about the living than the

dead. Also, many ghosts have anchors that have nothing to do with solving crimes or helping other mortals. These anchors usually consist of objects, places, or people. Banishers often attempt to force ghosts back into the Underworld by destroying or radically changing objects and places, ripping up treasured photographs, encouraging someone to remodel a home, or sometimes simply burning down an old and abandoned hotel. Anchors that are living people present a far more difficult case, but sometimes simply encouraging someone to move on with their life and to cease talking to their departed relative and perhaps finally sell or give away the relative's possessions and perhaps move to a new home is sufficient to break the anchor keeping the ghost in Twilight. Every Sin-Eater eventually needs to banish a ghost to the Underworld, because some ghosts are simply too evil or too needy and manipulative to be allowed access to the mortal world. No ghost wishes to be forcibly banished into the Underworld, but there are no shortage of ghosts where this is the best, or at least the easiest solution. While eliminating a ghost's ability to visit the mortal world may not make it any less dangerous, doing so does protect mortals from whatever harm it can do. Many Sin-Eaters who specialize in banishing ghosts to the Underworld do their best to avoid actually visiting the Underworld, both because they try not to think about it, and because they may have dozens of enraged ghosts lying in wait for them there.

Destroying

Most Sin-Eaters recognize that the Underworld is a corrupt and terrible place, and that banishing ghosts into this realm just adds to this corruption. Others care less about ghosts, but understanding that ghosts banished to the Underworld can sometimes find their way back into the mortal world. This process can be especially problematic because ghosts that spend a long time in the deeper portions of the Underworld often become substantially more powerful and less human. As a result, some Sin-Eaters have decided that the best approach is to destroy all of the ghosts they encounter. In practice, these Sin-Eaters ignore ghosts who do not cause trouble to mortals or the mortal world, and even the most adamant usually only destroy ghosts who have harmed or threatened either mortals or Bound.

Some of these Sin-Eaters also believe that "passing on" is nothing more than another form of destruction. They do not believe that reincarnation or any afterlife awaits ghosts who pass on. As a result, these Sin-Eaters see no practical difference between helping a ghost resolve its anchors and "pass on", and destroying it. Even these destroyers occasionally help ghosts resolve their anchors, but only if these anchors bring aid or justice to mortals. Even so, such individuals often believe in limiting contact between mortals and ghosts. As a result, they may refuse to pass messages between the living and the dead, and work to prevent ghosts from contacting mortals, even if all the ghost wishes to do is say one final goodbye. Most destroyers are convinced that ghosts are not human souls, but merely the remnant that remains behind once the actual soul has departed for some unknown and unknowable afterlife.

It's just not pragmatic to devote one's life to destroying *all* ghosts, of course. Even destroyers typically ignore ghosts who are not attempting to harm mortals or disrupt the mortal world. However, all Sin-Eaters eventually at least attempt to destroy some ghosts. If they are able, most do not hesitate to destroy the inhuman monsters they occasionally encounter in the Underworld, especially if one of these creatures manages to make its way back into the mortal world. Of course, it's frequently easier said than done. Many of the great beasts of the Great Below are capable of tearing apart entire krewes like so many game animals.

After they have helped a ghost resolve one or more anchors, Sin-Eaters who see no distinction between destroying a ghost and having it "pass on" often end their interaction with a ghost by destroying it. Some do this because they believe that's the right thing to do, others do so because they see ghosts as ultimately tragic and doomed beings whose existence is eternal torment. For these Sin-Eaters, destroying ghosts is ultimately a kindness, even if it is also usually an unwanted one. Some Sin-Eaters offer to slay ghosts they have gotten to know, claiming, sometimes quite accurately, that the ghost ceasing to exist may well be the best of a series of bad options.

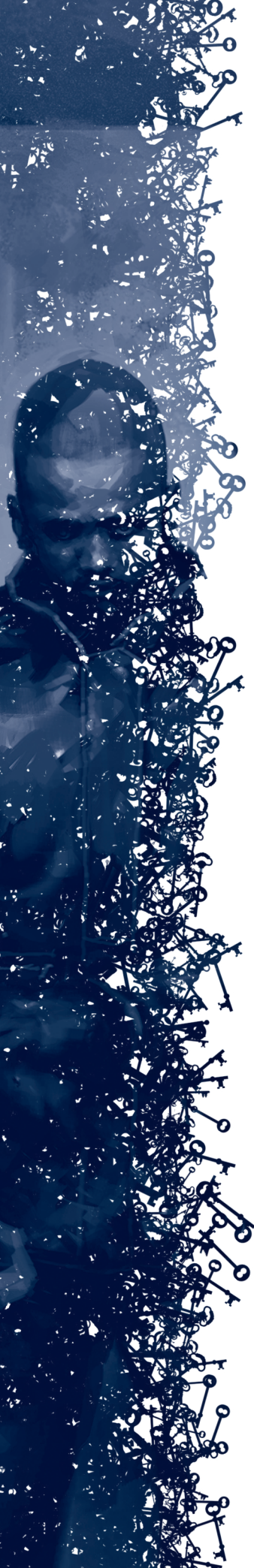
Ghostly Relationships

Ghosts are not people. That much is obvious. But in practice many, especially the recently dead, seem a great deal like people. Some seem capable of a wide range of emotions, including both friendship and love. Because Sin-Eaters can easily enter Twilight and many regularly visit the Underworld, there is no shortage of Bound who treat these remnants as their friends – some even find ghostly lovers. If a Sin-Eater or her geist encounters a dead friend or lover, it's tempting to continue the relationship. Some Sin-Eaters still have close relationships with ghosts in the Great Below, despite believing that ghosts belong in the Underworld and not alongside the physical world. More commonly, regardless of their views about other ghosts, Sin-Eaters who have ghostly friends and lovers protect them and make certain they are able to remain in Twilight in the mortal world, always close at hand.

There can be serious problems when Sin-Eaters becomes close to someone whom they first met as a ghost. And sad to say, tragedy may follow. One of the most uncomfortable truths of the lives of Sin-Eaters is that death changes people.

Ghosts have different motivations than the living and some of them are exceedingly dangerous. More than one Sin-Eater has protected a truly monstrous ghost who was once the Sin-Eater's husband, childhood friend, or sibling. The situation becomes even more complex when dealing with the ghosts of people that the geist once knew. An old associate of a geist may have had more than enough time to become exceedingly inhuman and horrifyingly deadly.

In either case, while some ghosts retain their feelings for the geist or Sin-Eater and are not driven by rage or the desire to harm or destroy the living, others have been drastically changed by death. Some retain old connections but become



increasingly monstrous in their other desires. A few unfortunate Sin-Eaters have protected these terrible ghosts, either by deliberately turning a blind eye to the ghost's actions, assuming that they could eventually find some way to sate the ghost's terrible hungers, or in a few horrible cases, becoming the ghost's partner in crime, helping the ghost find victims and then covering up the murders or other actions. Other Sin-Eaters dread finding monstrous Bound driven to perform terrible actions for the sake of ghosts that they love. The only answer may well be to utterly destroy both the ghost and the Sin-Eater.

Sometimes, the Sin-Eater or Geist is deceived by a ghost who no longer cares for or about them, but who pretends to still care in order to gain the Sin-Eater's protection and aid. Even if the ghost's wishes and desires are in no way monstrous, having a ghost lead a Sin-Eater who they cared for in life on about their feelings never ends well. However, not all relationships are with the ghosts of people the Sin-Eater (or even the geist) once knew.

While many Sin-Eaters are reluctant to discuss this facet of their unusual lives, it's all too common to become attached to a particular ghost. After all, even if a ghost has only a portion of its living psyche, it's still easy to anthropomorphize it sufficiently to overlook its differences. Such relationships are remarkably strange and difficult. Many of these Sin-Eaters are so attached that they end up spending increasing amounts of time in Twilight or the Underworld. Some Bound grow to care more about the dead than the living, or at least about one particular ghost. Also, even the best of these relationships can easily end in the ghost resenting the Sin-Eater. Sin-Eaters can easily walk between the worlds of the living and the dead, while ghost must either linger in Twilight, watching a world they can do little to affect, or dwell in a terrible and often deadly Underworld. The temptation to help a ghost possess a mortal and have something like a mortal life can be very strong and Sin-Eaters who don't often watch the ghost grow bitter and hateful.

Acting as Spiritual Intermediaries

One of the oldest duties of Sin-Eaters is acting as intermediaries between the living and the dead. In a general sense, any Sin-Eater that helps a ghost accomplish any goal in the mortal world is acting as such. However, most Sin-Eaters reserve this term for carrying messages between the living and the dead. Delivering such messages isn't always easy because so many ordinary people don't believe in ghosts, or at least claim that they don't. However, there are still ways to try. The simplest is carrying pen and paper into Twilight and allowing the ghost to write a note that the Sin-Eater arranges for a mortal to find and assume was written before the ghost's death.

Sometimes more direct interactions are needed. Sin-Eaters can do everything from translating between the living and the dead when both are present in one room to performing impressive rituals like the *dumb supper* (see p. 166), which allows the living and the dead to briefly coexist. However, convincing mortals to accept any such actions as something other than trickery can be difficult. One answer is to say nothing to the mortal and instead find ways to arrange for the mortal to encounter messages from the ghost that no one else could have sent. Even a ghostly-sounding phone call that is actually made by the Sin-Eater speaking in a sepulchral voice can be exceedingly convincing if the message delivers information known to no one else but the mortal and the ghost.

Often the easiest method of convincing a mortal of the reality of such messages is for the Sin-Eater to claim some sort of spiritual authority. The words of a Sin-Eater who is a religious official are far more likely to be accepted than those of a random stranger who claims to be able to talk to a departed relative. Most mainstream religions frown on the idea of talking to the dead. Some Sin-Eaters join more fringe sects instead, where contact with ghosts or spirits in the afterlife is considered more usual and acceptable.

Those who become involved in more mainstream faiths may find it feasible to describe their messages from the dead as angelic visions or as some other more acceptable form of knowledge. Many Sin-Eaters occasionally find it easier to pretend to be a religious official and a few actually become religious officials. Some Sin-Eaters specialize in dealing with ghosts left by the faithful of a given religion. In addition to causing such ghosts to be more likely to trust the Bound, being a priest allows the Sin-Eater to offer spiritual counseling to mortals who have recently lost someone close to them. Having a priest approach and talk about a recently-dead loved one is usually considered far more acceptable than having a random stranger do the same thing. An especially persuasive Sin-Eater who is also a religious official can convince many religious mortals that she bears them some sort of message from beyond the grave.

Dealing With New Ghosts

One of the more challenging tasks Sin-Eaters commonly face is dealing with the newly dead. While most ghosts do not encounter a Sin-Eater until they have been dead for several months or even several years, sometimes a Sin-Eater is present when or shortly after a person dies and must face a ghost who may not even know it is dead. For individuals who were old or seriously ill and expected to die, the challenge lies in letting the ghost know that their dreams, hopes, or fears about the afterlife are not

true. Instead of reincarnating or going to some religion's version of the afterlife, the individual is now a ghost and can either dwell in Twilight or move on to the horrors of the Underworld. While some people who were very old or suffering find being a ghost a relief from the burdens of their life, most of them are unwilling to face the Underworld. Many of the newly dead beg for help passing on.

Sin-Eaters unlucky enough to encounter victims of accidents or murder and others who died unexpectedly and in good health have the additional burden of having to find a way to deal with someone who is very likely both angry and unwilling to let go of their mortal life. The angriest and most determined of these ghosts sometimes prove to be exceptionally difficult challenges. Some wish to use their Numina to either interfere with the living in all manner of problematic ways. Others decide to attempt to harass any Sin-Eaters they encounter into either helping them interact with the living or acting as their proxies in the mortal world.

In many ways, the most problematic new ghosts are those disturbed or angry vestiges who truly enjoy their new nature. They feel free to indulge their old instincts, even if they no longer have flesh to be indulged. They can suddenly watch everyone they wish to, and more than that, they can act in ways denied to them when they were alive, at least if they possess the appropriate Numina. It's a dangerous ghost that realizes the possibility of being able to finally exact revenge against everyone who tormented them in their mortal life, while also being able to deny other mortals the joys they were denied in life.

Although there is no way to know this for certain, some Sin-Eaters suspect that these gleefully malicious new ghosts eventually become the worst monsters found in the Underworld. If true, this process takes decades or centuries, but some Sin-Eaters decide to take matters into their own hands and destroy these ghosts before they learn to be more than minor trouble to the living. Unfortunately, destroying new ghosts is often difficult, because they are by far the most human in their reactions. Older ghosts are far less likely to beg for their "lives", having become resigned to being a ghost and somewhat inured to the violence that is a regular part of ghostly existence, especially in the Underworld.

Exploiting Ghosts

Although many Sin-Eaters tell horrific stories about their fellows falling victim to the wiles or raw power of ghosts, there are also a number of particularly debased Sin-Eaters who turn the tables and abuse and exploit ghosts for their own benefit. Many ghosts who are tied to the mortal world are relatively helpless and extremely desperate. In addition to being able to help ghosts attain various goals, these Sin-Eaters can also threaten to sever the ghost's anchors. Encountering a ghost focused on making certain that its children receive their proper inheritance is a prime opportunity for a sufficiently unscrupulous Sin-Eater. On the one hand, she can promise to make certain that the ghost's hidden inheritance goes to its children if the ghost

does exactly what the Sin-Eater wants; on the other, she swears that she will steal and spend the inheritance if the ghost does not do as she asks. A relatively self-aware ghost can be manipulated in such a fashion.

While ghosts may wish to resolve their anchors, they may instinctively protect them, perhaps out of fear of being thrown back into the Underworld. By threatening to burn the photograph, melt down the wedding ring, or vandalize the apartment that keeps a ghost tied to the mortal world, the Bound can further manipulate the dead. In addition, martially inclined Sin-Eaters often learn Manifestations that allow them to harm or destroy ghosts or ceremonies that allow them to imprison them. Despite being dead, many ghosts cling tenaciously to their partial existence and would do literally anything to avoid destruction or imprisonment.

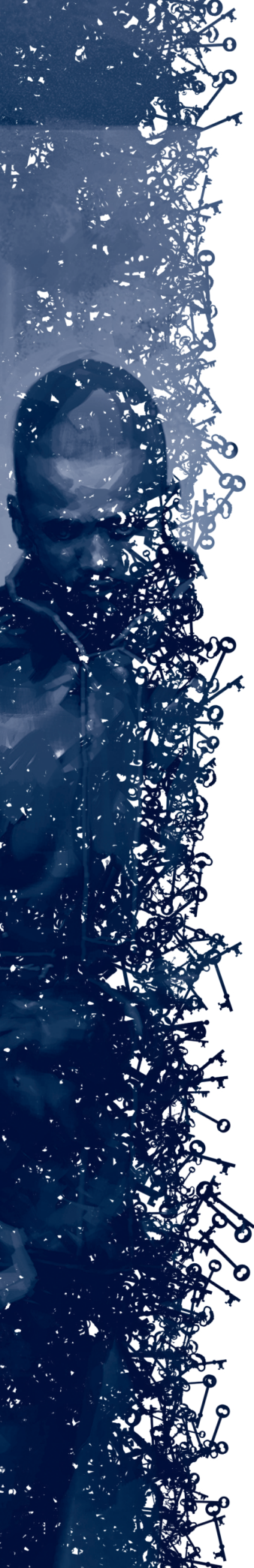
Ghosts have many uses. In addition to being excellent spies, they can intimidate ordinary humans, as well as harass or threaten rival Bound. Ghosts with more powerful Numina are more difficult to control, but can also become uncatchable thieves and murderers, their actions difficult to trace back to the Sin-Eater controlling them. Ghosts can provide the Bound with power, wealth, blackmail information against their enemies, and more.

In return, all these Sin-Eaters must do is make ghosts into their willing or unwilling servants. Finding completely amoral ghosts is easy, but finding ones that will not turn on the Sin-Eater at their first opportunity is harder. One tactic is to seek out relatively weak but useful ghosts who they can easily threaten into servile and fearful obedience. Some of these Bound justify their use of ghosts by their belief that ghosts are inherently corrupt entities, fit only for control or destruction. Others simply don't care and would be as happy to exploit mortals or other Sin-Eaters, but find exploiting ghosts to be easier. Trading favors with ghosts is a widely accepted practice, as is threatening or destroying dangerous or obnoxious ghosts, but many Sin-Eaters consider openly exploiting ghosts to be in very poor taste at minimum. Exploiting ghosts' powers to terrorize or control mortals or other Bound is the inversion of the responsible Sin-Eater's creed.

Sin-Eaters can be sufficiently discreet in their abuses of power that the first evidence is when a terrorized ghost fearfully approaches another Sin-Eater for aid against one of his fellows. Many Bound are reluctant to interfere with how another of their number deals with ghosts. But if a Sin-Eater's actions become sufficiently egregious or if she is found to be preying upon mortals or her own kind via ghostly cat's-paws, it becomes more a matter of self-defense.

Exploiting the Underworld

The problems of exploiting ghosts worsen when dealing with the Underworld. Summoning a ghost out of the Underworld and then threatening to return it if the ghost does not do the Sin-Eater's bidding is an exceedingly effective threat. Worse yet, some Sin-Eaters travel into the Underworld to control the ghosts there. The most powerful often attempt to set themselves up as minor lords of a



portion of the Underworld and a few of the most powerful occasionally attempt to create their own Underworld Dominion. Some Sin-Eaters theorize that Kerberoi are actually Sin-Eaters who managed to accomplish this mythic feat.

For those without such power or hubris, the Underworld still offers vast opportunities for exploitation. Some Sin-Eaters effectively run ghostly protection rackets, where they keep ghosts safe from their own abuse and the abuse of other Underworld denizens in return for services provided by the ghosts. The advantage to the Sin-Eater is that most ghosts who normally dwell in the Underworld swiftly become exceedingly callous and brutal. When they are summoned to the mortal world, they are most effective at abuse and deception. Of course, bringing the worst of the Underworld into the mortal world is a direct perversion of what most Sin-Eaters believe they should be doing, but there are always some who can't resist the lure of potentially dozens of powerful and cruelly obedient servants.

A few of the most debauched Sin-Eaters find that they enjoy spending large amounts of time in the Underworld, especially when they can make ghosts into their servants. Even if they are not considering attempting to create a Dominion, they can still force ghosts to serve their every whim, while abusing and tormenting other ghosts to their hearts' content. One particularly problematic aspect of this sort of behavior is that it is often difficult to distinguish

between this sort of abuse and attempt to clean up some portion of the Underworld and to rid it of the most monstrous ghosts. As a result, most Sin-Eaters are somewhat suspicious of any of their number who reputedly spends too much time in the Underworld, regardless of what their purported reasons are.

Specialized Ghostly Purviews

Most krewes deal primarily with ghosts in a single region: a town, neighborhood, or collection of neighborhoods. However, not all Sin-Eaters limit their interactions geographically. Some seek out ghosts of a certain bloodline or ancestry. A Puerto Rican Sin-Eater in NYC might limit her work to Puerto Rican ghosts and Puerto Rican mortals who are haunted by ghosts. Others specialize as to the type of haunting, focusing on helping ghosts who seek vengeance or those who wish to protect their descendants.

Hunting Krewes

Some krewes spend most of their time dealing with malevolent entities. All but the most inexperienced Sin-Eaters have encountered powerful and monstrous ghosts that must be destroyed or captured. Sometimes, these creatures are more than a match for any ordinary krewa. However, a few mobile Krewes adopt founding myths that stress battling horrors from beyond the grave. Sin-Eaters belonging



craig HENDERSON

to such krewes make their reputations by hunting down the deadliest monsters that escape from the Underworld. Although few in number, these “hunting krewes” usually travel a great deal, crossing territories to handle particularly deadly ghosts at the request of the local Bound.

The reputation of a successful hunting krewe can travel quickly across the Twilight Network. Of course, they are performing an exceptionally dangerous job, and so the mortality rate is quite high. After a hunting krewe has lost several members to various terrible fates — such as Synergy degradation after too many deaths — the other members may well disband. Currently, the oldest hunting krewe in the United States has been hunting for 14 years, losing three members in that time.

Ethnic, Religious or Family Dedication

Some small and often informal groups of Sin-Eaters are specifically focused on specific families, communities, or subcultures. Few are formal krewes. Instead, these groups are composed of blood relatives or those who have pledged to help each other look after their families, both in life and death. Since ghosts from various religious or ethnic backgrounds often have specific imperatives not shared by others outside of this community, Sin-Eaters who specialize in dealing with a particular population have a significant benefit over those who must deal with ghosts from a wide range of different cultures and backgrounds. Ghosts are almost always more inclined to trust Bound that belong to their culture or faith. Naturally, this type of specialization is only possible in areas where the particular population is concentrated. A wise Sin-Eater who hears of the Screaming Woman of Chinatown might do well to see if there are any Chinese-American colleagues in the area who could navigate the culture more easily.

Sin-Eaters in the Underworld

Most Sin-Eaters spend the vast majority of their time in the mortal world. However, they also find the need to visit the Great Below at least occasionally. Some even make the Underworld their specific purview. For any Sin-Eater who has any positive feelings toward ghosts, visiting the Underworld is difficult. It is a broken and terrible realm and little the Sin-Eaters can do can change anything. However, even small changes can help make the existence of the ghosts there slightly more bearable. Most of the truly horrific and powerful ghosts dwell in the deeper parts of the Underworld, emerging only when summoned or disturbed

in some fashion. However, a few wander higher up into the Underworld and torment the ghosts there. Some Sin-Eaters seek out these monsters and destroy them, thus making the existence of the other ghosts in the Underworld slightly less terrible. Other Sin-Eaters go into the Underworld, seeking the ghosts of people they or their geist once knew, ghosts of dead relatives or simply ghosts who touched them in some way and offer to help them pass on or perhaps to visit the mortal world and see their descendants.

Dealing with Other Supernaturals

Sin-Eaters aren't the only supernatural beings capable of interacting with ghosts. Mages skilled in the Death Arcanum can become mighty necromancers. Mortal thaumaturges and psychics can communicate with and rarely even summon or control ghosts. A few specially skilled vampires, werewolves, and changelings have powers over the dead as well. The most powerful of these beings can call ghosts from the Underworld or visit it themselves. Most Bound see little problem with psychics or thaumaturges who speak to ghosts, ward dwellings against haunting, or exorcise dangerous spirits. The most compassionate Sin-Eaters may watch over such mortals to make certain they do not grow overconfident or unknowingly call down the wrath of the Underworld on themselves or those they are aiding, but otherwise most Sin-Eaters do not interfere with mortals who have minor talents for dealing with ghosts. Most Sin-Eaters do not even reveal their existence to such mortals in an effort to protect them from too much contact with the supernatural.

The Sin-Eater's duty as it relates to other supernatural beings, though — that is something few agree on. Vampires are undead, but not of the Underworld. Should the mandate to assist the restless deceased or protect the living from the dead extend to them? What exactly is to be done about a dangerous haunting on the edge of a werewolf territory? How much do mages know, and can they be trusted? Some krewes extend their mandate to another group or type of supernatural. For example, the Old Blood Posse is well aware of the old ways of offering up blood to the dead, and has attempted to learn much about the ways of vampires to discover any correlation. And some krewes don't start out with the intention of making another supernatural group a particular purview, but circumstances cause them to decide otherwise. Crossing paths with a werewolf pack or coming to a necromancer-mage's attention can be a formative experience.

DEALING WITH VENGEFUL SPIRITS

Some ghosts aren't easy to help — particularly in a moral or ethical sense. The dead can go utterly mad with hatred and the lust for vengeance, not just against those that wronged them, but against all of the living. These monstrous spirits are a threat to the peaceful dead as well as to the living

There are spirits whose greatest pleasure is collecting the skins of mortal victims or arranging mortal entrails in complex patterns. The worst of these are utterly inhuman things that lack any shred of human memories or human form. When facing a giant grub with a dozen eyes and a huge fanged maw, Sin-Eaters cannot resolve its anchors or help it gently pass on into the unknown beyond. Instead, they must battle the creature and destroy or imprison it. In addition to protecting mortals from these monstrosities, Sin-Eaters are often forced to face them directly, since some of these spirits have a taste for Sin-Eaters and will hunt them preferentially.



F enemies

Becoming a part of the supernatural world carries with it no end of dangers. Even though Sin-Eaters gain superb resilience through their merging with a geist, the Sin-Eater's preternatural toughness is no guarantee of survival, especially when confronted with many other occult entities. While the diverse creatures of the World of Darkness come in types, they do all share one thing in common — they're all dangerous.

Fortunately for Sin-Eaters, most geists have at least a vague notion of the kinds of predators (and worse) that lurk in the shadows. The demands of the geist and of a Sin-Eater's profession *per se* inevitably cause Sin-Eaters to cross paths with other paranormal entities, about which a geist *usually* has some helpful pointers. Young and cautious Sin-Eaters do their best to avoid other supernatural creatures; foolhardy Sin-Eaters tend to assume that their near-death resurrection gives them a level of primacy in matters involving the supernatural world, which in turn usually results in a quick second death.

G hosts

Sin-Eaters deal with ghosts as a matter of course. Aside from the strong drive to send ghosts to their eternal rest and the constant deluge of ghostly noise, Sin-Eaters' geists are, themselves, near-ghostly beings. The Sin-Eater's connection to the Underworld, and ability to interact with it, means that every Sin-Eater deals with ghosts sooner or later — usually sooner. Of course, ghosts are also the beings about which geists tend to have the most comprehensive knowledge. This fortunately means that ghosts are, at the very least, a known threat.

Ghosts do have, unfortunately, an obsessive drive that keeps them around beyond death, which means that ghosts also try to avoid anything that would move them along and out of their spiritual trap. Certainly a ghost may recognize the value of resolving its connections to its old life, and may even want out of its hellish pseudo-existence. For the most part, though, ghosts don't understand their own condition, and have little if any knowledge of what Sin-Eaters do. This means that ghosts often fail to recognize a Sin-Eater or krewé's activities as any kind of "help," which in turn throws Sin-Eaters into conflict with ghosts even while trying to aid the dead in achieving some kind of final resolution.

The most common conflict with ghosts stems from simple misunderstandings over the means to satisfy what a ghost requires. What the ghost needs is often quite divergent from what it wants, and many ghosts lack the lucidity to understand even when a

Sin-Eater explains the realities of the situation. A ghost might want to find a way to protect and care for one of its fetters in the material world, unaware that the Sin-Eaters trying to destroy that fetter are in fact working to help liberate the ghost from its torment. Naturally, Sin-Eaters' powers aid them in defending against ghosts with a misguided sense of self-preservation, but since every ghost has its own supernatural capabilities, the occasional surprise pops up in ways that can be fatal to a Sin-Eater. For novices or fledgling krewes, even a solitary drone can be a problem if it can teleport away from confrontation, ignite its surroundings in the material world, or possess friends or bystanders.

Worse still are ghosts that retain enough self-determination and awareness to make cunning decisions about how to oppose Sin-Eaters. Particularly old ghosts tend to become highly eccentric and they often have strange or delusional notions about how best to conduct their business. Many such ghosts find a new focus to their incorporeal existence, the better to stave off boredom and insanity through the banal stretch of their unending days and nights. These ghosts might delight in harassing Sin-Eaters just for personal amusement, or may even become a nuisance in the midst of a krewé's already-established attempts to deal with a less-capable ghost. Little can ruin a krewé's carefully-prepared ceremony or ghostly intervention like another smarter, meaner, and more powerful ghost suddenly showing up to crash the party. Of course, even these malevolent ghosts need to move on, but a rushed Sin-Eater may find herself unprepared to ward off such a ghost without either doing permanent damage to one of the incorporeal, or having to break off an existing case. Worst of all, very old ghosts — especially ones stuck in the Underworld, with no remaining ties to allow them access to the living world — can be difficult to touch, highly influential with other ghosts, and of course so bored and jaded that they don't care about risking their own continued existence against Sin-Eaters.

Dealing with ghosts, then, is never quite as straightforward as it seems. A simple case of a weeping young mother ghost that needs to move on can rapidly become a running battle with terror when an old and twisted ghost shows up, fills the younger ghost's ear with lies about the Sin-Eaters, and then proceeds to manifest a range of powers designed to disrupt the Sin-Eaters' ceremonies, destroy their possessions, and ruin the intervention. Such mischievous ghosts have even been known to follow a Sin-Eater around, causing havoc in the Sin-Eater's attempts at leading a day-to-day existence. The di-

lemma of whether to banish or destroy the ghost or whether to find a way to resolve its existence in spite of its malice then becomes ever more burdensome to the Sin-Eater, who may find that simply eliminating the harassment, no matter how damaging to one's Synergy, can prove refreshingly straightforward in bringing back some normalcy to one's life... for a short time.

Rival Krewes and the Sacrosanct

Since krewes bind over mutual philosophical agendas — based on religious convictions, keen understanding of a particular facet of spiritual existence, or a set of beliefs passed down from generation to generation — conflict between different krewes is inevitable. Even a pair of neighboring krewes with nothing to fight about will sooner or later clash over dogma. When this dogma comes in contact with the realities of the supernatural world, of course, such conflicts become quite heated, with Sin-Eaters sabotaging one another's efforts, trying to bring ghosts around to "their" way of thinking, and even engaging in outright violence.

In a sense, a krewé is like a gang motivated by shared supernatural experience and a philosophy regarding death and the afterlife. A krewé following a voodoo tradition, with an emphasis on possession and a belief in the loa, will approach a case of ghostly possession quite differently from a Mexican Catholic krewé that believes in both ghosts and demons. Indeed, the same spirits that the voodoo krewé sees as loa would fit right into the Catholic krewé's category of demons, so naturally the two would have divergent views on how to deal with them...

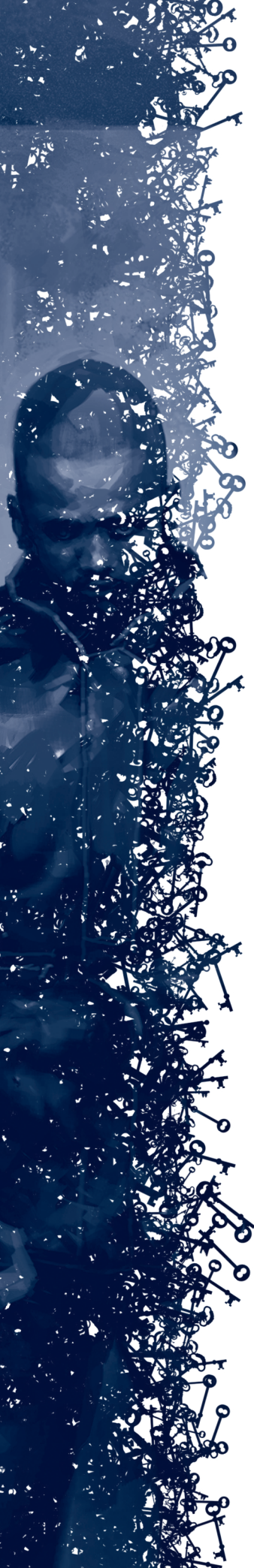
Krewes usually conduct themselves with wary disdain for one another. Naturally, a neighboring krewé may not have all the details "right," but so long as they stay away from the business of a krewé in its home turf and they don't screw up too many ghosts *too* badly, other krewes will stay away and leave them to their own problems. The exceptions generally come in three cases: former association, territorial disputes, and philosophical conflicts.

Former associates are, of course, a significant pain in the ass because they mean that the two krewes had some former contact that was insufficient to serve as a link between them, but enough to make sure they know secrets or methods in details that could prove inconvenient. Perhaps a pair of young lovers in a car wreck both survived and became Bound, but wound up gravitating to different krewes; now their bitterness over the circumstances of the break-up, their intimate knowledge of one another, and their recriminations over who was at fault in the accident will cause friction between them that naturally spreads to their krewes. Perhaps a young Sin-Eater decides to leave her mentor after a particularly strident disagreement with his views, and forms her own krewé; naturally, the mentor has a good idea of how the student started her career, and the student has a handle on some of the mentor's philosophy, which only serves to make their krewes' clashes more dangerous. Usually, these sorts of conflicts eventually devolve into "live and let unlive" situations, especially

once the point of mutual contact dies or moves on to other business. Sometimes, though, these rivalries can pass down from generation to generation, with a krewé telling stories of a rival to each new recruit, who in turn passes on those tales to later inductees, thus keeping the conflict alive. La Llorna's Sinners, a krewé of Catholic mystics that operates out of territory stretching from Tecate to El Paso, is one such case; founded in 1835, this krewé has continually refreshed its numbers from new recruits each generation, and other krewes operating in Mexico and the American southwest have all heard tales of how the Sinners trapped a rival krewé inside of the processional figures during the Festivo of Dia de las Muertas of 1848, then set them on fire and finally Bound their geists and laid their spirits to rest. Obviously, other krewes are wary around the Sinners, never mind the fact that this story has come down over 160 years and nobody's even interacted with the Sinners since the 1970s.

Territorial disputes arise when two krewes decide to set up certain areas as their "turf" and wind up arguing over who's going to oversee it and how best to protect it. Like other gang wars, these disputes tend to become rough-and-tumble affairs, with krewes using their allies to spy on the rival, move in and disrupt the other krewé's activities, and lay claim to turf in both a physical and supernatural sense. Territorial disputes are most common when two or more krewes contain Sin-Eaters who have some strong attachment to the area — such as Sin-Eaters who all have mortal families or mundane jobs in a particular town — or when the Sin-Eaters compete for a useful resource, such as an abundant graveyard or a portal to the Underworld. Unexpectedly, the former conflicts tend to be more difficult to resolve than the latter. You can always find a new graveyard or door to the Underworld in the next city over. You can't just pick up and get a new sister, and if you're already locked into a mortgage, you probably don't want to skip out on your career and house just because some snotty interloper declared that your home town was "his turf." Obviously, krewes avoid outright murder or anything that would lead to the unwarranted destruction of ghosts in these territorial fights, but accidents do happen...

Philosophical conflicts lead to the nastiest infighting between krewes, but then, holy wars do have a tendency to bring out the fanatical excesses of ideology. (Naturally, the specifics of any such ideology are often less important than "who's right.") Since krewes bind over matters of belief (and interpretation thereof), every krewé has its own set of core ideas, and when these conflict with another krewé's, neither side will compromise. Often, these beliefs are so strongly caught up in a krewé's identity — and in its binding rituals — that it is fundamentally impossible for a krewé to abjure these beliefs without breaking the metaphysical bonds between members. The Ban and Duty of a ceremonially-consecrated krewé (see page 182) often brings other krewes into conflict; a krewé dedicated to liberating the dead will fall quickly into battle with a krewé that uses enslaved ghosts and zombies, with the basis of their war being the philoso-



phy of their circle, as expressed through the krewe's channel. Like it or not, members of each krewe are hell-bent on a course of mutual annihilation, simply because they are metaphysically compelled to uphold a particular standard or sacrament. These enemies are often the worst that any Sin-Eater will face, since they have their own Manifestations, their own understanding of the Underworld, and their own cadres of allied ghosts.

Some particularly devoted Sin-Eaters take up a mantle of religious righteousness under the assumption that they have received revelation of *one great truth* or the notion of being *special recipients* of divine (or infernal) grace. If a devoutly religious man received a vision from an angel telling him he is a chosen servant of God, gifted with miracles to smite the unrighteous and given a holy calling, how does he respond when he encounters another Sin-Eater who makes the same claims? Either he decides they are both agents of some higher power that works through both of them, or he asserts that he has a special, chosen destiny while anyone else making such a claim is obviously an agent of an enemy power, sent to delude, misguide, and run counter to his sacred mission. The most dedicated (or delusional) of such Sin-Eaters are called the *sacrosanct* by others; these crusaders rarely form krewes, but instead devote their energies not only to settling ghostly business, but to confronting and even murdering other Sin-Eaters. Convinced as they are of their own divine mandate, the sacrosanct believe their "unique and special" role necessarily mandates that no other Sin-Eater can be a true servant of the divine. Such notions are as often caught up in the whispers of a malevolent geist as in the dissonance of a mind desperate to be somehow more special even than the small and select group that makes up the population of Sin-Eaters, but the results are the same: the sacrosanct are a clear and violent danger to other Sin-Eaters, though often one that is not recognized until the sacrosanct finally makes a move to kill.

Abmortals

Odd events and weird coincidences abound in the life of a Sin-Eater; perhaps it is no surprise that Sin-Eaters encounter, with alarming frequency, other people who have succumbed to unusual supernatural forces. While the process of becoming a Sin-Eater is rare and unpredictable, it is at least reasonably consistent; Sin-Eaters generally manifest a uniform suite of changes as a result of their involvement in the Underworld and their union with a geist. Not so abmortals, humans who have found themselves thoroughly changed by the intervention of a singular event, one personal and unique to each abmortal in question.

Abmortals run the gamut in capabilities; some are otherwise normal people who have stumbled into the supernatural world, only to learn that they are now infected with malevolent energies and inhuman needs. Others deliberately undertake to change themselves by means of custom-made rituals, convergences of occult power, or transmutation via unwholesome artifacts. Whatever the cause, abmortals often sustain themselves upon unnatural diets, and the process of transformation carries with it strange powers, as well as the promise of immortality.

Having left humanity and its attendant fragility behind, abmortals can be truly loathsome, immoral creatures; often, they manifest few outside changes to appearance that might indicate their undying natures. Sin-Eaters would likely leave them alone, but for the fact that abmortals generally sustain their eternal existences by cheating death via some sort of substitution pact. An abmortal often finds a way to maim or kill others in its place, so as to retain eternal youth and vigor, but each abmortal does so in a unique way related somehow to its own drives and past. Naturally, this means that abmortals leave a trail of death in their wake, which in turn draws Sin-Eaters to resolve the torments of the associated ghosts. Often, Sin-Eaters sense that the abmortal's work is somehow unnatural, that the abmortal removes one of the living before the fated time of the victim. Some abmortals even undertake the means to enslave the ghosts of those whom they kill in their stead.

Thanks to their signature immortality, each abmortal survives in a particular fashion, and stopping it from preying upon innocent humans will likely kill it — but just as often, a Sin-Eater who hopes to right the imbalance created by the abmortal's reign of slaughter must discover some means to do away with the abmortal quickly lest it continue to kill. A Sin-Eater might learn, for instance, that a particular abmortal survives by cutting out the eyes of a victim on the new moon each month, then eating the eyes and casting the sightless, throat-cut body into a bay of still water. If the Sin-Eater is unable to learn the secrets of the abmortal from a ghost, then the only alternative is to stalk the abmortal and learn how it conducts its killing, which in turn means that additional victims are likely. Naturally, each ghost created by this unwholesome practice means more work for Sin-Eaters and their krewes, so finishing off the abmortal is generally a priority.

For their part, many abmortals don't know or appreciate the work that Sin-Eaters perform. Indeed, created as they are by confluences of unique events, many abmortals have a decided ignorance of the supernatural world in general. It is only the fact of their depredations on the karmic balance of death (as some might poetically put it) that brings them into regular conflict with Sin-Eaters.

Kerberoi

Deep within the Underworld, the divergent and often hellish realms of the dead have rulers of their own. The Kerberoi are not exactly rulers of the various Dominions of the Underworld; it is, perhaps, more accurate to call them extensions of those Dominions. Each Kerberos is a manifestation of the character of a particular Dominion, and of that Dominion's Old Laws. It is in the latter state, as an enforcer of the Old Laws, that Kerberoi most often manifest as enemies to Sin-Eaters.

Within each Dominion, the Old Laws are arcane, arbitrary, and often hidden. These qualities, though, do not prevent the Kerberoi from enforcing them tirelessly and with abandon. Often, a Sin-Eater's first trip to one of the Lower Mysteries becomes an exercise in fleeing the associated Kerberos, as it is all too easy to inadvertently break one of the Old Laws and thereby attract the unwanted notice of the Kerberos.

Kerberoi do not have a uniform appearance. Like very ancient ghosts or particularly strange geists, Kerberoi usually manifest humanoid shapes, but often with strange geometries, bizarre growths, or symbolic attachments and appendages. A Kerberos might appear as an Egyptian death-god, with a gray-skinned humanoid body and animalistic head, or as a spider-legged creature with four faces; most of them are decidedly inhuman. Along with their frightening countenances, they often have a wide range of Manifestations at their disposal. Many Kerberoi are also quite a bit larger than the average human, which lends them perceived weight and authority in the Underworld along with actual superiority in confrontations.

Sin-Eaters who encounter a Kerberos had best be wary, for the creature rarely appears except when it undertakes the business of enforcing the Old Laws. Indeed, Kerberoi barely even communicate unless to explain an infraction or notify a Sin-Eater or ghost of its impending termination. Fighting a Kerberos is also generally a losing proposition. For this reason, Sin-Eaters go out of their way to recognize the Kerberoi of the Dominions that the Sin-Eaters visit, the better to get a head start when fleeing. In theory, a Kerberos could be bound by a powerful ceremony, or disincorporated by a concentrated attack, but the sheer power of the Kerberoi means that such a confrontation is more likely to be a losing proposition for the Sin-Eater than for the Kerberos.

Chthonians

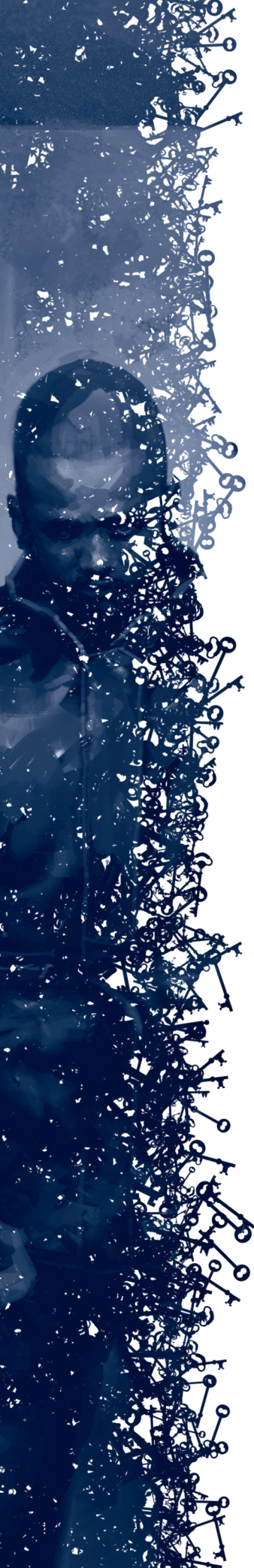
As if the hazards of ghosts and Kerberoi weren't sufficient, the Underworld is also home to something alien even to the perspective of the Bound. Some say these entities are ghosts or geists so incredibly ancient that their human aspects have eroded utterly. Others



john WIGLEY

say they were never human at all — that they're the ghosts of dead races that predated humanity, or what happens to a Kerberos that is slain. Some even say they're the ghosts of *concepts* — that they're impossible to define because the very concepts they embody have died out in the body of human knowledge.

The chthonians are hideous entities, all the surreality of a geist with none of the human aspect. They might appear as composite globs of organic or inorganic matter, as patchwork assemblies of bizarre body parts, or as grotesque parodies of living things. They seem to have no logic that a Sin-Eater can reliably predict: they follow urges only loosely related to survival and feeding. Even so, sometimes one of the Bound can achieve some rudimentary



communication with a chthonian, particularly if the thing has devoured ghosts recently and is still assimilating their personae and memories.

Other Perils of the World of Darkness

Besides the problems of the Underworld and the ghosts therein, Sin-Eaters find themselves running afoul of monsters of other sorts. Since the work of Sin-Eaters brings them into contact with haunted sites, cursed relics, and ghosts' fetters, run-ins with other supernatural entities are almost assured. Any creature that interacts with the dead, or with the necrotic power of the Underworld, will probably cross paths with the Bound sooner rather than later. The fact that other supernatural creatures don't know much about Sin-Eaters (and vice-versa) is both a hindrance and a blessing: a problem because of the inevitable misunderstandings between the two, but at least when a conflict occurs the enemies know as little about the Sin-Eaters as the Sin-Eaters do about other entities.

Vampires

Neither living nor wholly dead, vampires stand on the threshold between the material world and the lands of the dead. For undead cadavers, though, vampires are comically unaware of the Underworld itself. This alone means that Sin-Eaters don't run across the bloodsuckers too often — except when a vampire catches wind of exactly what a Sin-Eater can do.

Vampires live static existences, so they often cling to ancient habits. They also tend to favor orderly, predictable circumstances, because most have an uncontrollable fear of meeting their end by fire or sunlight. To bring about such controlled circumstances, vampires rely on their abilities and their charm to mesmerize, intimidate, and manipulate mortals and organizations. From such minions, the vampires derive a steady supply of fresh human blood, as well as all of the security they might need to continue to live in style. Naturally, the fact that vampires prey upon human blood, and that they often indulge in blackmail and violence in order to influence the humans around them, means that vampires tend to leave unhappy ghosts in their wake. For the most part, vampires remain ignorant of these ghosts and unaffected by them, but Sin-Eaters aren't so lucky, and a chance run-in with the ghost of a vampire's victim can push the Sin-Eater into confrontation with one of the hematophagic undead.

Since a Sin-Eater represents an unknown quantity, and a meddlesome one at that, Sin-Eaters tend to draw the attention of vampires. After all, if a krewe barges in on a vampire's drug operation or blood bank skimming and interrupts the whole process while in pursuit of a ghost's fetter or a lost

memento, the vampire behind the business won't really care about the motivations so much as the damages. Worse still, vampires recognize that other supernatural beings can be very useful tools (albeit dangerous ones), and some vampires aren't above trying to get their claws (or fangs) into a Sin-Eater or krewe for the purposes of co-opting the Sin-Eaters into the service of the undead.

Sin-Eaters drawn into conflict against vampires must keep in mind that the undead can be extremely old, experienced, and supernaturally powerful. Mind control, preternatural strength, shapeshifting, and invisibility all lie within the vampires' repertoire, and this only scratches the surface of the capabilities possessed by truly ancient ones. Even when Sin-Eaters think they have the upper hand, they may realize they're only playing part of a very long, very subtle game. The best thing any Sin-Eater (or human, for that matter) can do with respect to vampires is to avoid them whenever possible.

For krewes that find themselves diving into conflict with the undead, the greatest advantage lies in the fact that vampires have little interaction with spirits or ghosts. As a result, a friendly ghost or meddlesome geist can provide valuable intelligence with respect to a vampire's location, allies, powers, and routines. Woe betide the unlucky krewe that runs afoul of one of the rare vampires that does deal with ghosts, however; the krewe's incorporeal allies are as likely to become fuel for the vampire's magical rites as the Sin-Eaters' all-too-human blood.

Werewolves

It is perhaps fortunate that few werewolves bother interacting with ghosts or Sin-Eaters. Indeed, most Sin-Eaters can spend their entire careers without ever interacting with or realizing the existence of werewolves beyond a mention on the Twilight Network. Werewolves, for their part, don't generally seem terribly interested in Sin-Eaters, at least after first blush. This mutual blasé stems from the divergent supernatural callings of the two groups — werewolves deal with totemic and animistic spirits that have become nuisances in the material world, while Sin-Eaters typically deal with ghosts that might not even have an impact on the physical plane. The two groups usually only cross paths when a particular ghost manages to influence the lands of the living for a protracted time, thereby drawing the attentions of werewolves as well as Sin-Eaters.

The Bound see this rare interaction with werewolves and Sin-Eaters as a good thing because werewolves are natural engines of destruction. Driven by latent fury, following ancient tribal rules in the breach as much as in the observance, and gifted with the ability to shift between multiple forms, a lone werewolf is a dangerous thing to cross. Since werewolves tend to travel in packs, this only heightens

the danger. Sin-Eaters especially draw attention because werewolves might mistake them for people possessed by spirits, and because most Sin-Eaters don't automatically react with abject terror when confronted by a werewolf, in the way that most normal humans do.

On the positive side, Sin-Eaters faced with a particularly recalcitrant ghost might — *might* — be able to count on the assistance of werewolves in putting the restless shade out to pasture for good. That's assuming that the Sin-Eater can even find a werewolf, convince it to listen, and trick or persuade the werewolf into believing that the krewe itself isn't a bigger spiritual problem.

Mages

Whether calling them sorcerers, viziers, or some stranger name, mages represent a deeply frightening unknown quantity to Sin-Eaters. True, Sin-Eaters do use their own necromantic rituals in order to contact the dead and to perform various magical feats related to the Underworld — but mages seem to wield vast cosmic powers that run the gamut from scrying on distant locations to blasting their foes with conjured fire. Mages' goals are also enigmatic, which makes them troublesome as either allies or opponents; Sin-Eaters rarely understand the stakes involved in any conflict of mages. For their part, mages usually consider Sin-Eaters a sort of aberration, a "limited and puny" manifestation of the vagaries of the supernatural world. Some mages even specialize in their own forms of necromancy, and can bind ghosts, follow Sin-Eaters into the Underworld, or command the dead to do the mage's bidding.

Conflicts between mages and Sin-Eaters typically revolve around krewes with Bans or Duties that force them into fighting an opposing mage. Given the option, most mages would probably leave Sin-Eaters alone — but a krewe breaking down the door to a wizard's sanctum and setting all of his undead minions free, or breaking the mage's prized magical talismans, will quickly draw down ire.

Mages use ceremonies, much like Sin-Eaters, but these ceremonies don't function for krewes. By the same token,

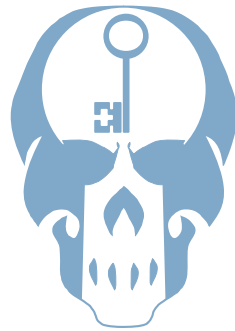
mages don't generally undergo the near-death experiences that Sin-Eaters all share. This means that there's a large metaphysical gulf between how mages perceive their roles and how Sin-Eaters interact with the supernatural world. Most mages, in fact, do not perceive themselves as having much of a duty at all with respect to the Underworld. This disconnect means that Sin-Eaters often perceive mages as petulant, whimsical, and wildly powerful yet irresponsible in their behavior; conversely, mages consider Sin-Eaters uninformed, misguided, and horribly handicapped. Neither side has much innate appreciation for the other.

Hunters

The last thing a krewe needs is a meddling group of humans trying to do the krewe's job (badly) and also trying to do in the krewe itself. Even well-intentioned interference usually leads to disaster, since most hunters feel a calling to deal (permanently) with anything supernatural. Hunters' tendency to work in groups, to barrel through situations without a complete understanding of the supernatural ramifications of their actions, and to doggedly track down any and all paranormal incidents means that, sooner or later, a krewe will have to decide how to deal with these sorts of mere mortals.

Of course, hunters are just as likely to want to lay ghosts to rest as are Sin-Eaters, but hunters lack the specialized insights necessary to perform such tasks with any degree of success. Many hunters even hold wildly inaccurate views about how to deal with ghosts at all, and most hunters can't see ghosts that don't manifest in the physical world. All of these limitations mean that hunters tend to seriously screw up a krewe's attempts to send a ghost to its final reward.

At first glance, most hunters will just assume that Sin-Eaters are eccentric but otherwise mundane people, and might even mistake a krewe for another hunting team. Once a Sin-Eater uses a visible Manifestation or otherwise exhibits a supernatural power, though, all bets are off. The majority of hunters won't even bother to figure out what the Bound are, or what they do, before attacking.



You would think you wouldn't remember being dead, even if it was only for one minute, fourteen seconds. Without oxygen, no brain function, just unconsciousness, devoid of dreams. There's nothing to remember. No tunnels and no lights, despite what other people say.

But we're supposed to remember, whether we asked for it or not. That's the deal that was given to us. And *they* won't ever let us forget.

I've talked with the others about it now and again, mostly when I can feel the Triplet has gone dormant. I can tell that it isn't always looking through my eyes, that it dozes off — if that makes any sense — from time to time, usually when the sun's particularly warm. That's when I tend to ask about what it's like for them, what their geists feel like from time to time, if they get the... reminders.

I also tend to steal some furtive sex when that happens, if I can get it; I mean, I won't say no to some action when the Triplet's more aware, but I like the extra measure of privacy. Chloe says that makes me a prude by Bound standards. I just think it's good to have something of your own, something that isn't subject to the Triplet's approval.

Because whenever it wakes up — again, if that's what it does — it's always the same thing: cold fingers caressing my heart. It never squeezes, and I don't know if it even can — it just lets me know that my heart is in its hand. I can feel my heart beating, but the Triplet's touch: that's exactly what it felt like when my heart stopped.

I wish I didn't know that. But if wishes were locks, the doors would all be closed...

And let's face it, I'd be dead.

So much as I dislike the memory, it's mine. The Triplet holds my heart, and I hold its. I hate remembering what death is like every morning, every afternoon, every midnight — but at least I'm only remembering.

CHAPTER TWO: CHARACTER CREATION





Character Creation

Sin-Eaters are not born. In truth, their beginnings are most people's endings. The shattered body at the foot of the stairs that stirs and moves again, her mind filled with new purpose and the face of the woman who pushed her. Every Sin-Eater had some affinity for the afterlife before they bound with a geist, even if they weren't aware of it. Their abilities as mediums and sensitives give them the chance to cheat death and join with a geist in a symbiotic relationship that allows both of them another chance.

Creating a Geist character is a combination of pure creativity and the hard numbers that allow you to approximate your ideas within the setting by allocating traits. Your choices of traits blend with your concept to create a unique individual, the persona with which you will interact with the other players and your Storyteller within the **World of Darkness**. Remember, a Storytelling game is about precisely that: telling entertaining stories about interesting characters. Taking the time to craft a three-dimensional character with a history, relationships, hopes, and fears will be more rewarding in the long run, both for your fellow players and for you. Hopefully, you'll be spending a lot of time with your Sin-Eater, so you owe it to yourself to keep him intriguing.

Krewes and Characters

In most games, the troupe makes up one krew. You're not going to get very far if your character is not compatible with the other characters, at least to some extent. It is a good idea to discuss your character with the other players and find ways for them to be drawn together. It doesn't matter if the characters are from different social strata, as long as there is some driving force, some commonality that brings them together time and again. That they are both Sin-Eaters can only go so far, if they truly have nothing else in common.

Step One: Choose Concept

Your concept is the most basic expression of your character. If you were in an elevator with a film director and you had two minutes to pitch your character's story to him before the doors opened, what would it be? Some characters can be summed up in a short blurb ("adrenaline-junkie athlete," "serial-killer survivor," "reborn zealot") while others require more explanation ("computer hacker who crossed the mob and spends her time digging up dirt on the local crime

*God give me work while I may live,
and life till my work is done.*

— Epitaph of Winifred Holtby

bosses by hunting down their old victims"). Either way, the concept is the framework upon which the rest of the character will be built.

It isn't necessary to incorporate your Archetype or Threshold into your concept at this point, but it is often helpful. Whatever you decide, don't feel shackled by it. Everything about your character doesn't have to tie into his near-death experience. In fact, some of the strongest characters are built from a foundation of contrasts. It is important that even contrasting characters have consistency, however.

In a sense, you need two concepts when building a Geist character. A Sin-Eater exists where the person and the geist become one symbiotic entity. It is vital to the Sin-Eater's motivations to have an idea of where both halves came from.

Step Two: Select Attributes

Once you've worked out your character concept and have given some thought to what it is that makes your character who he is, it is time to build the game-mechanic aspects of the character. The traits you will use to model your character's raw social, mental, and physical aptitudes in game terms are called Attributes. Characters have nine Attributes divided into three categories: Mental (Intelligence, Wits, Resolve), Physical (Strength, Dexterity, Stamina), and Social (Presence, Manipulation, Composure).

Each category of Attributes is first assigned a priority: primary, secondary, or tertiary. For example, a Sin-Eater who used to be a surfing pro until the rip tide almost got him might prioritize his categories Physical, Social, and Mental, respectively, to reflect the amount of athleticism that goes into surfing. Alternately, he might choose Social as his primary if he was actually a better spokesman than a surfer. The "Social" surfer might have been one of those flashy types that got all the attention, but it was really only a matter of time before he overextended himself.

You get five points to divide among the Attributes in the category you chose as primary, four in the secondary, and three for the tertiary. All characters begin with a single dot in each Attribute, representing the basic capabilities that every character possesses.

Purchasing the fifth dot of any Attribute costs two points. Buying an Attribute up to 5 dots costs five points: the first dot is free, three points buy the second, third, and fourth dots, and two points buy the fifth and final dot.

A table that details relative power levels of various dot levels of Attributes can be found on p. 43 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Step Three: Select Skills

Like Attributes, Skills are divided into Mental, Physical, and Social categories, and must be prioritized into primary, secondary, and tertiary. Skills are the abilities your character has picked up along the way, whether through formal education or real-world experience. Most Mental Skills are learned through training or study, while many Physical Skills are relatively easy to learn by doing.

You get 11 points to spend on your primary category, seven to spend on your secondary category, and four to spend on your tertiary category. Just like Attributes, the fifth dot of a Skill costs two points to purchase. Unlike Attributes, however, your character does not begin with a free dot in any Skill. Even Skills that can be picked up as a by-product of a normal life are not innate; they must be learned.

Characters without any dots in a particular Skill can still attempt actions related to that Skill using only the appropriate Attribute as a dice pool. However, these actions are considered “untrained,” and suffer a penalty depending on which category the Skill falls under (-3 dice for Mental, -1 die for Physical or Social).

A table that details relative power levels of various dot levels of Skills can be found on p. 54 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Step Four: Select Skill Specialties

While a Skill represents a fairly broad category of ability, most people are better versed in some areas of a field than others. An academic might have unmatched knowledge of the Crusades, but only passing familiarity with the role of Belgium during World War II, or he might be a world-renowned scholar of abstract artists like Jackson Pollock. In game terms, both characters could have four dots in Academics, with a Specialty in the Crusades or Abstract art, respectively.

You may choose three Skill Specialties for your character. These Specialties may be spread among three different Skills, or you might assign two or even three Specialties to a single Skill. Skill specialties can be specific subcategories of a Skill (for example, a Pistols specialty in the Firearms Skill), a situation in which the Skill applies (such as the Drive Skill with a Street Racing specialty) or any similar specific, restricted category. The Storyteller has the final say as to whether a particular Specialty is too broad or narrow.

Your character’s Skill Specialties give her a bonus die on dice pools whenever the Specialty applies. For more information see p. 54 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Step Five: Add Sin-Eater Template

So far, your character still falls within the normal realm of day-to-day humanity. You have defined traits that reflect your character’s knowledge and talents, the abilities that any ordinary mortal may have. Now it is time to add the effects of your character’s brush with death, the things that make him both more and less than human.

Remember, a character cannot possess multiple supernatural templates, and there are some Merits that are only available to mortal characters. A werewolf, vampire, or mage cannot become a Sin-Eater, and vice versa, nor does the Sin-Eater have access to the Unseen Sense Merit, among others.

Archetype

Sin-Eaters spend a lot of time thinking about death. Even those who celebrate life do so as a reaction to death. Your archetype defines your relationship with and philosophy regarding death. Your Sin-Eater’s archetype may not utterly express her beliefs, but it should express the gist of her outlook. It is also worth noting that two Sin-Eaters with the same archetype may have *very* different approaches.

- **Reaper** – Judges and Executioners, choosing who lives and who dies.
- **Celebrant** – Those who have seen death and embrace life to its fullest.
- **Gatekeeper** – Protectors of the paths between life and death.
- **Mourner** – Devotees/addicts to the passions of the bereaved or of the dead.
- **Bonepicker** – Scavengers that use their otherworldly powers to make this world more comfortable.
- **Advocate** – Dedicated to finishing the unfinished business of the dead.
- **Necromancer** – Seekers of knowledge of the dead and the occult lore of death.
- **Pilgrim** – Those that try to purify themselves and others, so that they might move on.

Threshold

Every Sin-Eater has brushed death and returned indelibly marked by the experience. A character’s Threshold and his geist are inseparable. When an appropriate candidate dies, it attracts a geist attuned to that sort of death.

- **The Torn: Death by Violence** – Victims of murder or suicide. Those who have had great trauma inflicted on them, or inflicted great trauma on others. **Key:** Passion and Stigmata.
- **The Silent: Death by Deprivation** – Those who die for lack of something vital: starvation, suffocation, dehydration, or heartbreak. **Key:** Stillness and Cold Wind.
- **The Prey: Death by Nature** – The victims of exposure or animals; those taken by the wild. **Key:** Primeval and Grave-Dirt.
- **The Stricken: Death by Sickness** – Plague victims, those taken by disease. **Key:** Phantasm and Tear-Stained.
- **The Forgotten: Death by Chance** – Victims of freak accidents, those who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. **Key:** Industrial and Pyre-Flame.

Psyche

A measure of the potency of your character’s bond with his geist, the Psyche trait represents how in touch the two halves of the character are. A Sin-Eater with a high Psyche is



a deathly being, an expression of the afterlife in the mundane world. The living world begins to avert its eyes, but twilight denizens are drawn to her like mourners to a funeral. On the other hand, a low-Psyche Sin-Eater seems almost normal to those around her. As the character's Psyche increases, she becomes capable of ever more impressive supernatural feats.

All Sin-Eaters begin with one free dot in Psyche. This rating may be increased by spending Merit points, at a cost of three points per dot of Psyche. Thus, you can raise your character's Psyche rating to 2 for three Merit points, or to 3 for six Merit points. Psyche is fully described on pp. 79-81.

Manifestations

Sin-Eaters tread the line between the physical, living world, and the ephemeral twilight state of ghosts. Geists are unable to affect the physical world without a conduit, and the Sin-Eater himself acts as that conduit, working with his geist to manifest strange and haunting powers. There are seven major families of Manifestations, though some Sin-Eaters whisper of other, more esoteric powers.

- **The Boneyard** allows the Sin-Eater to assert control over her immediate environment, usually by triggering "haunting" effects.
- **The Caul** permits the Sin-Eater to reshape his own body as needed, often in esoteric and frightening ways.
- **The Curse** enables the Sin-Eater to afflict her enemies with strange curses and ailments, and to subtly influence their minds.
- **The Marionette** allows the Sin-Eater to control physical objects, animals, and even other people, manipulating their bodies like a twisted puppeteer.
- **The Oracle** grants the Sin-Eater heightened sensory powers, clairvoyance, and even precognitive abilities.
- **The Rage** represents the Sin-Eater's power to strike at others with pure, unadulterated power.
- **The Shroud** governs effects that alter or improve the Sin-Eater's own body in some way, most often as a form of protection.

Your Sin-Eater begins with three dots of Manifestations, chosen however you like: one dot in three separate Manifestations, two dots in one, and one dot in another, or all three in one Manifestation. The Manifestations are detailed on pp. 110-150.

Keys

A Sin-Eater's powers are stained, both by the geist and the Sin-Eater himself, flavored by their emotions and deathmarks. When a Sin-Eater opens a conduit and manifests one of his powers, he unlocks that power with a Key. The Key used causes the Manifestation to express itself in a particular way.

Keys are another way to define your Sin-Eater's personality, history, and relationship with death. All of the Silent have either the Stillness or Cold Wind Key, for example, but a Silent hacker who died of heartbreak might also have the Passion or Industrial Key, while a Sin-Eater who starved in the wilderness might have the Cold Wind and Primeval Keys instead. Consider your character's death and the origin of his geist carefully when choosing his Keys. There are ten major Keys: the four Elemental Keys, (Grave-Dirt, Cold Wind, Tear-Stained and Pyre-Flame), Industrial, Passion, Phantasmal, Primeval, Stillness, and Stigmata.

Sin-Eaters begin with two Keys, one of which is one of your Threshold's two favored Keys. For more information on Keys, see pp. 110-114.

Keystone Memento

Every Sin-Eater has a keystone memento that allows him to perform ceremonies and access skills his geist might have known in life, among other things. The character's geist determines the form of the keystone. For example, a geist who appears as a drowned and fish-eaten corpse with tangled kelp hair might have a length of rusted, dripping chain as her keystone. Keystone are described in more detail on p. 193.

Step Six: Choose Merits

Characters receive seven points that can be spent on Merits. Sin-Eater characters may choose from the standard Merits offered on pp. 108-177 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, or from the **Geist Merits** detailed beginning on p. 87.

Merits should be chosen to compliment your character concept: a washed-out boxer is more likely to have Fighting Style: Boxing, than the Eidetic Memory Merit, while an ex-drug lawyer Sin-Eater who spends his time negotiating between various parties in the Underworld is more likely to have a lot of Contacts than he is to have the Holistic Awareness Merit.

Step Seven: Determine Advantages

Rules regarding the standard use of Advantages can be found on pp. 90-105 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. In general, Sin-Eater characters follow the standard rules for determining initial Advantage scores, but there are a few places where they diverge.

Synergy

A Sin-Eater is no longer simply human. In those moments between life and what comes after, your character made a pact with a ghostly being that allowed it to bind with him. Sin-Eaters coexist in

their own body with a geist. Of course, things go much more smoothly if both psyches get along. The higher your character's Synergy rating, the more in tune he is with his geist. The lower it is, the more out of synch the two are, and the more difficult it becomes to deal with the geist.

As an optional rule, Storytellers may allow players to exchange Synergy for experience points during character creation. This represents the acts the character has taken in his life since the binding, but before the game begins (perhaps during the prelude, as the newly returned Sin-Eater came to terms with his psychic roommate), which have already acted to drive a wedge between your character and his "guest." Players may sacrifice one dot of Synergy for five experience points, lowering their Synergy to as low as 5 (for 10 experience points). This exchange does not inherently invite a derangement, although if a player wants his character to begin the game with one as a matter of character development (without any compensating benefit for it), he is welcome to do so.

Plasm

Plasm is the deathly energy that fuels a Sin-Eater's unnatural powers. Plasm allows her to execute Manifestations, acquire (at least temporarily) skills her geist might have known in life, heal herself, and a number of other feats.

All Sin-Eaters begin with a plasm pool equal to half of their maximum plasm pool as determined by Psyche (see p. 80). If the character has purchased the **Haunt Merit**, specifically the **Haunt Residue**, she begins play with an additional point of plasm per dot of **Haunt Residue**. Thus, a character with Psyche 3 and two dots in **Haunt Residue** would begin with eight plasm points.

Unlike many other traits, plasm is rated only as a pool of points that you can spend. There is no dot rating for plasm that your character always possesses.

Step Eight: The Spark of Life

Aside from the basic character concept, character creation up until now has focused on defining your character in terms of her capabilities: what he can do, and what he knows. A roleplaying character is more than dots on a sheet, however. The information listed on your character sheet is just the cold, hard statistics that let your character interact mechanically with the world. Think of it as looking at your character's résumé. The challenge now is to determine the other half of the character — who he is.

Attributes and Skills are a good foundation for getting to know a character. But traits can be interpreted in a number of ways. If, for example, your character has a high Strength, does that mean he is thick and lumbering, capable of swinging a sledge hammer through a cinderblock wall as easily as through a skull, or is he a lank and wiry martial artist, able to punch through concrete blocks after he visualizes hitting the point just beyond them? Is his high Presence due to his devilish good looks and dapper clothes, or is he plain looking, until his face is lit by a devil-may-care grin as he performs insane stunts straddling a racing motorcycle? Each trait can manifest in a variety of ways, depending on how you see your character.

Other aspects of your character have nothing to do with his traits. Is he old or young? Thin or stout? Tall or short? What kind of music does he listen to? Does he read the paper, or prefer to get his news from blogs? Does he spend his leisure time restoring classic cars and volunteering at a homeless shelter, or cruising the club scene for new lovers? Does he have a pet? A dog, or a cat, or something less common, like a hedgehog? Details like these help to make your character more than just a placeholder in the shape of a Sin-Eater, and they give you, your Storyteller, and your fellow players hooks to make the game come to life.

THIS ISN'T MY FIRST CARNIVAL

Storytellers may wish to allow players to create characters with more experience than those described in the rest of this section, representing more powerful characters at the chronicle's start. This option is generally recommended for veteran players; those new to the game are often better suited to learning about the setting along with their characters, and creating experienced characters only once they themselves have a handle on the setting.

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Fresh from the Slab | 0 experience points |
| Established Sin-Eaters | 35 experience points |
| Veteran Krewe | 75 experience points |
| Lords of the Underworld | 120+ experience points |



SIN-EATER TEMPLATE QUICK REFERENCE

This sidebar sums up the process of adding the template to a mortal character to create a Sin-Eater. Use it alongside the mortal character generation rules on p. 34-35 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Archetype

Select an archetype to represent your relationship with your second life.

- Reaper** — You are compelled to choose who lives and who dies.
- Celebrant** — Having beheld death, you embrace life to its fullest.
- Gatekeeper** — You guard the doorways between life and death.
- Mourner** — You feed on the passions of the bereaved or of the dead.
- Bonepicker** — You use your spectral powers to make this world more comfortable.
- Advocate** — You are compelled to assist the dead with unfinished business.
- Necromancer** — You are entranced by the occult lore of death and the other side.
- Pilgrim** — You seek purification for yourself and others to ease all transitions.

Threshold

Choose which form of death almost claimed you, which influences your powers.

- Torn** — Death by Violence
- Silent** — Death by Deprivation
- Prey** — Death by Nature
- Stricken** — Death by Illness
- Forgotten** — Death by Chance

Keys

You begin play with two Keys. Choose one from the options granted by your Threshold, and another of your choice to represent the power of your geist's keystone.

- Torn** — Stigmata or Passion
- Silent** — Stillness or Cold Wind
- Prey** — Primeval or Grave-Dirt
- Stricken** — Phantasm or Tear-Stained
- Forgotten** — Industrial or Pyre-Flame

Manifestations

Choose three dots of Manifestations, the ghostly powers granted by your geist. You may split these dots up between one to three Manifestations of your choice.

- The Boneyard** offers control over one's immediate environment, usually by triggering "haunting" effects.
- The Caul** reshapes one's own body, often in esoteric and frightening ways.
- The Curse** afflicts enemies with strange curses and ailments, or influences their minds.
- The Marionette** controls physical objects, animals, and even other people.
- The Oracle** grants heightened sensory powers, clairvoyance, and even precognitive abilities.
- The Rage** is the ability to strike at others with pure, unadulterated power.
- The Shroud** governs effects that alter or improve one's own body in some way, most often as a form of protection.

Psyche

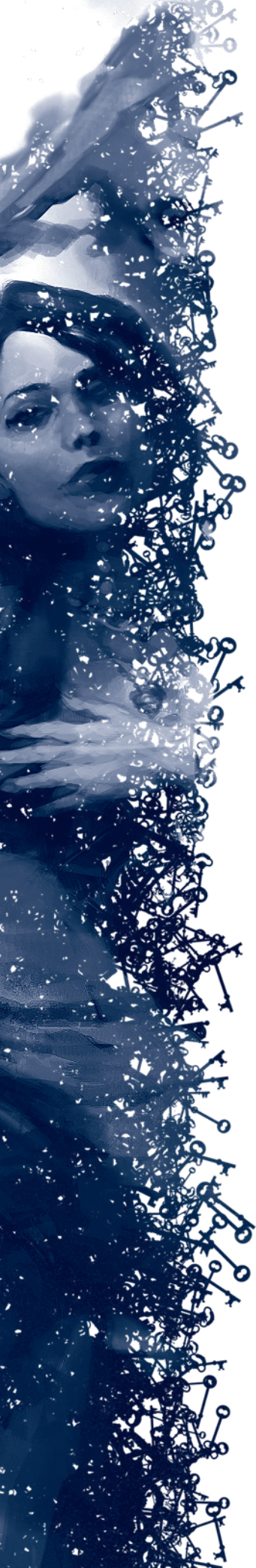
A character's Psyche begins at 1, but Merit points may be spent to increase it.

Merits

New Sin-Eater Merits include Ceremonies (●+), Haunt (special) and Memento (●+).

Experience Point Costs

| Trait | Cost |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Attribute | New Dots x 5 |
| Skill | New Dots x 3 |
| Skill Specialty | 3 |
| New Key | 10 |
| Manifestation | New Dots x 6 |
| Merit | New Dots x 2 |
| Psyche | New Dots x 8 |
| Synergy | New Dots x 3 |
| Willpower | 8 |



The Prelude

The prelude is another way to flesh out your character above and beyond the basic character creation process. While it is optional, it can allow a player to try on a character and make sure he fits. Preludes are normally run as a one-on-one scenario with the Storyteller, and it is a good time to explore not only your character and his persona. It also lets you get a feel for the setting and start building a sense of your character's place in it. Family, friends, and even rivals can be established without stealing the spotlight from other players to focus on you. On the other hand, some preludes are run as a group process: if the characters all share the same near-death experience, it is appropriate to run them through the prelude together.

The prelude may also be used to fine-tune your character's statistics to better reflect how you picture the character "coming to life" once you've had a chance to play him. Often, when a character is actually put into play, you discover a disconnect between the *idea* of the character and the execution. One trait that seemed useful may turn out to be less so, while you may realize another trait is integral to expressing your character's concept. You may also discover that the character you find is not exactly the one you actually wrote up and, what's more, you prefer this "new" character. For example, he may prove to be more insidious, getting what he wants with honeyed words rather than sheer force of personality, prompting the player to move a dot from Presence to Manipulation if the Storyteller approves of the change. At the Storyteller's discretion, a player can swap dots within the same trait groups (so increasing one Physical Attribute while decreasing another Physical Attribute by the same amount), as long as the end product is something that could have been built using the original character creation rules.

Preludes can prove useful for Storytellers as well. They get the chance to impart setting and backstory without forcing players to sit through a lengthy narrative session where the players do nothing but listen. Prelude scenes give the Storyteller a chance to get a handle on each character's supporting cast and his relationship to Storyteller characters as well as the other players' characters. Rival or allied krewes, mentors and even ongoing antagonists can be introduced, and their presence as three-dimensional characters with their own histories, goals, and desires established in a tangible fashion for the players and their characters.

Storytelling the Prelude

As a Storyteller, several decisions must be made before running a Geist prelude. First, you must establish the type of prelude (or preludes) you want to run. You can run preludes one on one, or in a group. Individual preludes for each player are useful because they allow a single character to be introduced without fear of neglecting other players. Each player character in a chronicle is a star in her own

right, complete with a supporting cast and relationships that can be better established when the tight focus is on only that character. Krewe preludes are useful to establish a cohesive group dynamic and experience. Given enough time, some Storytellers choose to combine the two, introducing each character into the flow in one-on-one sessions before bringing other characters onstage as "guest stars" in one another's preludes. This might be a good option if your troupe has scheduling issues, but can be difficult to juggle for beginning Storytellers.

Your prelude scenario can be interactive (with players being allowed to control their characters during the scene) or simply narrative, where you, as Storyteller, describe the scenario and actions of everyone involved in the scene. Narrative preludes are faster and easier to script, but the player operates at a remove from his own character, relegated to the role of observer rather than actor, reducing the emotional impact of the scene.

If the prelude is run as an interactive scene, you've got to decide if you're going to use the Storyteller rules for challenge resolution or engage in freeform collaborative storytelling. Rules tend to slow down a narrative scene and introduce an element of chance to a situation that already has a planned, desired outcome. On the other hand, if the player is unfamiliar with the game system, the prelude can be a good place to introduce the basics of the rules before the game actually begins.

Particular care should be given when allowing dice rolls (rather than raw narrative) to determine the outcome in combat and Synergy loss in prelude scenes. Nobody wants to create a character only to have him die or go insane before the "real" game even begins. To avoid this, it is advised to use narrative to ensure that the outcome of combat scenes is at least non-fatal for players' characters and to steer clear of Degeneration rolls during prelude scenes. In the case of players who take advantage of the optional rule and trade Synergy for experience, working through the scene of *how* they lost that point is another matter entirely.

Elements of a Prelude

Essentially, a prelude exists to introduce the character to the setting and the setting to the player. Any scene that can showcase a character's attitude and personality can serve as part of a prelude, but certain pivotal moments of a character's life — and near-death — can prove extremely helpful to defining the character and his relationship to the setting.

Everyday Life

Nothing has seemed right since you got back. People stare at you as you walk down the street. Even without fatigues they know — war changes you. They don't know how many people you killed. They don't want to know. They don't see the faces of the dead



staring at you from mirrors and windows. They don't hear the whispers.

You've been through six jobs in the last eight months. The support groups aren't helping... The faces won't go away.

What are you doing, and where are you going?

Every Sin-Eater started off as a relatively normal person with hopes and dreams, lives and relationships. Since the character's life was irrevocably changed by his near-death experience and subsequent binding with his geist, it makes sense to establish what his life *was* before it was so altered. This scene might be a pivotal one that leads, directly or indirectly, to the character's brush with death, or it might be a scene that shows the best — or worst — of the character's former circumstances.

These scenes can be played out like any other game session, either one-on-one or in a group. Other players can take on the roles of people from the character's past or, if their characters knew one another, they can even play their own characters. If traits come up during the course of the scene, just ignore any traits added in Step Five and any Sin-Eater-only Merits the character has. Significant actions may be rolled for or narrated to best fit the flow of the story at the Storyteller's discretion.

The Brush With Death

It only gets worse when you drink, so you work instead. You bury your head in back-breaking labor down at the construction yard and pretend the riveters don't sound like the pop! pop! of a rifle. You've been here three months, and maybe this time it'll stick. The foreman was a Marine too, he knows how it can get, and he's all about Semper Fi. You know he's got your back, even when things are really bad.

Besides, you took to the girders like a natural, and he's short on steel monkeys, so he puts up with your episodes.

Today is particularly bad. The whispers keep coming, a murmuring chorus buzzing in your head like a swarm of accusing wasps. Even the pills can't shut them up. The white noise in your head explodes into television static turned up beyond all the way, and you lose your footing. You can dimly hear the shouts and screams as you plummet fifteen stories.

What do you do?

The moment of death is one of the most fundamental experiences of man's existence. Indeed, it is the defining experience for all living things, because life is only meaningful because it can be taken away, because it *ends*. Life exists relative to death just as light exists in relation to darkness.

The character's brush with death and subsequent binding is vastly important to his life, and should certainly be given the attention that entails.

The death scene is heavily reliant on the character's Threshold, but there's quite a bit of room to work within that constraint. Take the Torn, for example: death by violence is a broad category that

can cover murder in the heat of passion, mugging, and even accidental death competing in an ultimate fighting championship. Storytelling is a collaborative experience, and the prelude is no exception. It is important to keep the player's concept for their character and his geist in mind when planning out the prelude, but the Storyteller should not necessarily repeat the player's summary by rote. Introducing elements of the setting that the player did not consider can help to draw the character into the world and get the player invested in the game, rather than just in their own character.

The Return

Silence. Peace. Those were the things you hoped you would have when you died, but there is none. The sky is cacophony, the voices in your head materialized and shattered, pushing down on you. The ground is a churning mass of earth and stone, and the rain that falls is not water, but swiftly falling shafts of steel rebar being driven into the ground. There is no shelter from the impaling tempest.

Standing in the storm, oblivious and unafraid, is a single man, staring at you. He is pierced by the rebar, immobile and yet, he is closer now than he was when you first saw him. The Transfixed Man is closer yet, so close that you can see where the rebar punched through his hard hat. The tiny cracks that erupted out from the edges of the hole. His eyes roll in his head, and when he opens his mouth to speak, you can see steel in the back of his throat. The words that come out are difficult to understand, but you get the gist.

He wants to make a deal.

What do you do?

As important as a character's death is, what happens after is actually the beginning of their existence as a Sin-Eater. The binding of geist and mortal, the creation of the gestalt being that is a Sin-Eater means that the character cheats death. Death does not look upon cheaters lightly, and neither should the return be glossed over or waved away. This scene is the first time that the character experiences the ephemeral world of the dead and the horrific things that dwell there (including his own geist), so it should reflect the wonder and terror of the afterlife and the confusion of existence turned upside down.

The Underworld, particularly as seen through the eyes of the newly dead, does not necessarily follow the rules of physical reality, and you should feel free to experiment with narrative devices and flourishes that help to enforce a sense of disembodiment, a transformative existential fear and confusion.

The geist itself may have once been a ghost, but it has evolved into an expression of desire, an almost primal symbol of an aspect of death. Vivid description is a Storyteller's most powerful tool when establishing the unrelenting grotesqueries of a Torn geist's multitude of weeping, seeping wounds or the almost incomprehensible awe of one of the Prey, devoured

by a conflagration and left nothing but a pillar of flame, its crackling voice hissing and popping like grease in a skillet.

Don't be afraid to mine horror movies and ghost stories for inspiration. Many effective ghost stories touch on basic instinctual fears in ways that work in nearly universal ways, so it is possible to reuse certain elements. But beware of cliché and overwrought, purple language. Unless your chronicle is intended to be comedic, unintentional humor can destroy the mood utterly.

Final Questions

The following questions are provided as a springboard to help you work out as much of your character's details as possible. Feel free to answer some, all or none, but remember that the more fleshed out your character is, the more interesting they are, not only to play, but to play *with*. Answering these questions for your geist may also be helpful, though there's something to be said for giving your Storyteller a broad sketch of your geist and allowing her to fill in the details as it serves the story.

How old are you?

When were you born? How long have you been a Sin-Eater? Do you look young for your age, or have your experiences weathered you before your time?

What do you look like?

What color are your eyes? Your hair? How do you dress? Do you have tattoos or other distinguishing features? Did your near-death experience leave any physical scars?

How sensitive were you?

All Sin-Eaters were somehow sensitive before the merging. Did you know what you saw or heard, or did you try to deny it? Did you try to tell anyone about it? Did they believe you? Were you "treated" for it?

What was your Bargain like?

Where did it happen? Was anyone there that still plays a part in your life? What happened, and how did people treat you when you returned?

How are you different now?

How did your experience affect you? Did it push you to experience life to the fullest or did it make you more careful? Are you convinced that nothing can stop you, or do you second-guess everything, afraid of the inevitable? Do your friends mean more to you now? Or are friends something to hold at arm's length so that you aren't hurt when they pass on? Do you have any friends that are *already* ghosts, and did you know them in their living years?

Example of Character Creation

Kat has been invited to play in Eloy's **Geist** game. Eloy lets her know that the game will focus on a gang war involving both human and ghostly agents. The players' characters will make up a krewe caught in the middle. The game's themes will explore loyalty, paranoia, and danger, as the

WHAT ABOUT MY GEIST?

Your geist is as much a part of your character as the mortal, but this entire section has covered building your human character. To make your character truly three-dimensional, you should spend some time thinking about your geist and her history.

What does your geist look like?

Geists are not merely ghosts. They've transcended to a certain degree, and become more archetypal. A character's geist may look like the Transfixed Man, an industrial crucifixion, or more abstract, like the Pyre Woman, her rage and pain distilled into a pillar of the fire that killed her. Does he have blades for fingers or a zipper slash where his mouth should be?

How old is your geist?

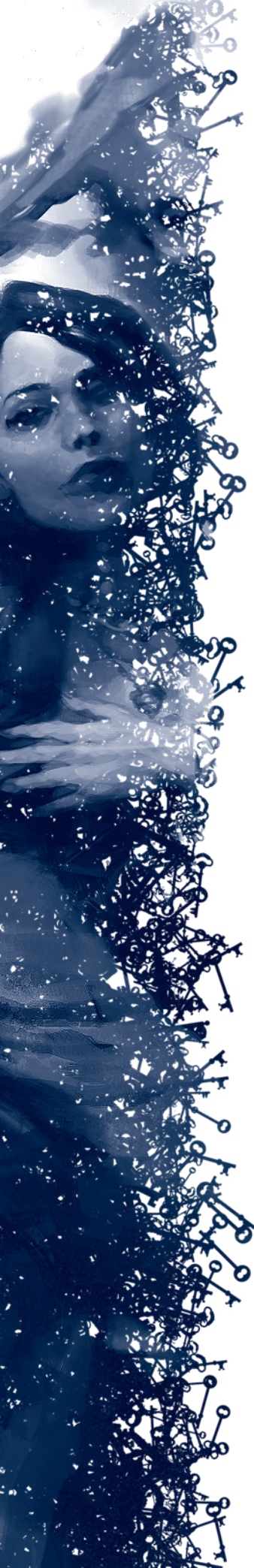
Some geists have been dead for a century or more. It is particularly frustrating for an old geist to be newly bound, because it takes time for the Sin-Eater to find an equilibrium with the geist, to open himself up to the gestalt and become capable of manifesting all of the abilities of which the geist is capable. Or is your geist only a decade dead, learning this as he goes along, like you?

How did your geist die?

Even if your Sin-Eater doesn't know how his geist died, it is good to have an idea of where the geist came from, and while the geist's life history is important, her death is what made her who she is today. If she was murdered, is her killer still alive? Does her killer have any descendants, and has she transferred her rage to them? Does your geist have any living descendants, and what is her attitude toward them?

Is this your geist's first merging?

A geist can live on beyond the death of the mortal she has merged with. If this *isn't* the geist's first merging, what happened to the last Sin-Eater she was bound to? If she was destroyed, is the culprit still active, and does the new Sin-Eater know him?



krewe attempts to negotiate the treacherous turf disputes while maintaining any relationships they have within the warring factions and learning about the true power behind the war, deep within the Underworld.

Kat settles down with a character sheet and a few sheets of scratch paper for notes, and starts to write down some rough ideas for her character. She discusses the setting a bit with Eloy, and bounces character concepts off the other players to get a feel for what would fit best, both into the setting *and* into the nascent krewe that is forming.

Step One: Concept

Knowing that the story will focus on a gang war, Kat wants her character to be able to fit in on the streets. She throws out a few options and gets some back, and eventually decides to make her character a car thief who also street races for extra money and more importantly, the thrill and danger of drift racing on city streets.

Kat looks through some name books and decides on the name Zita Vargas.

Before she was bound with her geist, Zita was a rough and tumble car thief and street racer into drift racing, where the driver intentionally causes the rear wheels to lose traction and slide, riding a razor line between control, speed, and completely letting go. It was one of those drifts gone wrong that sent her to the other side.

After the merger, she still steals cars and races them, but she's also begun to do side work as a messenger; for the right price, she'll deliver messages to loved ones or enemies, uncover lost or buried secrets, even take on a shady fare or two as an unlicensed gypsy cab, if she needs to.

Step Two: Attributes

Now that she's got a pretty tight character idea, it's time for mechanics. First, Kat must prioritize Zita's Attributes. Zita is cunning, a smart girl that fell through the cracks of the system, and her quick thinking keeps her out of trouble, so Kat prioritizes her Mental Attributes as primary. When she *does* get in trouble, Zita's a scrapper, so Physical Attributes are secondary. That leaves Social Attributes as third, which fits Zita's concept. She's a bit rough and tumble, and not particularly good with people.

Kat has five points to distribute among Zita's Mental Attributes. Since Zita is, above all else, adaptable in the blink of an eye, Kat puts three points into Wits, giving her a Wits of four. The other two points are split between Intelligence and Resolve. She makes a note that she'd like to raise those later, as soon as she gets the experience points to do so.

Next, she moves on to Zita's Physical Attributes. Of the four points she has available, Kat puts one point in Strength and Stamina, respectively. Zita isn't built for brute force, but she's nimble, so Kat puts the final two dots in Dexterity, for a score of



three. She's been in plenty of fights in her time, and she's probably won at least as often as she's lost.

Finally, she turns her attention to the Social Attributes, where she has three points to spend. What social status Zita has is entirely due to her force of personality, so Kat puts two points into Presence. Kat decides that Zita's got a bit of a temper, so she leaves Composure below average and places the final Attribute point in Manipulation. Zita can be persuasive if she has to, but she has no patience for fools.

Step Three: Skills

Next, Kat has to choose Zita's Skills. This time, Kat chooses Physical as Primary, giving her 11 points to assign. She chooses Social Skills as the next highest priority, worth seven points there. Zita didn't stay in school long enough to pick up much in the way of Mental Skills, so that leaves them as tertiary with only four points to spend.

Zita's concept revolves around cars and the stealing thereof, so Kat immediately drops three points in Drive and another three points in Larceny. She's picked up a lot of other Skills in her time, so Kat puts a point each in Athletics, Brawl, and Stealth. Then, after some thought toward Firearms, Kat decides against it, and she puts her last two points in Weaponry. Zita keeps a knife in a concealed pocket in the sleeve of her jacket, and she knows how to use it.

Kat moves on to Social Skills, where she has seven points to spend. A car thief has to be able to negotiate with fences and chop shops, even a Sin-Eater, so Kat puts two points each in Persuasion, Streetwise, and Subterfuge. Zita knows her way around the streets, and she can usually talk her way through a deal, whether she's telling the truth or lying through her teeth. The final point goes into Expression. It's not part of the original concept, but Kat decides that when nobody else is around, Zita writes rap lyrics, and she's never had the courage to share them with anyone. It adds another facet to the character, and that pleases Kat.

Finally, Kat has four points to spread among the Mental Skills. She decides to put two points in Crafts, since Zita should know how to work on cars. Kat puts a point in Occult, to reflect Zita's curiosity about the strangeness of her own situation, and the final point goes into Computer. She's learned a little about computers just from jacking cars, but she spends a lot of time online, checking social sites and keeping in touch with the few people she misses from out in California.

Step Four: Specialties

Finished with Skills, Kat decides on Zita's Skill Specialties, the specific areas in which she excels. To make sure Zita can actually steal cars, Kat puts a Specialty in Crafts as Hot-Wiring. For her second, Kat chooses a Specialty of Drift Racing for Drive, and for her third and final, she decides to put another Specialty in Larceny for Lock-Picking.

Step Five: Sin-Eater Traits

Zita Vargas the human is pretty fleshed out now, but it's time to transform her into a Sin-Eater. Kat reads over the Archetypes and decides, after considering the Bonepickers, that Zita is more interested in the thrill of simply being alive, so she chooses Celebrant instead. Zita's near-death experience falls pretty well under the Forgotten, so that's an easy choice. She chooses her Keys next. As Forgotten, she has the choice of Industrial or Pyre-Flame — Kat quickly decides that the Industrial Key reflects Zita's technical aptitude nicely. For the Key gained from her keystone, she chooses Stigmata, liking the motif of blood and asphalt. Next, Kat looks over the available Manifestations. For now, she puts all three of her Manifestation points into the Marionette.

Kat decides that Zita's keystone memento is a lucky rabbit's foot keychain, its fur matted with old, dried blood.

Step Six: Merits

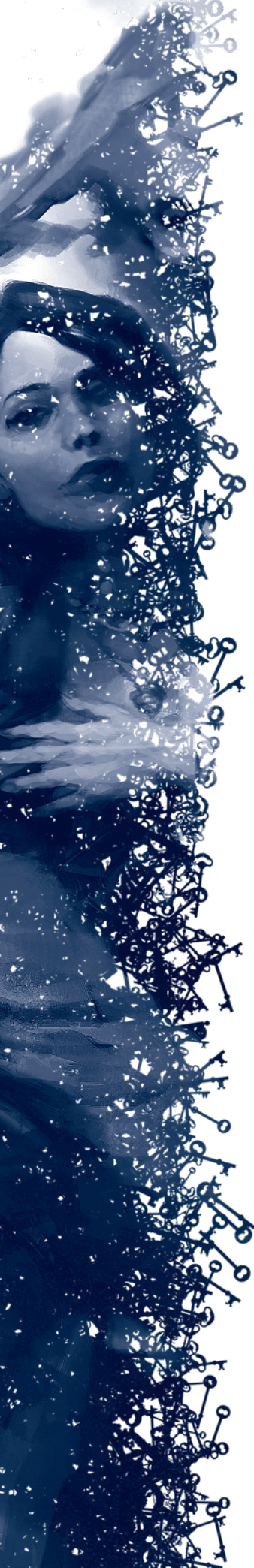
Kat has seven points to spend on Merits, either Sin-Eater specific ones or the normal human ones from the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. She decides to spend three points on the Stunt Driver Merit to reflect her skill driving, and she puts a point into Resources. Zita's still not doing great, but she's got *some* income, even if it isn't exactly legitimate. Kat also takes a point of Contacts (Underground) to represent Zita's friends in the chop shops and fences around town. Finally, she decides to take two dots worth of memento, which could give her a vanitas or two Charms. Kat discusses it with Eloy, and works out two Charms. The first is a rosary Zita found wrapped around a wrought-iron fence spike at the local graveyard, its wood blackened and the *Christos* rusted, that gives her a one-die bonus on Stigmata Key-related rolls. The other is a ring of broken keys for forgotten or demolished cars, taken from a jar in a junkyard that provides her with a one-die bonus on rolls related to the Industrial Key.

Step Seven: Advantages

Now that all of Kat's character's traits are established and her Merit points are spent, it's time for her to calculate her Advantages. Some of these are derived from other traits. Kat adds Zita's Resolve of 2 and her Composure of 1 together to come up with a Willpower of 3. Zita's Synergy score begins at the standard 7. Kat looks over the list of Virtues and Vices and decides that Zita may have a short temper and fall to Wrath, she also nurtures Hope for the future.

Zita's Health is 7, determined by adding her Stamina of 2 and her Size rating (5 for a human adult) together. Her Dexterity of 3 and her Composure of 1 give her a 4 Initiative. Her Wits and her Dexterity are equal at 3, so it's a toss-up for Defense, which is the lower of the two. Finally, Zita's Strength of 2 and Dexterity of 3 are added to her Species Factor (5 for a human adult) to give her a Speed of 10.





Kat also records Zita's starting Psyche (1), plasm (5), and Willpower points (3, the same as her Willpower dots).

Step Eight: Spark of Life

Kat already has a pretty good idea of who her character is and what she can do. There are just a few more things to flesh out before she's happy. Kat starts out looking at the list of questions on p. 67 for some ideas on how to round out Zita's character.

She decides that Zita is only in her early twenties; plenty of time to clean up and go straight or burn out in a blaze of glory. She grew up as a foster kid after her grandmother died, shuffled from one home to another across California, dumped whenever she fought too much or got caught stealing again. She wasn't stupid, but few of her teachers reached her. She saw things just like her *abuela* had, down in Mexico, but nobody believed her. So she stopped telling people, afraid of being put away for being crazy.

When she got old enough, she tried for a new start, moving across country to New York City. She got into trouble pretty quick, stealing cars and racing them, betting to make money to pay for a tiny apartment. Eventually she ended up on the wrong side of a bet, and found herself not-so-gainfully employed by a chop shop. They paid her to steal cars and drop them, turning them into spare parts and cash. It wasn't the worst thing that could have happened, until a boost went bad and the cops were chasing her down the Jersey Turnpike until she rolled the car into oncoming traffic.

She should have died, but she became a Sin-Eater instead.

Kat decides that Zita's geist is the Passenger, who appears in the back seat just outside Zita's peripheral vision. She's never seen him clearly, but she can smell him when he's there, a mix of sickly sweet rotted blood and charred flesh. His silhouette appears in the rearview mirror, and he speaks to her through the static hiss of a dead AM radio station. No matter what she does, all of her cars gather a black stain in the back floorboard. She's not sure of his history, but she figures that is enough to start.

Kat gives her character sheet to Eloy for approval, and discusses how she'll fit into the game. He's happy with the character, and Zita Vargas is ready to join the game.

Archetypes

Nobody comes back from beyond the veil of death unchanged. While a geist helps to bring a Sin-Eater back, the real change is in how he reacts to spending

time dead. One Christian krewa revolves around the idea that the only way to be born again in Christ is to die first. Most aren't that direct, but everyone notices some change. The direction that change takes is illustrated by a character's Archetype.

Each Sin-Eater has an Archetype. In much the same way as a Virtue or a Vice, her Archetype isn't meant to exclude behavior. Every Sin-Eater experiences moments where she throws herself anew into life, but only characters that focus on that aspect should take the Celebrant archetype.

Archetypes are named such for a reason. They tap into a layer of myth and folklore surrounding death and those who walk close to it. A character can tap into that archetypal role to draw power from the Underworld, refreshing her plasm. She has to remain connected to her human side when channeling plasm, reaffirming her status as a bridge between the living and the dead. In game terms, that means the character has to channel her Archetype through her Virtue or Vice.

When the Storyteller judges that a character's actions during a scene reinforce his Vice, and are particularly appropriate for his Archetype, the character regains one point of spent plasm in addition to the point of Willpower. If the Storyteller judges that his actions during a chapter reflect both his Virtue and his Archetype, he regains *all* spent points of both plasm and Willpower. These plasm rewards modify the normal rewards for Virtue and Vice when a character's acting true to his Archetype; he can't regain Willpower from his Vice once during a scene then regain Willpower and plasm later during the same scene.

Example: Leila used to be a DJ with the defining Virtue of Charity (her desire to make other people happy through music) and the Vice of Gluttony (her addictive personality). Since returning with a geist bonded to her, she's started acting more and more as the Gatekeeper. Sometimes, the best way to keep the living and the dead separate is to settle whatever's keeping a ghost in the real world. It's not the quickest or the easiest way, but it's the right thing to do. When she takes the Charitable route to keeping the living and the dead separate, she's acting in accordance with both her Virtue and Archetype, and regains all of her Willpower and all of her plasm. On the other hand, if she indulges in the little thrills of power that come from being a guardian — going for a quick scare or a rough exorcism just to make a point and make herself feel good, she regains one point of Willpower and one of plasm.

Normally, plasm flows through an Archetype into a Sin-Eater, for her to use as she wills. Rarely, she can act as a conduit for plasm rather than a receptacle. By involving her geist in her Archetype directly, the plasm pours into her geist. When she uses a Manifestation in an appropriate fashion for her

Archetype, that Manifestation costs no plasm to activate, though secondary effects (such as the Attribute-boosts of the Beast Shroud) still cost plasm as normal. She can do this once per *story* and the Storyteller must agree that her actions follow her Archetype – though he should always err on the side of the player.

Example: A recalcitrant ghost has worn down Leila's patience, and it won't stop haunting a young boy. Rather than trying to appease it, she takes the fight to it. She activates the fifth dot of her Stigmata Shroud (p. 149). As she's crossing over to keep a ghost from interfering with the living, she figures that the Manifestation is in line with her Archetype. Her Storyteller agrees, and she doesn't pay the 3 plasm the power normally requires.

No Sin-Eater is meant to act as a conduit for plasm. It takes its toll, fuzzing her thoughts and slowing her reflexes. Her next failed roll during the scene is treated as a *dramatic failure*, no matter how many dice were rolled.

Advocate

A woman's imprisoned by that necklace. Hand it over or face the consequences.

Nobody comes back from the dead without owing something. A Sin-Eater's got that feeling in spades. She's the ambassador for the underworld among the living. She can't dodge that responsibility – she can see the dead, she can speak with the dead, and she *owes* the dead. After all, she's still alive. Those ghosts she meets in the living world are trapped by their own desires; the woman looking for her stolen locket is just as important as the cop who needs to avenge his murder.

Not every Advocate believes that she has an obligation to the dead. Many help resolve the unfinished business of ghosts because they want to. After all, if he does right by the dead then a Sin-Eater can earn the respect of other shades, and makes his life easier in lots of little ways. If a ghost has heard of him, he stands a better chance of getting her to help him, and when it comes to helping her pass on, he'll not have to work quite so hard to learn her secrets. Not everyone believes in paying it forwards, and some shades will search out an Advocate with an eye to forcing him to help them move on. While this is normally just inconvenient – waking him when the Sin-Eater is trying to sleep, or disturbing him in a stakeout – sometimes, selfish ghosts can be deadly. One Sin-Eater was distracted by a ghost who needed to tell her son that she didn't really love him, but she picked exactly the wrong moment: right as a couple of muggers jumped him. Thanks to the ghost's intervention, he nearly died.

Of all the members of a krew, it's the Advocates who have the best relations with the dead simply because they focus on the needs and wants of each ghost they meet. Whether she's driven to serve the dead or just because she can relate to shades better than those who are still alive, she's likely to know what to say to every ghost with which she deals – indeed, she knows when to talk and when to take a more direct approach. That comes with a price:

sometimes, an Advocate will miss social cues that most people, including most Sin-Eaters, would pick up on. At its extreme, an Advocate begins to see everything in terms of their relationships and anchors. People are nothing more than a collection of the relationships and emotional triggers, objects worth no more than what they mean to their owners. A car is just a lump of metal until someone drives it and loves it – or gets drunk and kills in it. A gun isn't anything until it's fired to kill someone, or to save someone. Advocates need to remember that objects exist (and can be very useful) even when someone doesn't care for them.

A few Advocates go one step further, believing that the dead matter more than the living. For all that he's bonded with a *geist*, a Sin-Eater is mostly human, but as he does the work of the dead he's little more than their tool in the living world. He has wants and needs, and if he ignores them to do the work of the dead, he's not really living. Every Advocate needs to remember that he's still alive, that he can go out and feel the wind in his hair and the sun on his face; a chance he wouldn't have had without the *geist* bringing him back. That new lease on life can't be totally spent on the work of the dead.

Most Advocates blend the work of the dead and the joys of life. A ghost who wants to dance one last time will find an Advocate a willing partner. Hell, she'll find that ghost a person to possess and steal or fake invitations to the best of black-tie events just to dance. On the other hand, a Sin-Eater who wants to sever a Necromancer's link to the Underworld will feel better if she can find a ghost who benefits from doing what she was going to. Though it takes more work, an extra reason for doing what her krew would have her do anyway makes her feel better. The combination of personal vocation and the chance to discharge an obligation to the dead is a powerful drive.

Virtue Channel: A Faithful Advocate helps to resolve a ghost's issues secure in the knowledge that the shade will go on to a better place. A Fortitudinous Advocate does whatever he can to help the dead, even if it pushes him to his limits. A Just Advocate only assists those shades who he deems worthy of help, using his position as a Sin-Eater to reward and punish. A Prudent Advocate helps the dead without regard for reward, and ever mindful of the risks he takes.

Vice Channel: An Envious Advocate will destroy a rival's relationships and prized possessions to help a ghost. A Greedy Advocate barter help in exchange for a ghost helping him gain material wealth. A Proud Advocate will force a ghost to do everything he wants in exchange for helping it pass on. A Wrathful Advocate will lash out at a ghost's anchors, destroying them even if that won't help the ghost.

Archetypal Manifestation: A Sin-Eater unleashes the Pyre-Flame Rage, burning a dead cop's assassin until he's no more than a pile of ash and a whole lot of smoke. Desperate to retrieve a necklace from a woman so that it can be buried with a ghost's body, a Sin-Eater calls on the Silent Caul to steal it from its current owner without ever being noticed.





Bonepicker

Pleasures of the flesh are wasted on the living.

Some Sin-Eaters live every day as if it's their last. They're fools. The whole point of dying and *coming back* is to get another chance at life, another set of years to live. Unlike people who believe in reincarnation, Bonepickers carry on where they left off, out to make their new lives as comfortable as possible. After all, shouldn't people reward the untouchable man or wise woman who solves their problems with the dead? And what of those old ghosts who left hidden treasure? To a Bonepicker, they're birthday and Christmas on the same day.

Being comfortable doesn't mean being lazy. A Bonepicker might believe that a man is entitled to the sweat of his brow, so a Sin-Eater is entitled to the sweat of his geist. In that case, it makes a lot of sense for him to put a lot of effort into dealing with both the dead and the living, because that's what gives him the right to his rewards. Sure, everyone wants a Ferrari, but who deserves it more? Some rich investment banker who's never had to really work a day in his life, or the Sin-Eater who freed that banker's daughter from ghostly possession, and who took the "haunted" supercar as his only reward? A few Bonepickers don't see anything unethical in that even if they're the ones who encouraged a ghost to hang around the Ferrari — and encouraged a specter to spend a day in a young girl's body.

A Bonepicker doesn't necessarily focus on getting a reward for his work, though that's a very common way to look at things. She just wants a comfortable life: a place to live that suits her lifestyle, stylish transport, easy access to good food and stylish clothes. In the end, she just wants what she's always thought she deserved. Sure, getting there isn't the end of wanting things — that'd be a foolish goal and there's got to be something for her to aim for — but she shouldn't spend her new lease on life striving for mediocrity. She's been *dead*, and the very fact that she's not any more means the universe must like her. Whether she begs, borrows, or steals what she wants, she's *getting* her comfortable life, and soon.

Among Sin-Eaters, it's the Bonepickers who come prepared with whatever mundane items a krewes requires. While she might not be able to get a specific 16th Century Russian icon, she can provide a safe place to crash, and whatever tools and equipment her comrades need — as long as she gets paid in kind. Every Bonepicker has her limit, simply because if she gets into debt she's not comfortable, and if she does that on someone else's behalf she's not seen any real reward. Some selfless Bonepickers don't particularly mind, while a few — often those who have read one too many Ayn Rand books — keep an internal record of who owes them what. A Sin-Eater who does that has made a terrible mistake: he's mistaken

the trappings of life for life itself. A sports car is no use if nobody ever drives it or looks at it or loves it. Collecting houses, cars, or just plain money for the simple sake of having them makes the Sin-Eater a slave to avarice. He never gives himself a chance to actually live because he's spending so much time making sure that he has everything he thinks makes a life. Others get what they want and never strive again. Why help a dangerous poltergeist move on? He's got a life to live, sensations to experience, and all the rewards of a life well lived to return to.

Each Bonepicker has her own beliefs about how she should go about gathering her material resources. Some put their Manifestations to good use: if everyone who sleeps in the Trudeau house goes mad, then soon enough it'll be on the market for a nice low price. Others are less subtle, calling upon the Caul and the Shroud to carjack or steal from people. Others don't believe it's fair to involve their geist in stealing from people when they're quite capable of doing it themselves; indeed, the challenge comes from getting away with a theft without using any of her new talents. Some arrange confidence tricks beforehand — while many exorcists are elaborate conmen, only Sin-Eaters can use ghosts as accomplices. And still others don't believe in stealing what they need; as long as her krewes pays her back and she's got time to herself when she can work a few side jobs, she has no need to steal. With the help of some low-level Manifestations, she can get to wherever she wants to be without really cheating — and collect everything she's owed.

Virtue Channel: A Charitable Bonepicker wants to have all the resources she can at her fingertips in order to use them to help other people. A Hopeful Bonepicker wants a comfortable life not just for herself but to improve the lot of those around her. A Just Bonepicker takes from those who have wronged society. A Temperate Bonepicker takes things that he needs (food, shelter, and transport) rather than just things he wants.

Vice Channel: An Envious Bonepicker doesn't care what she takes as long as her theft harms one of her rivals. A Prideful Bonepicker steals the shirt he's wanted all month when he has an opportunity, simply because he can. A Slothful Bonepicker cares about the things he has to the exclusion of going out and living life. A Wrathful Bonepicker steals a guy's wallet in order to provoke a fight.

Archetypal Manifestation: A Sin-Eater manifests the Industrial Boneyard to control a car, proving to its owner that the car's haunted and only the Sin-Eater can rid it of the ghost. Creeping through the HR department, a Bonepicker manifests the Silent Caul to become a living shadow, able to access her company's personnel records to give herself that raise she's wanted for a long time.



joel BISKE

Celebrant

I know what happens next, and I'll be damned if I just wait for it to happen.

Knowing with absolute certainty that you're going to die is a powerful motivation to go out and live. Celebrants don't just know that, they embrace it. Life's there to be enjoyed, and it'd be irresponsible to waste this new opportunity. Whether a Sin-Eater enjoys life through sex, drugs, or base jumping, one thing's for certain: his life's never boring. Time alive is a finite resource, so it's up to a Celebrant to spend it as best he can. And if he can make other people's lives more interesting, that's just great.

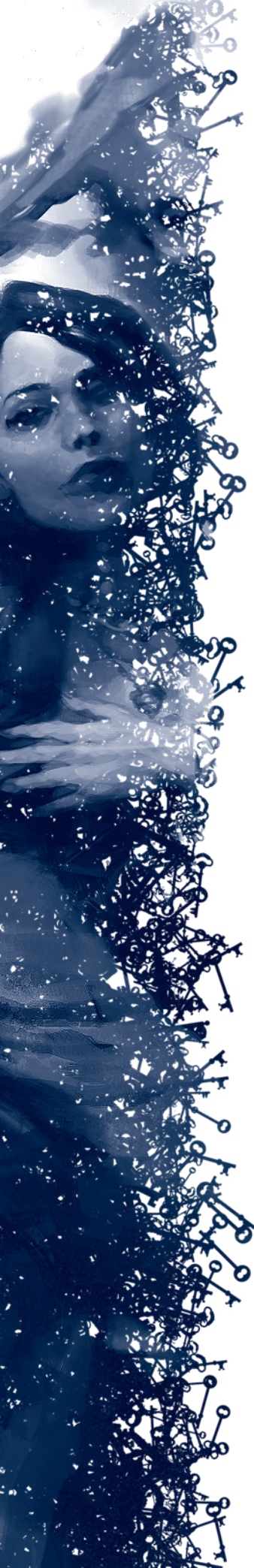
For Celebrant Sin-Eaters, living's the thing. Every day that doesn't remind them that they're alive is a day wasted. Activity and action is their bread and butter, whatever the source. One may get his jollies from flipping off three Kerberoi at the end of a thrilling chase through the Underworld, while another has a different man on her arm every night. One thing's for sure: working nine-to-five in a gray office is as good as being dead already. While few Sin-Eaters can hold down a regular job, almost none of those who do are Celebrants.

Some Celebrants think that life is wasted on the living. Most people hit only a few high notes in their entire lives, spending the rest of their time wasting away in endless repetition. To that end, they think it's only right to spread the joy. Showing someone that they're going to die is a great way to affirm that person's life — after all, it worked for the Sin-Eater, right? A few even stick around to see how their visitation plays out, trying to guide the luckless victim

towards living his life while he still can. Thing is, nobody's got a good way to predict how a particular person will react to visions of his own death. Even with a Celebrant's coaching, few understand their ordeal well enough to share in the Sin-Eater's *joie de vivre*.

The knowledge that he's got a second chance at life is powerful enough to drive a Celebrant to push herself — and her geist — to the very limits of her capability. Throwing herself head-first into risky and dangerous situations soon gets her a reputation as a daredevil. The best Celebrants always manage to pull through, whether that's escaping another death by the skin of her teeth, or pulling off dangerous escapes with only luck on her side. Thrill-seeking has its darker side: most people only hear of the successful. Without some planning and forethought, a million-to-one chance won't pay off. Many Celebrants therefore put a hell of a lot of effort into preparation, making them less likely to throw themselves into a random scheme on a whim. They're valued assets to their krewes, simply because they've always got a plan — after all, you only get one shot at base jumping without a parachute. For all her planning, a Celebrant is still after a reminder that she's alive, and the purest way to get at that is the thrill of adrenaline. She's not going to back down from a challenge just because it's dangerous. Hell, most of the time she's going to up the ante. Running from the cops is just more *fun* if they're shooting at the getaway car, and conning some sap into buying the Hollywood sign for thirty million bucks is a damn sight more exciting than hustling pool or playing "find the lady." And hell, even if the scheme doesn't come off, the Sin-Eater still feels alive.





Adrenaline isn't the only proof of life. Some Celebrants indulge themselves in pleasures of the flesh — after all, they won't have a chance to when death finally claims them. A few try to convince other people to take pleasure when and where they can, while others indulge only their own sybaritic lifestyles. These Celebrants live their life for binge drinking, drug overdoses, and wild orgies. After all, what better way to affirm life than to have a good time? As long as everyone involved consents, nothing's particularly wrong with it — though everything comes with a cost. A Celebrant who doesn't think ahead may end up owing money to a lot of people. Even if not, people who want to emulate her may ruin their lives in the process, losing jobs and savings in the pursuit of ecstasy. And then there's the Celebrants who think that their pleasure comes before everything, even consent.

Virtue Channel: A Fortitudinous Celebrant tests the very limits of her stamina and endurance just to know that she's alive. A Just Celebrant takes great personal risks in the course of doing what he knows is right. A Prudent Celebrant focuses on planning schemes rather than diving in headlong. A Temperate Celebrant recognizes that focusing too much on enjoying one facet of life is unbalanced, and applies himself to a range of situations.

Vice Channel: A Greedy Celebrant doesn't care who gets hurt as long as his next indulgence is bigger and better than the last. A Proud Celebrant focuses on making himself the center of attention — the best way to know you're alive is for the whole world to remind you. A Slothful Celebrant focuses on short-term thrills rather than working towards a greater celebration of life. A Wrathful Celebrant never feels more alive than when he's beating someone else to death.

Archetypal Manifestation: A Sin-Eater sets up a Passion Boneyard that makes those within feel a reckless *joie de vivre* in the middle of a dull office building. Chased through the Underworld by a pair of Kerberoi, a Sin-Eater calls upon the Silent Caul to become two-dimensional, avoiding their sharp senses.

Gatekeeper

You've no right to be here. That's why I got involved.

Sin-Eaters come back from the very brink of death — often having been dead for minutes before a geist helps them back to their own bodies. That gives some a deeper insight into the life, death, and the distinct difference between the two states. Having been in both states, some take on the role of Gatekeeper, policing the boundary between the living and the dead. After all, everyone alive has a right to live their own lives. Young ghosts may try to live vicariously through the living, while others torment the living

world just because they're no longer part of it. Older ghosts have stranger motivations, having lost so much of their sense of self that few can understand *why* they try to kill anyone who spends a night in the Barker House. When the dead interfere with the living, a Gatekeeper has to make a stand.

Likewise, when living people interfere with the dead, Gatekeepers feel drawn to intervene. Some believe that Necromancers just encourage the dead, while others think any breach of the veil of death is an inherently bad thing. Exorcists, whether a church-sponsored conspiracy of ghost-hunters or just a loose group of people who know a couple of rites, tend to draw a Gatekeeper's interest. Some support humans who enforce the barrier, while others believe that only Sin-Eaters should deal with unruly ghosts. After all, even the most learned exorcists can cause far more trouble than they try to solve. Mediums and Necromancers don't cause the same division among Sin-Eaters: they provide a way for the dead to communicate with the living, or for the living to control the dead. They flaunt the barrier, and that's something that Gatekeepers can't stand.

Some Gatekeepers go one step further than just enforcing the barrier. A few believe that since melding with a geist, they're actually in a state of limbo between the living and the dead, not truly part of either world. With one foot among the living and one in the Underworld, they're the only ones capable of dealing with both mediums and poltergeists. Most don't go that far in their estimation, instead embodying the Gatekeeper because their geist has given them a new lease on life. Now able to see the dead and how much they try to influence the living world, these Sin-Eaters would rather strengthen the barrier between life and death to save both worlds from outside influence.

At her best, a Gatekeeper is an exorcist, showing up one day to deal with a ghost or poltergeist, then moving on to confront a medium who's been helping the dead possess people. Some Gatekeepers don't want ghosts to think that they're entirely on the side of the living, and will help resolve whatever fetters a ghost to the world. Others couldn't care less about the motivations of ghosts or Necromancers. Anyone trafficking in the dead is little better than a slaver, and a ghost who won't move on needs smoking out — often with as much fire as the Sin-Eater can find. The easy way isn't ideal; a dead medium will likely come back to haunt the Gatekeeper, while a ghost moved on with unresolved issues may plot her revenge in the Underworld. On the other hand, deep research and communion with one being at a time is far too slow to possibly make a difference.

At least as important as a Gatekeeper's means are her priorities. A fanatical Sin-Eater may punish all ghosts equally, driving them to the Underworld just for inhabiting the same room as a child who can see

the dead—and when he’s done with the ghost, he’ll turn his attention on the child, unleashing terrors to remind her never to deal with the dead. A canner Gatekeeper focuses on those ghosts who torment humans, researching her targets and enforcing the separation between living and dead where that barrier’s needed most. A child who sees the dead is less of a threat than the dime-store Necromancer who binds ghosts to his will. Likewise, the Bloody Widow who castrates every man to sleep in her bedroom deserves her attention more than the victim of a drive-by shooting who just wants to see his family for one last time. While the Gatekeeper wouldn’t see helping the father’s ghost as a priority — that’d be breaking the barrier — she probably wouldn’t get in the way until he turned nasty.

Virtue Channel: A Faithful Gatekeeper enforces the barrier between life and death so that ghosts can go on to their final reward. A Fortitudinous Gatekeeper exorcises ghosts even when they try to convince him to let them remain. A Just Gatekeeper knows that it’s only right that the dead and the living remain apart, and enforces that at all costs. A Prudent Gatekeeper knows that she can’t stop every ghost and medium, so picks her targets wisely to do the most good.

Vice Channel: An Envious Gatekeeper terrorizes mediums because they can see their dead loved ones, while his are nowhere to be found. A Gluttonous Gatekeeper banishes those ghosts who would have him help them, in order to indulge his passions. A Lustful Gatekeeper gets off on the power and authority of enforcing the barrier, even when it’s a bad idea to do so. A Slothful Gatekeeper doesn’t care about the reasons behind a haunting or a medium, and solves every problem the easy way — often with violence.

Archetypal Manifestation: A Sin-Eater calls on the Tear-Stained Rage to clog a medium’s lungs with water before he can command a bound ghost to terrorize a school. Protecting a child from his vengeful father’s spirit, the Gatekeeper calls on the Stigmata Boneyard to bar the ghost from the house.

Mourner

You can’t build on a place without knowing what was there before.

Death is just the beginning. That’s the key, that’s the one thing that most people don’t realize. If it were the end, then why have the Underworld? Some Sin-Eaters might think that ghosts are merely the memories and echoes of people who lived, but they couldn’t be more wrong. Life after death is just a different kind of life, a new way of encountering the world, where the fetters of emotion and importance become explicit rather than implicit. Consciousness remains, albeit altered by the lack of a physical form. But all death is really a change, not an ending. Sin-Eaters who recognize this first and foremost are known as Mourners. To one of these brave souls, her time among the living was forfeit when she died that first time.

A Mourner doesn’t owe the dead anything. She doesn’t have that particular kind of survivor’s guilt that calls her

to help the dead simply because she’s no longer one of them. Rather, she feels more comfortable around people who have already undergone the change, relating to ghosts more intimately than she has ever related to humans. She also likely feels kinship for those who have lost someone, though she can’t be said to share their loss. A widow has seen her husband die, while a Mourner has seen her old self die — not in some melancholy “death of the young” sense; she witnessed her own death, and quite possibly can’t get over that.

Some Mourners, often those who were prepared to die, believe that they are in fact dead. Despite her geist bringing her back from the brink, one of these Sin-Eaters honestly believes that she’s a dead shell, little more than a corpse animated by her own ghost. She holds on to a delusion that costs her dearly, for the rest of her krewe likely don’t believe her and other Sin-Eaters — especially Celebrants and Bonepickers — might try to forcibly re-educate her in the joys of a second lease at life. Dead or alive, she’s still present and thinking in the living world, a vital force. She can’t allow her self-image to get in the way.

Other Mourners have a different take on the interplay between life and death. The moment of death is the dragon before nirvana, the point of transition that instills ultimate fear. A Sin-Eater doesn’t flinch when crossing the barrier, but she’s got enough strength of will that a geist takes her back across the barrier. The only problem is, part of a Mourner never wanted to leave the Underworld. Being dead was so much simpler than being alive; everything made so much more sense. Coming back to the world of the living was a step backwards. To that end, she surrounds herself with the trappings of death to remind herself of what was snatched away from her.

A few Mourners go too far. After all, if existence as a ghost is such a wonderful change, then surely it makes sense that other people will thank the Sin-Eater for helping them past the barrier. As a Sin-Eater, she’s perfectly suited to help people past the veil of death. A few kill only those who have already had a full life and who actually want to die; helping with assisted suicide and making the dying comfortable. Others actively kill the people they love, giving them the blessing of death. A Mourner who does take this path has to be careful—being a Sin-Eater means nothing to mundane authorities, and even other Sin-Eaters will take umbrage at one of their own presuming to know when a person is fated to die. After all, death may be a transition, but that doesn’t make it a good thing.

Many still believe that killing is wrong. The role of a Mourner is to embrace death in life, to show how the end of life isn’t the end of existence. A Sin-Eater can do that without resorting to a knife and a gun. Often, simply living as an example for the rest of the world is enough. She can show through her life that death, while something to mourn, isn’t the end.

Virtue Channel: A Fortitudinous Mourner focuses on the value of death even when the world shows the ugly side of death — one of her friends is messily killed right in front of her. A Hopeful Mourner helps those around him





come to terms with the duality of death and life, accepting whatever happens. A Prudent Mourner must resist the temptation to treat death as the end of life — that only comes when a ghost resolves its anchors and moves on. A Temperate Mourner uses the passions of the bereaved as a useful counterpoint to the highs and lows of the living world.

Vice Channel: An Envious Mourner would rather take the benefits of the dead for herself than face her living rivals. A Gluttonous Mourner indulges herself in the passions of the dead rather than facing the world of the living. A Lustful Mourner indulges her passion for the dead at the expense of other ghosts. A Slothful Mourner gains emotional contact through going to support groups for the bereaved rather than focusing on the living people around her.

Archetypal Manifestation: A Mourner dons the Phantasmal Caul to remind a mugger of his own mortality by warping his flesh into a nightmarish form. Faced with a man who fears death because he has too much to live for, a Sin-Eater unleashes the Cold Wind Curse to remind his target that the world can be a soul-crushing place.

Necromancer

This Kerberos isn't just an enforcer, it's a petty tyrant. But I think I can get us on its good side.

A ghost is more than the echo of a person who was once alive. Not only do the dead carry on existing, some of them learn. A number of ghosts go on to discover terrible secrets buried in the Lower Mysteries and strange revelations about the state of life after death. Some Necromancers discovered just a taste of that occult lore when they died, and returning with a geist just makes them hungry for more. Others realize that they barely know anything about what happens after death, and hunger for details and secrets that can help them prepare their loved ones for their eventual death. A Necromancer's family may think him morbid, but he's not really thinking about death, he's concentrating on what comes after.

Other Necromancers seek out the knowledge of the dead. After all, while a man takes what he knows to his grave, death's not the end for a Sin-Eater. A Necromancer investigating a murder will likely do his best to track down the victim to learn what happened — and one hunting down some esoteric knowledge thinks nothing of tracking a ghost to the Autochthonous Depths if it knew something in life that the Sin-Eater would find helpful. Everything that man has ever known exists in the thoughts and memory of a ghost somewhere. The real problem to some Necromancers is that when a ghost moves on, everything he ever knew is lost to the world. A few go so far as to kidnap knowledgeable ghosts — with or without their krewe's knowledge — simply to make sure that they don't lose

access to storehouses of information. Of course, some ghosts simply degenerate after spending so long dead, especially those without anchors remaining in the material world. That's just as bad as moving on; an animalistic ghost can't communicate what it knows even if it can be said to know anything.

Among a krewe, Necromancers are the ones who either have an answer or who know where to find one. Information and intelligence is what matters. Often, a Necromancer's the one who knows (or discovers) the Old Laws of whichever Lower Mystery her krewe find themselves in, and it's up to her to find out about the Dominion's Kerberos. A few go so far as to collect the lore of Sin-Eaters as well as ghosts, building up Books of the Dead that document specific locations in the Underworld. A canny Necromancer might even know a way to get one over a specific Kerberos, though such secrets aren't exactly easy to uncover.

It's easy for a Necromancer to go too far. Some throw themselves into the lore of the dead. A Necromancer might find herself questioning ghosts about local events even when she'd be better served — and receive an account with less bias — if she just spent a couple of hours in the local library. Others leave themselves open to manipulation by all manner of shades in exchange for secrets and knowledge. It's easy for a Necromancer to push against that order, especially if he sees a member of his own krewe turned into a pawn for specters. He uses his position as a Sin-Eater and Manifestations of his geist to enforce his authority over ghosts, keeping them captive and forcing them to answer his questions. While it's easy to play the tyrant, a Sin-Eater who does risks falling into a different trap—in many ways, a ghost cannot truly know anything that it knew in life, it can only remember things. Relying on the memories of long-dead shades can be a dangerous thing.

A few Necromancers, those who focus on the occult secrets hidden in the Underworld, don't rely on ghosts at all. Delving for secrets among the Lower Mysteries, the Necromancer has to look after himself. Shades hold few secrets that a determined Sin-Eater can't unveil through other means. On the other hand, ghosts can be very useful — especially if the Sin-Eater can press them into service as distractions for the Kerberoi. In exchange for their assistance, a Necromancer can find all manner of secrets that can benefit his krewe — and himself.

Virtue Channels: A Charitable Necromancer seeks the secrets of the dead to answer the questions of the living. A Faithful Necromancer searches for meaning and chaos by querying the knowledge of the dead. A Just Necromancer will pressure a ghost for knowledge he needs even when the ghost should really move on. A Prudent Necromancer ignores shades who offer him untold luxuries, preferring to press on into their Dominion to unearth its secrets.

Vice Channels: An Envious Necromancer discovers secrets in order to get one up on his rivals. A Gluttonous Necromancer uses the knowledge he gleans from the dead in pursuit of excess. A Slothful Necromancer interrogates ghosts for answers rather than doing his own research. A Wrathful Necromancer beats secrets out of ghosts rather than bargaining with them.

Archetypal Manifestation: A Necromancer unleashes the Stigmatic Boneyard to bind a ghost into his home, preventing it from leaving until he's learned all he can. A canny Necromancer, faced with a ghost who refuses to disclose its secrets, dons the Stigmatic Shroud in order to take out his frustrations.

Pilgrim

The fire? Material things will only hold you back. You're better off without them.

For some people, dying is a fundamental chance, a moment when everything they've done in life is taken apart and shown to be pointless. In that one moment, all ties to the living world become meaningless and emotions are revealed as tethers, things that hold the dead back from going on to their true and just reward. A Sin-Eater is unique because he knows all this without truly dying. The geist that rescues him also gives him another chance, a means to get things right one last chance. And more than that, the chance to help others get things right. After all, for all that they're everywhere, ghosts are the ones who have got things wrong. If a soul dies without fetters to the living world and no need to complete one last task, then it likely won't come back as a ghost. Most Sin-Eaters believe that's because the person's spirit skips the Underworld entirely — it being a place where ghosts must shed the detritus of memory and emotion before moving on to their final reward. Admittedly, many Sin-Eaters still believe that someone who has lived a bad life will pay the price. Those who follow the Pilgrim's path try to live a life that will lead them to a reward, and they encourage those they help to do the same.

Sin-Eaters who focus on the spiritual nature of death and help people avoid the Underworld are known as Pilgrims. Some don't stop there. Though each one is certain he's helping people avoid an eternity of bitterness and regret in the Underworld, the people they help don't necessarily see it that way. After all, if he doesn't explain what he's doing, then the Sin-Eater's actions can appear random, or even dangerous. Even if he does, some Pilgrims believe that helping people to shed life's fetters doesn't require their consent. After all, nobody can really know what it's like after death, so they can't make an informed choice about whether they really want to suffer such an existence. Whether he takes a recent widow out for a night of passion to help her forget her husband, or crushes a family's prized car to stop both father and son fixating on it as they repair it, he'll help sever their emotional ties to both things and people.

If he just destroys what people find meaningful, a Pilgrim won't find many willing to accept his help; and most are grounded in the real world enough that they don't want

to risk the intervention of law enforcement. Most Pilgrims have to go one step further, focusing not on the object but the connection. While it's harder to release people from the accumulated detritus of life without destroying things, a Pilgrim has to learn — unless he plans on murdering anyone those he's helping hold dear. A man searching for his estranged son may forge a stronger bond if his son dies, but if the Sin-Eater convinces him to give up on the boy, ignoring attempts to locate him or make contact, then time and distance can erode the bonds. Conversely, convincing the man to have another child is a good way to redirect the emotions directed at his existing child. It takes time to grow close enough to someone that a Pilgrim can know what will work best to unchain him from the world, but most Sin-Eaters believe it's entirely worth it.

Far more important to most Pilgrims than the eventual destinies of other people is the state of their own souls. "Physician, heal thyself," is a motto that many Pilgrims — though by no means all — aspire to. To that end, a Pilgrim has to shed the bad karma he's accrued during his prior life. Fortunately he's got a step up on most people, having seen what tied him to the world. Armed with that knowledge, he can work on weakening the things that tie him down. Most focus on those things in the living world, things from before their first death. A few go further than that, living apart from other Sin-Eaters and refusing to join a krewé to avoid becoming too attached to anyone.

Virtue Channel: A Faithful Pilgrim focuses on how situations of chaos and tragedy help untether him from the living world. A Fortitudinous Pilgrim will go through hell and high water to help someone avoid the Underworld. A Hopeful Pilgrim refuses to let others give in, focusing on helping people after death by helping them in life. A Just Pilgrim understands that justice can reach beyond the grave, and only helps those who he deems worthy.

Vice Channel: A Greedy Pilgrim tries to help people get over prized possessions by stealing those things away. A Lustful Pilgrim breaks a person's emotional connections by using them for his own ends. A Prideful Pilgrim seeks his own enlightenment at the expense of others. A Wrathful Pilgrim helps people to sever their emotional ties by destroying the things — and people — they care about.

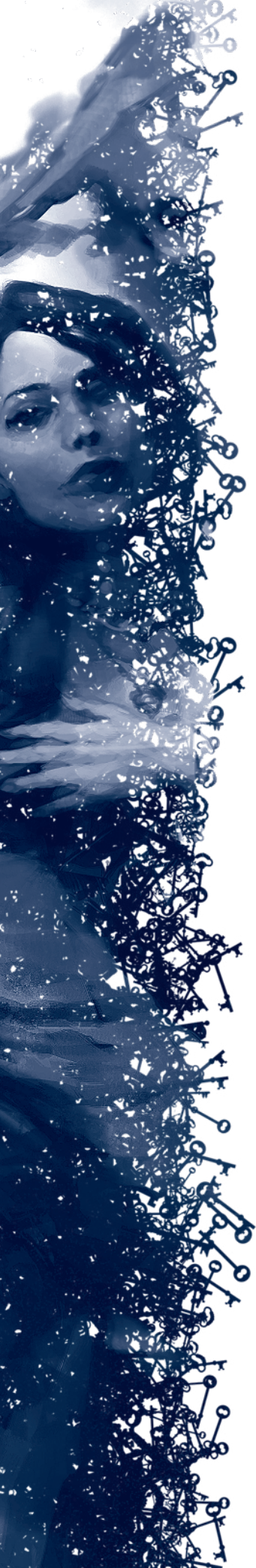
Archetypal Manifestation: A Sin-Eater dons the Passion Caul, bonding with his geist in order to better understand people's emotions, so that he knows what ties a person to the living world. Desperate to remove his ties to her husband's pocket-watch, a Pilgrim calls on the Industrial Rage and watches it crumble in her hands.

Reaper

This city's going to wake up to a better tomorrow, because you're not waking up at all.

Whatever standards of moral relativism a person holds to, it's only the most saintly — or the most misguided — who think that everyone has a right to life. Some people poison the world just by existing. Beyond redemption in this life, it's up to someone who's seen the other side to offer them





matt SMITH

another chance in the afterlife. Reapers do what they can to make the world a better place, bringing death to those who don't deserve to live any more.

The really hard part for a Sin-Eater who would be a Reaper comes from understanding that death isn't the easy answer, and knowing where to draw the line. The guy moving drugs into the Lower East Side makes people miserable with every single breath, that's hard to question — though if the Sin-Eater's brother is breaking legs for him to pay their mother's medical bills, the situation's not quite so clean cut. Other people piss off a Reaper, but don't deserve death; cutting her up in traffic isn't worth a bullet to the back of the head. At least, not most of the time.

Every Reaper kills, but some prefer murder to be a last resort — especially if they can frame the killing as a sacrifice to make the world better. Those Sin-Eaters try to get their targets to change their ways through direct manipulation. A rare few can spend the time to get to know a person and work change from within, but most prefer to haunt their target until he changes his ways. While bleeding walls and terrible shrieks may not convince a slum landlord to change his ways, they're just the ranging shots in a Reaper's arsenal. Rotting flesh and atrophied limbs sit alongside psychological torture and curses in a Sin-Eater's repertoire, and a good Reaper can use them to convince people to change before she resorts to killing.

At her best, a Reaper goes out of her way to find ways to improve things by shuffling a few people off the mortal coil. She may spend months in research or just a couple of hours, but she finds people who make the world bad and she kills them. In the end, that's what she's brought back with her, a need to make life better for people as a whole. The most direct way to do that is by killing those lynchpins of hate. In the end, she can be certain that she's doing the right thing. Problem is, nothing's ever quite that easy. Her actions have repercussions: kill one gang boss and three others fight to take his place. Each is just as bad as their predecessor, and while they vie for power, the people who live on their turf suffer. Often a Reaper has to attend to a situation after the sacrifice, haunting and scaring people until they do something with the opportunity she's handed them. Even then, she has to be careful who she tells about her mission. While her intentions may be good, she's got to be ready to show some real benefit to drive off claims that she's a trigger-happy vigilante.

A Reaper doesn't have to care what's better for the world. Driven solely by her own sense of what's right and just — often tainted by a need for revenge — she terrorizes and kills everyone who crosses her path. An outsider who doesn't understand the Sin-Eater sees her as little more than a terrifying killer, a spirit of bloody murder. To the Reaper, everything makes

perfect sense. Someone trying to mug her is in just as much danger as the father of a serial killer. Her twisted sense of justice drives her to torture and kill people who wrong her in any way, as long as she can justify her actions.

Most Reapers fall somewhere between these two extremes. The ideal of the kindly angel of death who just wants to make the world a better place is one to which most people can aspire, but everyone's human. While a Reaper won't necessarily kill people just because they get on her bad side, the desire for petty vengeance is only human and making a guy's walls bleed will certainly make him think again about being a jackass.

Virtue Channel: A Charitable Reaper is guided by her compassion to make other people's lives better with her sacrifices. A Faithful Reaper makes sure her victims' deaths serve a higher purpose. A Hopeful Reaper engineers her sacrifices to strengthen others' belief in a better world. A Temperate Reaper weighs the advantages and disadvantages of every killing, never letting her heart rule her head.

Vice Channel: An Envious Reaper focuses on personal rivals rather than real evils, and works to profit from the death as much as possible. A Lustful Reaper takes advantage of her victims before ending their lives. A Proudful Reaper makes sure that her victim goes to his grave knowing just how she out-thought or out-fought him. A Slothful Reaper strikes against a target without doing any research, trusting that the world will see itself right.

Archetypal Manifestation: A Sin-Eater calls on the biting winds and freezing rain of the Cold Wind Boneyard to cripple a serial killer who has stalked his neighborhood before moving in for the kill. Faced with the man who ruined his family's reputation, a Sin-Eater sends the carrion-birds of the Beast Grasp to reclaim his honor.

Traits

Sin-Eaters possess special traits to represent their strong connections to their geists and to the Underworld. While not every Sin-Eater exhibits the wide range of oddities that come with the near-death experience and resulting transformation, the change from mundane mortal to Sin-Eater does carry with it certain indelible alterations. If nothing else, the Sin-Eater's exposure to a wider world creates a new set of priorities regarding survival and morality.

New Advantage: Psyche

The psychology of the Sin-Eater is a complex subject, considering that Sin-Eaters themselves can seem largely delusional or schizophrenic – except, of course, that they actually do talk to unseen entities. At first, the transition from a “normal” lifestyle to a supernatural one leaves the Sin-Eater with a weak, imperfect connection to the geist. With time and practice, the Sin-Eater and the geist forge a harmonious bond, or at least an uneasy conjunction that provides the Sin-Eater with a greater exposure to the

geist's ethereal energies. Exercising this connection allows the Sin-Eater to manipulate greater amounts of plasm, to surpass human limits and to contain vast power. Psyche is a measure of the combined will of the Bound, the force of mortal determination and deathly purpose. It is the strength of the bond, as opposed to the balance of the bond (itself called Synergy).

A Sin-Eater who's just survived the changeover starts with a Psyche rating of 1. There's no prior experience or training that can prepare a Sin-Eater to handle plasm or Manifestations, after all. Some Sin-Eaters have a natural knack for the business, and might have a slightly greater Psyche score; additional Psyche may be purchased as Merits, at a cost of three Merit dots for one dot of Psyche. Entering play with a higher Psyche does require some amount of exposition between the player and the Storyteller, though. Perhaps the Sin-Eater has actually been “in the know” for a while, or maybe the character's geist had a particularly strong influence that jump-started the Sin-Eater's command of plasm. Whatever the case, the character's Psyche generally develops only through continued practice, exposure to the Underworld, and the work of resolving ghostly fetters. A Sin-Eater with a high Psyche score should have an appropriately developed history to explain the prior experiences that led to the character's improved command of plasm. Psyche also grants some level of resistance to supernatural forces; the player may add her Psyche rating to die rolls made to resist a supernatural power such as a Manifestation, if the power allows for a contested roll. (In the case of powers of other supernatural beings, Psyche is the equivalent of Blood Potency, Primal Urge, and other such traits.)

A refined Psyche is not without its dangers, though. As a Sin-Eater becomes more attuned to her geist and to the Underworld, her connection makes her more sensitive to the necrotic energies of the dead. This means that the Sin-Eater must regularly find ways to keep that connection strong, whether by moving ghosts on to their final rewards, devouring them, or spending significant amounts of time within the Underworld itself. The connection also works both ways – a Sin-Eater with a powerful Psyche becomes so attuned to the Underworld that she requires anchors to connect her to the living world. Interfering with these anchors can have a deleterious effect on the Sin-Eater, just like disturbing a ghost's fetter.

As a Sin-Eater practices the use of plasm and studies Manifestations, her connection to her geist strengthens. Even if the two parties are not in accord—a case in which the Sin-Eater might have a low Synergy (see p. 83) – exercising the powers of death provides a Sin-Eater with greater finesse and control. Eventually the Sin-Eater experiences an epiphany, which leads to tangible improvement in commanding the intangible world. Some Sin-Eaters, afraid of their new powers or religiously disposed to think of their abilities as inherently wicked, avoid further development, but most Sin-Eaters improve their Psyche rapidly, with only a few months (or even weeks) of practice at first. A Sin-Eater's Psyche usually plateaus after a few years, when the whole business of laying ghosts to rest becomes second



nature and the Sin-Eater has a solid understanding of Manifestations. Those Sin-Eaters who continue to push their limits, who make frequent forays into the dangerous Underworld, and who seek the advice of other ghosts and spiritual entities may break through the limits of their former humanity and improve their Psyches further, but the tremendous effort involved (not to mention the risks associated with such activities) means that Sin-Eaters of such a level of skill are rare. Fully half of all Sin-Eaters will never push their Psyche to the point of losing their ties to the physical world.

In rare cases, a Sin-Eater's Psyche may degrade. This can happen due to an attack, a supernatural injury to the geist, or even due to deliberate neglect on the part of the Sin-Eater. In such a case, the Sin-Eater bleeds off plasm and loses any enhanced traits that exceed the limits imposed by the character's lowered Psyche score. If the Sin-Eater later improves in Psyche once more, regaining the lost levels of traits requires the expenditure of additional experience points; traits lost to degeneration of Psyche are gone, not simply suppressed, and must be re-learned.

Example: *Tran, an animistic Sin-Eater from Koreatown, has achieved a Psyche of 7 after several excursions into the Underworld and an epiphany resulting from liberating an entire family of ghosts from their former home. This increased Psyche requires Tran to spend time in the Underworld in order to keep the connection strong, and Tran must also retain anchors in the material world in order to find his way back. Still, his experiences dealing with tricky ghosts, hostile Kerberoi and enigmatic entities provide him with the insight that he needs to increase his Subterfuge skill to 6.*

During a foray into the Underworld in search of clues for a Ceremony, though, Tran suffers an attack from a Kerberos. While Tran manages to escape permanent death, the Reaper's flaying causes damage to his geist and their connection, thus impairing Tran's ability to touch the energy of the dead. Tran's Psyche drops to 5, thereby reducing his Subterfuge skill to 5 as well. Without the supernatural power to allow him to exceed human limits, Tran cannot retain his extraordinary level of skill. Though Tran could eventually improve his Subterfuge again in the future, the player would have to spend experience points to raise Tran's Psyche and Subterfuge once more.

| Psyche | Attribute/Skill/ Manifestation Max | Max Plasm/ Max Plasm per Turn | Anchors | Time in Underworld |
|--------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|---------------------|
| 1 | 5 | 14/1 | None | None |
| 2 | 5 | 18/2 | None | None |
| 3 | 5 | 22/3 | None | None |
| 4 | 5 | 26/4 | None | None |
| 5 | 5 | 30/5 | None | None |
| 6 | 6 | 40/7 | 1 | 1 day/lunar month |
| 7 | 7 | 50/10 | 1 | 3 days/lunar month |
| 8 | 8 | 60/15 | 2 | 5 days/lunar month |
| 9 | 9 | 75/20 | 2 | 1 week/lunar month |
| 10 | 10 | 100/25 | 3 | 2 weeks/lunar month |

Maximum Number of Deathmask Mementos (see page 205) is always equal to half the character's Psyche.

anchors

Experienced Sin-Eaters use anchors to empower their highly-refined Psyches. They vary from ghost's anchors (**World of Darkness**, pg. 209) in nature, even if they're very similar in function. A Bound's anchor is a memento (as the Merit) that has become so central to the Sin-Eater's functioning that it serves as a direct link between her (and her geist) and the power of the Underworld. This anchor allows the Sin-Eater to absorb so much plasmic energy that she is capable of superhuman feats — that is, to attain a Psyche rating of 6 dots or more, which in turn opens access to traits of 6 or higher — but it also becomes a potential vulnerability.

A Sin-Eater cannot increase Psyche unless she has access to enough mementos to create anchors. No special ceremony is necessary; a memento simply "upgrades" to anchor status when the Sin-Eater's

Psyche rises high enough. If the Sin-Eater doesn't have enough mementos to meet the minimum requirement for a given level of Psyche, then the Sin-Eater cannot advance to that level of Psyche until she gains additional mementos (and the player must, of course, purchase those Merits with experience points).

A memento that serves as an anchor allows the Sin-Eater to gain the benefits of her advanced Psyche, but it also works as a possible conduit to the Sin-Eater. If another individual manages to make contact with the memento — be it a ghost in the Underworld or a supernatural enemy in the material world while the memento is physically present — then the individual gains a +2 bonus on the dice pool for any supernatural power used to affect the Sin-Eater. The memento creates a direct connection

to the Sin-Eater, which in turn makes her vulnerable to the depredations of an enemy who can affect that memento. If the opponent manages to connect to multiple anchors at once, the bonuses stack. Fortunately, mementos that aren't used as anchors do not provide this sympathetic connection, even if the Sin-Eater has some that are anchors and some that aren't.

Worse still, if a Sin-Eater's anchor is destroyed, her Psyche immediately drops. A Sin-Eater with a Psyche score of 10 dots who loses an anchor drops to a Psyche of 9; losing all three anchors at once would traumatically drop her to a Psyche score of 5. This comes with the attendant loss of excess plasm and reduction in supernatural traits. Naturally, Sin-Eaters are *extremely* protective of their anchor mementos.

A Sin-Eater may choose which mementos become anchors upon increasing Psyche to an appropriate level, but once a memento is selected as an anchor, the choice may not be undone. If an anchor is destroyed, of course, the Sin-Eater may select a new one if the player raises the character's Psyche once more.

Time in the Underworld

Sin-Eaters who channel large amounts of plasm become so infused with the matter of the Underworld that they can retain their control and their storage of plasm only by visiting that grim place from time to time to bask in its deathly energies. Of course, visiting the Underworld is not a task undertaken lightly even by the most experienced Sin-Eater, and the demands of this sort of journey are a prime cause of death in Sin-Eaters who try to advance their Psyches to extraordinary levels.

At first, a Sin-Eater only needs to make a quick jaunt to the Underworld to refresh her connection once every short while – for a total of a day (a full 24 hours) during each lunar month. As the Sin-Eater's Psyche increases, the need for the Underworld's unnatural physics also increases, which forces the Sin-Eater to spend more and more time there. Eventually, the Sin-Eater may well spend half of her time in the Underworld and half in the living world. Such a lifestyle is, of course, hardly conducive to holding down a job or a relationship, and it can have a degenerative effect on the Sin-Eater's Synergy as well (see page 84).

The time requirements listed on the table are for each lunar month, measured from new moon to new moon. A Sin-Eater who fails to meet the time requirements loses a point of Psyche at the end of the cycle. This fortunately means that the necessary time for the next month is slightly lower, but a Sin-Eater who is unable to reach the Underworld, or one who is busy with life in the material world or afraid because of some enemy in the Underworld, can lose Psyche over the course of several months while failing to visit. As always, the loss of Psyche carries with it the accompanying loss of excess plasm and of extraordinary trait ratings.

Advanced Sin-Eaters usually seek out a Haunt (see the Merit on page 87) in order to make their journeys into the Underworld, if not easier, at least more predictable.

Plasm

Plasm is the "juice" by which Sin-Eaters empower their Manifestations and other supernatural abilities. As described in myths, ectoplasm appears as a residue in sites that ghosts regularly haunt, and in low places such as cenotes (see page 87), especially ones with Avernian Gates (see page 82). This ghostly remnant can appear as a solid, jelly-like mass, as a thick, syrupy liquid or as a greenish vapor. Usually, plasm that's uncontained simply sublimates and vanishes in a matter of minutes; it dissipates rapidly in the living world as it decays back into the entropy from which it formed. Sin-Eaters, though, can recognize and harvest plasm for their own uses.

A Sin-Eater uses plasm to fuel Manifestations, to temporarily absorb injury, to power certain ceremonies, and to open Avernian Gates. Thanks to the utility of plasm, it's a valuable commodity for Sin-Eaters, but not one that's easily traded. As a form of ghostly essence, it retains its power only when it's captured within the Sin-Eater's body (or, in rare cases, held in a semisolid form via a special Manifestation, ceremony, or influence on the part of a geist). Sin-Eaters can hold plasm indefinitely if it isn't used, and many Sin-Eaters like to stock up in order to make sure they're prepared for any contingency, but acquiring the plasm in the first place can be troublesome.

A Sin-Eater generally returns from the brink of death with only a trace amount of plasm in his system, a small "gift" that remains as a result of contact with the geist. This single point of plasm is still sufficient to perform a few tricks, and geists are quick to impart knowledge about what a Sin-Eater can do with plasm. After all, a skilled Sin-Eater with a reservoir of ectopic energy and the means to use it creatively can accomplish far more than someone who remains ignorant of plasm's properties. Naturally, a freshly-minted Sin-Eater has only a limited command of the power; as shown on page 84, the Sin-Eater's Psyche rating determines the amount of plasm that he can hold and how quickly he can expend it. With practice, the Sin-Eater's control of plasm will improve.

Healing

A Sin-Eater can absorb the force of injury with plasm. When hurt – whether by claw, fire, speeding limousine, or paper cut – the Sin-Eater's player may choose to spend plasm to ablate the wound. The injury fills with a white, mist-shedding substance, and for the rest of the scene the injury has no effect on the Sin-Eater; the plasm simply "fills in" as needed. At the end of the scene, the plasm bleeds away and leaves the Sin-Eater bruised and sore, but probably not as badly injured as might've happened otherwise.

Spending a point of plasm as a reflexive action allows the Sin-Eater to bulwark against a single health level of damage of any type. At the end of the scene, these wounds convert to bashing damage. See "Ectoplasmic Flesh," on page 172.



The plasm in a Sin-Eater's system also fights off deleterious influences. While Sin-Eaters can still consume and feel the effects of alcohol and recreational drugs, other things that might cause health problems (from toxic metals to diseases and poisons) all find themselves captured in the wash of plasm and then expelled from the Sin-Eater's system. For this reason, the Sin-Eater's Psyche rating adds to all resistance rolls against toxins, as explained on page 172.

Opening an Avernian Gate

An Avernian Gate is a doorway to the Autochthonous Depths, the upper levels of the Underworld. It's that part of the Underworld in which Sin-Eaters will find reflections of the culture of the living nearby, and where they'll likely be safest (at least, compared to the Lower Mysteries). A Sin-Eater can open an Avernian Gate with a touch, an instant action, the expenditure of one point of plasm and a Psyche roll. See page 264 for the specific modifiers.

A Sin-Eater that runs out of plasm in the process of trying to open an Avernian Gate will find that the task becomes markedly more difficult, which is yet another reason why many Sin-Eaters rely on a reservoir of the precious substance.

Manifestation Use

Activating a Manifestation often requires the expenditure of plasm. In such a case, the use of plasm is reflexive; it happens as the Sin-Eater activates the power in question.

Because a Sin-Eater's Psyche limits his ability to spend plasm, a character might have to spend several turns concentrating on a Manifestation in order to complete it. Should a Manifestation require more plasm than the Sin-Eater can expend in a single turn, the Sin-Eater must continue to use actions to focus on spending the plasm over several successive turns. The type of action required is the same as that normally used to complete the Manifestation — that is, if a Sin-Eater with Psyche • tries to activate a Manifestation that costs 3 plasm and requires an instant action, then the character must spend three turns, spending one point of plasm per turn in conjunction with an instant action, to finish the Manifestation. The dice roll for activation occurs when the last point of required plasm is spent and the last action is taken. If the Sin-Eater interrupts the process by failing to take the appropriate action on a turn, then the spent plasm is lost and the Manifestation does not occur.

Acquiring Plasm

Because ectoplasm stems from the energies of the dead, it naturally coalesces in places, things, actions, and people associated with death. Acquiring plasm, then, can be a risky venture, because it requires the Sin-Eater to deal with situations that are inherently

dangerous. Fortunately, a Sin-Eater does not, strictly speaking, *require* plasm — but plasm itself does ease the business of interacting with ghosts.

Haunts: The most common source of plasm for Sin-Eaters comes from cenotes (see page 87). These “low places” tend to collect plasm, especially at night, simply because they meet the archetypal characteristics of a place of the dead. Graveyards, tombs, caves, underground pools, sewer tunnels, and cellars all become thin places where the energy of the Underworld leaks into the living world. The more haunted and decrepit the location, the more plasm it accumulates. Of course, this means that locations rich in ectoplasm also often have ghostly inhabitants and natural hazards like unstable ceilings and poisonous vapors.

Deathmasks: Deathmasks, a type of memento, naturally collect plasm. As objects representative of the solid remains of a destroyed geist, deathmasks serve as innate bridges between the living world and the Underworld. A deathmask holds up to five points of plasm, and refreshes a point every night; a Sin-Eater wearing the deathmask can access this extra plasm just like his own personal stores. Normally a Sin-Eater can access this plasm for use but not pull it into his internal reservoir, though an unusual ceremony might be able to bypass this limitation.

Ectophagia: Sin-Eaters can literally eat and drink ghosts. Consuming the stuff of the Underworld can grant physical sustenance, but ghosts are an even more concentrated source. Even a Sin-Eater who isn't in the Underworld can gain some benefit by “huffing,” as it's called by those with a fondness for the novels of Tim Powers. To perform this act, the Sin-Eater consumes the last remnants of a ghost that has just been defeated. The more of the ghost's Corpus the Bound devours, the more plasm he gains. For more information, see p. 176.

Threshold Resonance: When a Sin-Eater performs an act that resonates with his geist's Threshold, he may regain plasm as the geist itself gains power due to the emotional strength of the action. A Sin-Eater with the Threshold of the Torn (death by violence) may regain plasm through violence to the brink of death — both by perpetrating it (possibly at a cost to Synergy) or suffering it (at a cost to health and sanity). The Sin-Eater must feel a deep and moving connection to the Threshold to regain plasm in this fashion. Typically, this means a Sin-Eater generates plasm when suffering damage or testing for degeneration of Synergy as a result of an action taken in conjunction with the Threshold. Some Sin-Eaters become “pain junkies” and deliberately seek out situations in which their Threshold will cause them suffering, thereby giving them a shot of plasm. When a Sin-Eater gains plasm in this fashion, the amount gained depends on how much the Sin-Eater is in conjunction with the Threshold; 1-3 points is typical, and never more than 5.

Resolution: A Sin-Eater can also collect the plasm released when a ghost transcends its etheric existence. A Sin-Eater present and influential in the process of releasing a ghost from the last of its anchors — sending the ghost to its final rest without destroying it — gains a burst of plasmic energy as the ghost vanishes into whatever fate awaits those who finally let go of their lingering connections to the living world. This happy(?) event refills the entire store of the Sin-Eater’s plasm.

Stealing Plasm

Rumor holds that Sin-Eaters particularly adroit with Manifestations can leech plasm out of other Sin-Eaters with just a touch, or even by stealing it directly from breath. Some misguided Sin-Eaters, perhaps thinking that their supernatural powers are akin to vampirism (with vampires themselves seen as creatures on the crux between life and death), believe they can steal plasm by drinking the blood of other Sin-Eaters, or eating their flesh. If these powers exist, they are closely guarded by the cannibalistic geists and their hosts that profit from them.

Synergy

A Sin-Eater in alignment with his attendant geist benefits from the close connection, which grants a certain peace of mind and an affinity for the little details of the Underworld. Sin-Eaters who flout the needs of their geist or who reject or abuse their relationship to the Underworld can quickly spiral into a circle of degeneration that deadens the Psyche and makes the Sin-Eater’s job as a psychopomp very difficult to complete. Of course, no Sin-Eater is perfect, so more than a few give in to various temptations and find themselves dealing with the friction that grows when Sin-Eater and geist fail to harmonize.

Synergy takes the place of Morality, but is even less of a barometer of how “moral” a character is. It represents how well the Bound has integrated with the urges and drives of her geist, which may be a *positive* thing but not necessarily a *good* thing.

Sin-Eaters rarely fall into a perfect fit with a geist. Indeed, a Sin-Eater who has just had a near-death experience and awakened to a wider supernatural world is hardly in a position to be a boon companion and stable part of the new relationship. Still, most Sin-Eaters do adjust, with a little cajoling from the geist and help from a krew. In game terms, this means that the typical Sin-Eater starts with a Synergy score of 7.

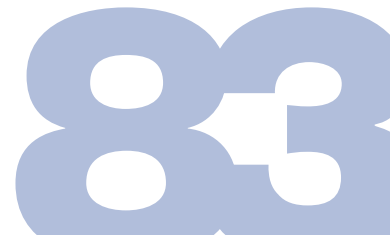
Over time, a Sin-Eater’s Synergy tends to fluctuate. Many Bound actually devolve in Synergy, because they find themselves pushed into the position of taking actions of dubious morality. While a Sin-Eater’s moral framework changes along with his new lease on life, the sheer stress of dealing with ghosts, traveling

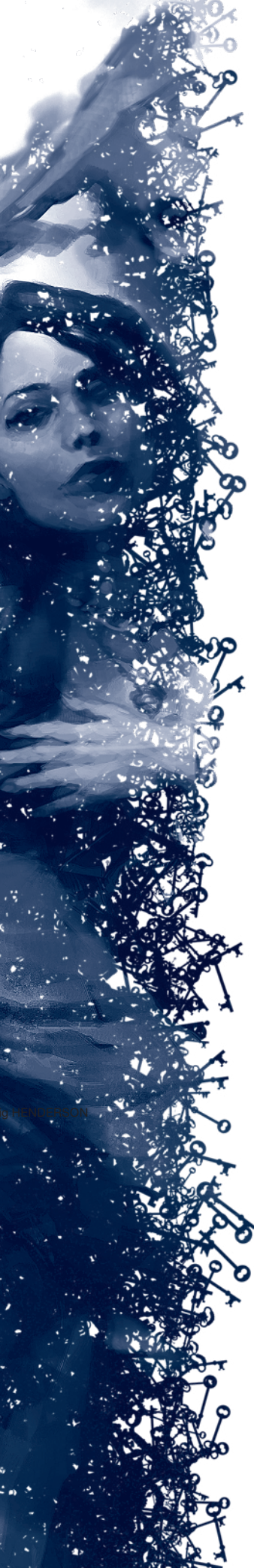


craig HENDERSON

through the Underworld and arguing with other krewes means that something has to give. Most of the time, it’s one of the Sin-Eater’s principles. This usually isn’t so bad; it just means the Sin-Eater doesn’t necessarily live up to all of the expectations of the attendant geist. This friction can make some of the Sin-Eater’s supernatural talents harder to focus, since the geist can’t exert its influence as easily when it is not sympathetically bound to its host.

A rare few Sin-Eaters strive to mesh their own goals to that of their geists to the point of increasing their Synergy. This rise in correspondence causes the two beings to grow ever closer. High Synergy can aid a Sin-Eater in performing some tasks, such as opening an





Avernian Gate. Of course, some of those same actions may cause internal discord on their own. Often, a Sin-Eater who chooses to pursue strong Synergy with his geist must make sacrifices, by giving up options that other Sin-Eaters would take for granted.

Synergy as Morality

Synergy is not a moral code. It is a measure of how unified a Sin-Eater is with his geist. Low Synergy represents discord, the mortal and the geist warring for control and fighting against one another's impulses. High Synergy represents unity, the human host acting in a geist-like fashion and the geist anticipating the human mind. A high-Synergy Bound may be functionally sociopathic, while a low-Synergy Sin-Eater may have become that way by adhering to a moral code in spite of his geist's wishes. It's not that the concerns of a human code of Morality have vanished (though they might have). Rather, the bond with the geist becomes the most immediate and affecting element of a Sin-Eater's persona. She is more likely to suffer mental degeneration from internal struggles against the passenger in her head than from becoming increasingly callous, because the geist is more immediate.

As a Sin-Eater performs acts that violate the compact between living and dead, or that put him into conflict with his geist, he risks the decline of Synergy. These acts are called discord triggers: they represent events and actions that may cause geist and host to pull in separate directions.

A discord trigger works mechanically much as the Morality "sin" it replaces. If a Bound performs an act rated at his Synergy value or less, the player rolls the number of dice indicated on the table below. If the roll succeeds, the Sin-Eater retains full accord with his geist, although both parties know the event in question tested the strength of their resolve. If the roll fails, the character suffers a loss of one point of Synergy, and may also gain a derangement, based on a roll of the character's new Synergy rating. Failure of the follow-up Synergy roll results in the character gaining a new derangement of the Storyteller's choosing, probably associated with the sin, the circumstances surrounding it, and the Sin-Eater's Threshold.

One significant event can also have a strongly deleterious impact on Synergy: death. Sin-Eaters who "die" a second (or third, or fourth...) time may be pushed back from the brink once more by the geist, but in doing so, the geist must expend significant energy and shunt the Sin-Eater's death onto another person. The result is an automatic loss of Synergy, as well as a permanent reduction in the Sin-Eater's maximum Synergy score by two points.

A Sin-Eater who drops to a Synergy score of zero becomes one of the Wretched, a fractured shell of spirit and flesh totally out of synch with one

another. Usually the geist and the mortal minds vie for dominance, with the geist frequently having the upper hand — a Wretched may spend much of his time in a fugue state, conscious for only a few small portions of the day when his geist retreats and relinquishes control.

Synergy and Sins

| Synergy | Discord Trigger |
|---------|---|
| 10 | Opening an Avernian Gate, entering the Underworld. (roll five dice) |
| 9 | Using plasm from a deathmask, violating an Old Law. (roll five dice) |
| 8 | Closing an Avernian Gate. (roll four dice) |
| 7 | Destroying a charm or fetter. (roll four dice) |
| 6 | Destroying a ghost or Avernian Gate, ectophagia. (roll three dice) |
| 5 | Destroying a vanitas, reviving a dead person. (roll three dice) |
| 4 | Destroying a memorabilia or deathmask, accidental murder or manslaughter. (roll three dice) |
| 3 | Destroying a keystone, destroying a geist. (roll two dice) |
| 2 | Torture, serial murder. (roll two dice) |
| 1 | Mass murder, suicide attempt, attempting to destroy one's own geist. (roll two dice) |

The Nature of Discord

One doesn't "sin" against Synergy — one imperils it. As a representation of the unity between mortal and geist, Synergy is put at risk by actions that cause the geist to revolt against the host's will, or by actions that make the host repulsed by the nature of her geist. The "rightness" of an action is of little consequence: what makes it a discord trigger is how it imperils the bond.

Sin-Eaters do not test Synergy for acts that might be sins against Morality such as committing theft, assault, or selfish acts or thoughts. The objects of the material world, and even the physical health of its denizens, are as ephemeral as ectoplasm. Everyone dies. Things break down. Sin-Eaters quickly come to grips with this reality, especially given that they get to see the ghosts left behind after people die and things break.

The most prominent discord triggers include:

Opening an Avernian Gate and Entering the Underworld: Given the work that Sin-Eaters do, this seems a bit perverse, and Sin-Eaters themselves cannot agree on why this causes dissonance with the geist. Some theorize that geists wish to distance themselves from the Underworld as much as possible, having

once escaped it to become symbionts with the living. A few Sin-Eaters believe the living should never have anything to do with the lands of the dead, and that this distinction causes the Sin-Eater to suffer a disconnect of purpose that leads to dissonance with the geist.

Using Plasm from a Deathmask: A deathmask is the final remnant of a destroyed geist. Pulling the plasm from such an item is, in effect, drawing out the Underworld through the remnants of a destroyed ghost, which is of dubious provenance, especially considering that the Sin-Eater's powers largely stem from an as-yet-undestroyed geist.

Violating an Old Law: While nobody can claim to know exactly why the Old Laws exist, they do carry strong metaphysical weight. Sin-Eaters who delve long into the Underworld and the Lower Mysteries quickly learn that breaking an Old Law not only risks the anger of the Kerberoi behind them, but also stirs disharmony with one's own geist.

Closing an Avernian Gate: While Avernian Gates can be dangerous and opening one is a very mild (trivial, even) violation of the ways of the dead, closing such a gate is a more serious offense. The Sin-Eater is, essentially, denying his deathly aspect and asserting once more the divide between living and dead.

Destroying Mementos: Every memento holds some element of death's power within it. To destroy such an item, even to claim its plasm, is an act the geist reads as a back-handed threat. The more personally attuned a memento, the more it symbolizes of life and death, the more dissonant its destruction is to either a geist or a Bound. A keystone in particular is a part of a geist,

Destroying a ghost or Avernian Gate: It is the business of Sin-Eaters to help resolve ghosts' torment and to serve as psychopomps. Taking the violent and destructive solution may sometimes be the only viable one, but it is also one that is at odds with the purpose of the Sin-Eater. This sort of destruction is also distasteful to the geist itself, because it is destruction of things that operate on the geist's level of experience. Note that laying a ghost to rest peacefully may remove it from existence in some fashion, but does not count as destruction for the purpose of Synergy loss.

Ectophagia: Huffing plasm from a ghost is good for a quick fix, but it also causes a welter of emotions from the ghost's Threshold and sometimes elements of its own passions. This confuses the bond between Sin-Eater and geist.

Accidental Murder or Manslaughter: When a Sin-Eater takes more lives than intended, it causes a disconnect. Firing into a crowd and killing someone other than the target, or running down a pedestrian during a hectic car chase, or catching an innocent in an explosion or poisoning: these things rattle the sense of purpose that drives every Sin-Eater.

Reviving a Dead Person: Whether it's using a forbidden ceremony to call a corpse back to life or using a crash cart to revive a clinically dead patient, this act plays merry hell with the boundaries between life and death.

Destroying a Geist: Geists are not immune to the compulsion of self-preservation, and aiding in the destruction of another of its ilk is sure to cause some measure of discord.

Torture, Serial Murder, Mass Murder: Though a geist may indeed desire to slowly torture the object of its wrath, or to claim victim after victim in the name of an arcane purpose, these acts are essentially "unclean death." Torture prolongs a life in pain, keeping it from the release of death but denying it the full bloom of life. Serial murder and mass murder are both particularly unclean forms of death, awakening aspects of the Underworld better left to rest.

Attempting Suicide, Attempting to Destroy One's Own Geist: The geist chose its host for a reason. It reacts strongly against any attempts on its existence, including its bond with its host. Attempting to kill oneself or one's geist triggers a powerful surge of self-defense on the geist's part, and shakes the bond to its foundation.

Roll Results

When a player makes a Synergy roll for a moral violation, roll only the dice pool for the actual sin in question. If the sin is on the table above the character's Synergy rating, then no roll is necessary; the violation is too minor to matter at the Sin-Eater's current level of dissonance. Willpower is *not* usable to boost the Synergy roll, nor does any other trait add to the pool. In general, Manifestations and ceremonies cannot improve a Synergy dice pool, because the very act of endangering Synergy runs counter to the energies conjured by the geist's power.

Dramatic Failure: Not possible; no chance roll is made for Synergy degeneration or derangements.

Failure: Failure after committing a sin against Synergy results in the loss of one dot of Synergy, and a subsequent roll of that new Synergy rating to test for a derangement. Failure on the following Synergy roll results in a derangement, unless the character's resulting (lower) Synergy is 7 or more.

Success: On a roll after a Synergy sin, the character manages to stave off the debilitating effects of violating the code of the Underworld. On a follow-up to a loss of Synergy, the character retains clearness of thought and does not gain a derangement.

Exceptional Success: On a roll after a Synergy sin, the character experiences a sudden burst of confidence after skirting the edge of the rules of the Underworld; the character gains a point of Willpower as well as retaining his Synergy. On a Synergy roll to avoid degeneration, no special effect occurs, though the character avoids the derangement.

Resisting Degeneration

Few Sin-Eaters *want* to fall into the bleak oblivion of having their geist become little more than a distant, haunting voice. A Sin-Eater's degeneration checks represent cases in which the Sin-Eater has violated one of the arcane principles of the Underworld and its own sense of order. Still, sometimes the law can be bent or skirted, without breaking it outright. If a Sin-Eater violates a discord trigger with significant eye to the consequences and preparation to assuage the results — such as having a ready sacrifice of wheat for the Death-God of one of the Lower Mysteries before violating one of the laws of the River of Dead Seed — then the player may gain a +1 or





+2 bonus to the degeneration check, if the Storyteller feels the sacrifice is sufficiently genuine and sincere (as well as in some way a hardship for the Sin-Eater). If the Sin-Eater callously flouts a given law, or conducts repeated offenses against the laws in a short period of time, then a -1 or -2 penalty to the degeneration check may be appropriate. Certain triggers may call for an automatic loss of Synergy without a die roll. In general, if a Sin-Eater conducts a violation on a level that is at least four points below the character's current Synergy, or flagrantly and deliberately violates the laws of the Underworld with callous disregard for the consequences, a loss of Synergy may be automatic.

Regaining Synergy

A Sin-Eater's Synergy rises only by making a deliberate effort to advance in conjunction with the geist and with the Sin-Eater's role as an intermediary of the Underworld. This means adhering rigorously to the laws of the Underworld, acting in accord with the geist's wishes, and performing the various duties expected of a Sin-Eater all without treading upon the rules of the dead. Performing in this fashion is not just a matter of rote behavior (although rote reverence, sacrifice, and ceremony do have their place); the Sin-Eater must become so accustomed to following the rules that such things become second nature and force of habit. Gaining a closer bond to the geist may have its advantages, but it is also a harrowing process. No living being truly feels comfortable with the whispered voices of the dead offering "friendly advice." Making a deliberate effort to improve Synergy is therefore a choice to pursue behaviors that are, essentially, unnatural to the living.

All of this means that improving Synergy is not a simple process. Experience points alone will not purchase Synergy without extreme effort on the part of a Sin-Eater. A character with a low Synergy rating has much work to do to claw back up to mediocrity; a character with high Synergy must show extreme improvement in minute areas to gain further ground. In either case, the process requires strict adherence to the laws of the dead over a lengthy period of time. The Sin-Eater's principles and desire to uphold the rules must also be tested. If values falter when they are tested, after all, they aren't really values. If they are never tested, then how can their true measure of conviction be revealed?

The player and Storyteller should work to craft suitable means to portray the pursuit of Synergy, if that is the character's goal. Keep in mind that even if the player wants to increase the character's Synergy rating, events in the story may dictate a different outcome. Often, the choice of Synergy is a choice between what's expedient and what's correct (in Synergy terms). The true dedication of the Sin-Eater to the path of increasing Synergy will come out in what the Sin-Eater is willing to sacrifice, and how hard he is willing to let his life become, in the

effort to become closer to his geist. This isn't to say that every story involving improvements of Synergy should be sheer torture for the player; rather, the story should focus on the difficult moral choices and consequences of trying to strive for a stronger connection between the living and the dead. The pursuit of a single dot of Synergy is an acceptable focus for one story, though the last few dots (9 and 10) might require several stories of striving.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Synergy

A high Synergy score carries certain benefits, though it is up to the individual to determine whether these are worth the price of upholding the rigorous standards of such lofty station. A low Synergy carries significant detriments as well, so Sin-Eaters usually try to avoid falling into the depths of total disconnection from their geists.

A Sin-Eater with a Synergy score of 8 or more gains certain automatic benefits:

- +1 bonus to all rolls to open an Avernian Gate. The Sin-Eater is so in touch with the ways of the dead that opening a passage into the Underworld is second nature. Of course, simply doing so may be a discord trigger (see the accompanying table).
- +1 bonus per dot above 7 on all Social dice pools when interacting with Kerberoi or other geists. The Sin-Eater's close bond with death causes the creatures of the Underworld to intuitively regard him as one of their own.
- +1 bonus per dot above 7 to the roll made to conduct a ceremony (see page 150). The Sin-Eater's connection to the Underworld makes the power of the ceremony flow more fluidly and easily.
- +1 bonus per dot above 7 to rolls made to navigate in the Underworld. The geist's knowledge and the Sin-Eater's intuition provide guidance when maneuvering through the Autochthonus Depths and the Lower Mysteries (and perhaps stranger places).

A Sin-Eater with a Synergy score of 5 or lower gains certain drawbacks:

- -1 to -3 to open an Avernian Gate (-1 at Synergy 4-5; -3 for Synergy 3 or lower). The Sin-Eater's dissonance makes it hard to grasp the ephemeral boundaries of the gateway.
- -1 per dot below 6 on all Social dice pools when interacting with Kerberoi and other geists. The Sin-Eater's discord between his living soul and his dead symbiote causes dissonance in certain dead things able to perceive it.
- -1 per dot below 6 to rolls made to conducting a ceremony (see page 150). A Sin-Eater who cannot work in tandem with his geist will find that he has trouble cajoling the necromantic energies necessary to conduct lasting powers.

- -1 per dot below 6 to rolls made to navigate in the Underworld. The depths of the Underworld become a forbidding, cold place to a Sin-Eater who does not have the aid and counsel of a willing geist.

Merits

In addition to the various Merits available to all humans, as explained in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, Sin-Eaters have access to a small range of Merits that represent their special connections to the Underworld. Sin-Eaters can and often do retain their connections to living society, represented via their Merits such as Allies, Contacts, and Resources. Those cunning (or demented) Sin-Eaters who pursue knowledge of the Great Below gain access to Merits that provide a unique connection to the Underworld and its powers.

One option available to Sin-Eaters is to purchase the Twilight Network as one of their Contacts. This obviously represents the ability to glean information from obituary listings, cemetery graffiti and other such sources, or to put out a call for information and have it answered, rather than a face-to-face meeting with one particular person. In such a case, the player may substitute Occult for Streetwise when rolling to gather information from the Network.

The Merits included below provide distinctive benefits for the Bound alone. While a mortal might stumble across a cenote or a wizard might capture a memento, these items are useless to anyone who does not have an attendant geist. Unless otherwise noted, these Merits may be purchased during character creation, or afterward, at the usual costs explained in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. These Merits may also be lost, though, in the event of the destruction of an important place or item.

Ceremonies (•+)

Throughout the ages, countless rituals have been devised for the living to contact, placate, or honor the dead. These rituals rarely have much innate power of their own — but in the hands of someone bound to a geist, they can be invested with deathly power. The adoption of these ceremonies, and to some extent the duties that these ceremonies reflect, are in some ways what defines the role of the Sin-Eater.

This Merit represents the number of ceremonies (see page 150) that a Sin-Eater knows and can perform. A character beginning play with three dots of Ceremonies might know three one-dot ceremonies, one one-dot, and one two-dot ceremony, or a single three-dot ritual.

In order to learn a new ceremony, the Sin-Eater must usually find an instructor to teach her, though in some cases (particularly with high Synergy) a Sin-Eater can learn how to “create” a ceremony from scratch. For instance, a character might study a particular culture’s rites for propitiating the dead, and with assistance and advice from her geist, fine-tune a version of those rites that has some supernatural effect when she performs it.

When purchasing new ceremonies with experience points, they aren’t treated as expansions of this Merit. Learning a new ceremony costs 2 experience points per dot, or three per dot if the character has no instructor available and must devise it on her own.

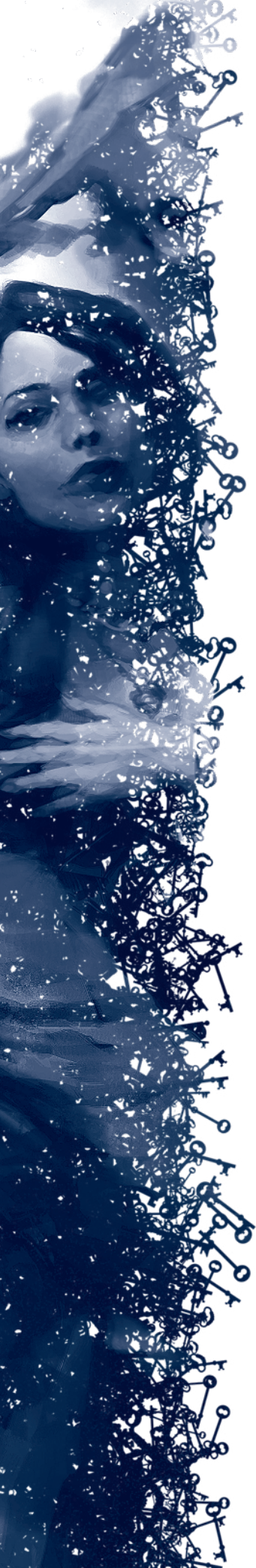
Haunt (• to •••••; special)

Effect: Prominently figuring in the death-legends of many cultures are caves, tunnels, cisterns, and doorways that lead into the depths of the Great Below. Sin-Eaters know all too well that such places contain the residue of darkness, stillness, and cold that comes with exposure to death. The lingering remnants of ghostly passage, or the association with death and the dead, can give some places a very real connection to the Underworld in truth. The Mayan term for such a place is a *cenote*, which refers to an underground cavern with a black pool that leads to the Underworld beneath its frigid, accepting waters. Experienced Sin-Eaters know, however, that these passages to the Great Below can and do occur in all manner of silent places; in addition to the usual suspects, cenotes can form in closets, basements, underground storage chambers, crawlspaces, or even in the industrial depths of an abandoned factory floor with labyrinthine passages amid the sunken machinery. More generally, the Bound refer to these places as low places, Avernian Gates. Those that have been claimed by a krew or a Sin-Eater, though, are called Haunts. Sin-Eaters who have special access to a Haunt can rely on the power of the place to fuel their plasmic needs while also using the cenote as a soft point to cross into the Underworld.

Haunts come in wide and moribund variety. One might be a tiny room with a secret hatch, barely large enough to fit a person, home to a child who became trapped and died down there; another could be a haunted manor that has a grisly subterranean chapel devoted to some Slavic death-god. The utility of a Haunt lies not in its size nor in its opulence, but rather in the power of its connection to the Great Below and in its ease of use. To this end, each cenote has a rating in three different factors: its *utility*, its *fluidity*, and its *residue*. Each factor provides a benefit to the Sin-Eater who has access to the Haunt in question. Each factor is also considered a separate Merit to purchase, with each Haunt having ratings in both categories, although a Sin-Eater need not necessarily purchase scores in both categories immediately.

A Haunt is a useful tool, but it has a strong drawback. Sin-Eaters who sleep in cenotes find themselves haunted by ghostly visions and hideous dreams of death, much like the nightmares that afflict users of memorabilia mementos (see page 209). Sleeping at the heart of a Haunt prevents a Sin-Eater from regaining Willpower due to a night’s rest, as the rest in such a place is far from refreshing.

A Haunt’s *utility* represents just how much use it can serve apart from its supernatural focus. It generally accords to the size, accessibility, general security, and helpful mundane accouterments that the location has to offer. A cenote with no dots in Haunt Utility might be a small sub-basement that the krew can access but does not own, unable to provide



any benefits beyond its supernatural power. Three dots in Haunt Utility could represent a solid but slightly decrepit haunted house, not legally owned by the krewé but generally unwanted by others. Five dots might represent a small museum complete with library or a plantation house in the swamp, able to provide room and board for an entire krewé, or host a magnificent Flesh Fair.

A cenote's *fluidity* represents the strength of its connection to the Underworld. Every Haunt is potentially an Avernian Gate to the Great Below, but some have a particular affinity for such travel. The more that a cenote follows mythic archetypes — containing a limpid pool of black water, an archway, a piece of funerary statuary — the stronger its connection tends to grow. For this reason, Sin-Eaters often decorate Haunts with such morbid representations. Each dot of Haunt Fluidity grants a +1 bonus to all attempts to cross into (or out of) the Underworld at its location, and an additional die toward any ceremonies performed within its boundaries. Note that this bonus is only useful to the Sin-Eater who possesses the appropriate dots; perhaps the Sin-Eater performs tiny rituals there to make a connection with the cenote, or owns several of the pieces of decorative artwork that create the funeral motif. This bonus does stack with the benefit granted by using mementos while crossing into the Underworld (see page 265).

Finally, Haunt Residue provides a Sin-Eater with access to additional plasm. While a Sin-Eater can

gain plasm by dealing with ghosts or, in desperation, murder (see page 82), cenotes tend to leak ectoplasm into the material world. Ectoplasm that forms at a Haunt almost always does so at night, usually near the “witching hour” (midnight), and generally takes the form of a sticky or slimy residue, clear or yellowish, with a tendency to give off wavering vapors. A Sin-Eater can inhale these vapors to refuel her stores of plasm. Left by itself, plasm quickly dissipates, but powerful cenotes will continue to generate new residue. Each dot of Haunt Residue indicates one point of plasm that the cenote generates each week.

Each cenote has separate ratings in Utility, Fluidity, and Residue. Further, a Sin-Eater may well have knowledge of multiple Haunts; in such a case, each cenote's set of Merits is purchased and tracked separately.

Special: A krewé of Sin-Eaters may share a Haunt, and indeed many krewés rely on cenotes as meeting places, locations to stash letters for the rest of the krewé, and centers for the performance of great ceremonies. The krewé may keep a Haunt's location hidden from other Bound, or they may choose to flaunt their power by hosting Flesh Fairs there.

When a krewé purchases a Haunt Merit communally, each Sin-Eater adds his or her dots in the appropriate Merits — Haunt Accessibility, Haunt Fluidity, and Haunt Residue — to the total value of the cenote. The entire krewé then benefits from the improved value of these Merits. For instance,



a pair of Sin-Eaters could each donate one dot in each Haunt Merit, thereby granting their krewé a cenote with effectively two dots in each of Haunt Accessibility, Fluidity, and Residue. A shared Haunt like this is usable by anyone who has placed dots into the cenote's purchase, as well as anyone who is part of a ceremonially-bound krewé with such a purchaser. Of course, this means that some krewés will have shiftless layabouts who contribute little to the upkeep of a cenote's usefulness — which is a source of strife in more than one krewé.

Should a krewé expel a member from its ranks, all of that member's shared dots contributed to the Haunt are lost by the krewé; the discord of their ceremonial bond disrupts the flow of energies temporarily. The expelled Sin-Eater retains the Merit dots for his own use, perhaps representing a back-up location discovered or a new place to set up shop, but each Haunt Merit has its rating reduced by one dot. (If the Sin-Eater only contributed one dot in the first

place, then that dot is lost.) In the event that a krewé breaks up and each member goes their separate ways, all of the dots of the shared Haunt are refunded to their previous contributors, less one dot each as a result of the breakup, need to find new locations, cost of moving personal effects, hurdles of gaining new access, and so on. Should a Sin-Eater die, all of her contributed dots vanish from the shared Merits of her krewé.

Shared Haunts do not rise in value above ••••• in any category, even if the krewé contributes more total dots; excess dots are superfluous, but might prevent the cenote from losing potency if the krewé suffers a sudden loss.

A Sin-Eater may also have personal access to a private cenote while contributing to the krewé's shared Haunt. In such a case, the character simply possesses multiple versions of each Merit. The shared Haunt Utility for the group's cenote, for instance, would be tracked and purchased separately from the Sin-Eaters own personal Haunt.

| MERITS | |
|---------------------|-------|
| Haunt Accessibility | ●●●●○ |
| Haunt Fluidity | ●●●●○ |
| Haunt Residue | ●●●●○ |
| | ○○○○○ |
| | ○○○○○ |
| | ○○○○○ |
| | ○○○○○ |
| | ○○○○○ |
| | ○○○○○ |
| | ○○○○○ |

| MERITS | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Haunt Accessibility-Shared | ●○○○○ |
| Haunt Fluidity-Shared | ●●●●○ |
| Haunt Residue-Shared | ●●●●○ |
| | ○○○○○ |
| | ○○○○○ |
| | ○○○○○ |
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Memento (•+)

The golden death mask of Tut-Ankh-Amen. The rifle with which Lee Harvey Oswald (ostensibly) killed Kennedy. The cremated remains of Nurhachi, first sovereign emperor of the Manchu dynasty. Relics and reminders of such potent deaths (and lives) carry with them the emotive resonance of their history. Each one is a symbol of the power of death, held in tangible form, with memory carried in it just like a ghost that clings to some half-faded, decaying vestige of its former living glory. To a Sin-Eater, such memento mori not only serve as artistic and maudlin reminders of mortality, but as focal points of very real and very tangible power.

Every Bound has access to at least one memento: the keystone originally given to her by her attendant geist. Many Sin-Eaters go out of their way to collect additional mementos, often for their utility and sometimes out of a perverse desire to assemble a medley of morbid miscellany. A few krewés even hunt down other Sin-Eaters and their geists for the express purpose of relieving them of their mementos. Due to the utility of mementos, Sin-Eaters are apt to gather as many as they can — but mementos are, after all, signature objects that generally have a unique provenance. This means the demand for mementos far exceeds the supply, with predictable and sometimes violent consequences.

Mementos generally grant access to a Threshold — a symbolic representation of a specific form of death, such as “death by violence” — which carries with it bonuses when invoking ceremonies related to its form of death. Some mementos provide Keys, which grant bonuses when used by a Sin-Eater who shares the same Key; a Sin-Eater with the Pyre-Flame Key, for instance, gains a bonus when using a Pyre-Flame memento to invoke a Manifestation.

Six different forms of mementos generally make the rounds of Sin-Eater society. The simplest memento is a charm, a small item imbued with a trace of symbolic death-energy so as to assist in unlocking Manifestations. A vanitas is a memento created by a Sin-Eater to symbolize her personal artistic interpretation of death. A fetter is a ghost's anchor to which the Sin-Eater has bound the ghost via a special ceremony, thereby granting the item a cold infusion of death via the ghost's traits. A deathmask is the remnant of a geist given material form; worn by a Sin-Eater, it provides association with the former geist's own qualities in the form of innate knowledge from the geist's past as well as a Key associated with the former geist's keystone. Memorabilia, the most potent of mementos, are unique relics from powerfully symbolic deaths, such as the aforementioned rings, weapons, clothes, and implements





associated with the demise of legendary figures from King Arthur to Elvis Presley. Finally, a keystone is a Manifestation of the pact between geist and Sin-Eater, given to the living by the dead as a symbol of the connection between the two.

A Sin-Eater's initial keystone (granted by her geist) is an automatic special Memento Merit with a Threshold and two Keys, provided at no cost. Each additional memento counts as a separate Merit purchase. If a player wants to possess multiple mementos, then the Sin-Eater must have multiple Memento Merits to match. A Sin-Eater who possesses a Charm and a vanitas has two separate Memento Merits: the Charm is a • Memento Merit, and the vanitas is a •• Memento Merit.

Unlike other Merits, mementos do not improve via use, practice, or the simple expenditure of experience points. Each type of memento represents a signature item with unique characteristics. A Charm, for instance, is a simple object imbued symbolically with some association with death. It is not possible for a Charm to suddenly "become" a deathmask, a remnant of a destroyed geist. In extremely unusual circumstances, a Sin-Eater might discover that an item thought to be a weak memento is actually something of greater provenance (such as a Charm bullet that later turns out to be a memorabilia, perhaps the bullet that killed Martin Luther King, Jr.). Such an improvement in the value of a memento is fodder for story development, and should not occur simply because the player wants to make a given memento "better."

In addition to the varied powers of mementos, every memento is in essence a battery of death energy. As an instant action with a Resolve + Occult roll, a Sin-Eater can destroy one of his own mementos while in contact with it in order to release its energy and stanch his wounds. The Sin-Eater absorbs the freed plasm, healing a number of Health equal to twice the memento's Merit rating. The memento

permanently loses its supernatural powers (and, since its unnatural resilience disappears, crumbles into dust).

Specific examples of mementos, and of the particular benefits they provide to their owners, can be found starting on page 192.

- Charm (one Threshold)
- Vanitas (one Threshold, Willpower refresh)
- Fetter (one Threshold, one Key, one Numen)
- Deathmask (one Threshold, one Key, skill bonuses, plasm reservoir)
- Memorabilia (one Threshold, one Key, equipment bonuses, social bonuses)

T hresholds

As recognized by the Bound, Thresholds are states of being, of deathly resonance. They're the marks put on someone or something by Death. Death by violence carries a supernatural tie to — and affinity for — violence.

The Sin-Eaters are generally aware of Thresholds, and treat the concept fairly seriously. While they don't tend to elevate a Threshold to the status of a social group or belief system, it is true that most people who die by deprivation seem to have some things in common. As such, the Bound tend to take the marks of death and expand them into heraldry. The Torn self-identify as such because it gets the point across: they understand violence, and they accept that part of their nature. The Forgotten talk more about chance and accidents, because they have something of an investment in the concept. In the end, a Threshold means something to every Sin-Eater — but just how much it means is up to the person in question.

WHAT DEATH?

The Thresholds are intentionally broad, and some deaths could come under more than one Threshold. Does the Sin-Eater who died of poison from a snake bite or from an infestation of worms count as one of the Prey or one of the Stricken? If a Sin-Eater was struck by lightning while answering his phone, is he one of the Prey or one of the Forgotten? If someone suffocates because of a carbon monoxide leak, do they come back as Stricken (because he was poisoned), Silent (because he suffocated) or Forgotten (because he was just plain unlucky)? Does someone who slipped on a banana peel and fell into a river and drowned come back as one of the Forgotten or one of the Prey?

How to choose?

In the end, while the Threshold gives some idea of how a Sin-Eater died that first time, the player is free to choose just what circumstance had the strongest claim over her character. One Sin-Eater killed herself with a bullet to the head after a bout of clinical depression and comes back as Torn — the brutality of her death overshadowed the misery of her depression. Another kills himself in the same circumstances and comes back as Stricken — the act of violence was merely the punctuation mark on the long death of the soul that claimed him. A third jumps off a bridge and drowns, and he could be Torn, Stricken, or Prey. It's left to the player to choose which Threshold resonates the most, and why.

THE TORN: DEATH BY VIOLENCE

She comes back. She can't open her eyes for the longest time, but she screams, she thrashes, her fury bringing a rain of blows on the people and objects around her – the nurses in the ER, the homeless man who found her in the alley, the corpses of her fellow passengers who were on the bus with her when the blast went off, the partner who cut her down and tried to revive her. And the creature that came back with her laughs and laughs, and sinks its fingers deep in her soul, and holds on tight until she has to stop, open her eyes, and come to terms with the fact that she can't drive the monster away.

She's one of the Torn, the Bleeding Ones.

One of the Torn might have known she was going to die, or she might have had no idea. It might have been a bullet, a knife, a gas chamber, a noose, a landmine, a rain of boots to the gut. She might have ended it all. He may have walked into the wrong neighborhood. She might have just grown up poor – and that's more likely than the alternative, because most people who die of violence, no matter where in the world they are, no matter how they died, lived in poverty, and the same is true for the Torn.

A private soldier joined up because no other road opened itself up. He never had the privilege to sit in the officer's mess and got to go straight to the front, straight into the meat grinder. A civilian victim of the same conflict was never going to be able to leave the war zone that ate her home. She might have been one of those countless women who suffer the most when the victorious armies rolled in and the soldiers came looking for payback and their own kind of fun. A teenage boy got a rocket launcher he barely knew how to use thrust into his hands, and was shot dead, pow, a statistic listed under "estimated insurgent casualties" before he even got to shoot a single rocket.

Poverty makes victims closer to home. Too many cities collapse under the weight of urban violence and the poverty that made it. One of the Torn was the target of a drive-by. Another was collateral damage in a dealer's shoot-out, or shot in the head before she even knew what was happen-



*The Bleeding Ones, Victims of Malice,
Marked by Murder and Conflict,
Chosen of the Red Horseman*

ing by one of her enemies or one of her friends. Or a police officer shot another man on the street before he could even show them he had no gun, and said he was resisting arrest. Another owned a convenience store – some junkie blew her face to pieces because he thought she was going for a shotgun she didn't even have. A man's third crime in a hard-line three-strikes state turned out to be the impassioned stabbing of the man he was trying to rob on the street. He went to the chair, and when the geist found him, he crawled out of the morgue.

The very rarest of Torn were affluent. The rich have an insulation against violent death, but a rich man might have shot himself when his stocks dissolved. She might

have been poisoned, or stabbed, or shot by a jealous spouse or colleague. He might have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, robbed on the street and stabbed before he could even protest.

Something *else* might have done the deed: the guts of one torn out by a ravening beast that looked for all the world like a wolf – but the last wolf here died out a hundred years ago. An artery emptied of every drop of blood, sucked out by a dead man. A neck snapped by a single blow from the fist of a patchwork monster.

So many deaths, commonplace, tawdry, planned, sudden. And from each the Torn come back with the capacity to face the violence that soaks the world and change it.

A Bleeding One might have an astounding capacity for vengeance, and an even more uncanny ability to inspire others to join him in that vengeance. Another engages in a relentless pursuit of cold eye-for-an-eye justice. An old, cold-eyed man has a penchant for the kind of bloody escalation that causes people to forget completely who started things off in the first place.

Just as many face that violence in a very different way. A Torn who bears marks very like the stigmata shows a talent for bringing an end to violence. She brings about reconciliation through example, or sacrifice, or force of personality. She might be so pure in her rejection of violence, even while



*"Deserve" doesn't have anything to do with it.
That's how it is. Just not how it has to be.*

the creature that sits on her shoulder howls for satisfaction, that the only sensible word for her is “saint.”

Is this the thing that caused the Geist of a Bleeding One to choose him over anyone else? It’s impossible to say. She might have been a vicious killer or a tireless peace worker before she died. Or she might have been no more remarkable in this than anyone else. Maybe a Torn always had this capacity and didn’t know it. Maybe the experience of rebirth changed the Sin-Eater and made him capable of more than he ever was before his rebirth. It’s academic. In being or becoming a person who meets violence head-on and changes it, a Torn attracted and fused with a Geist shaped by murder and conflict and comes back with a direction, a path that must be followed *now*. It almost doesn’t matter at all what the Torn did before he died. Everything he does is about the present, the now. He has these powers *now*. He must raise his fists or turn the other cheek *now*.

The Torn have the resources — innate, born of the experience of dying, it doesn’t matter — to choose, violence or the transcendence of violence, capitulation to the endless cycle of killing and pain, or the fight for a better way. The ghosts of the murdered call to the Torn and torment their Geists. Each can only respond.

Does the Bleeding One bring forgiveness or destruction? Does she end the cycle gracefully or blast it apart forever? Either way, it’s a free choice, but the violence must be addressed. It demands a response, and the ghosts born of it must be dealt with, one way or the other.

In dreams, every one of the Torn bleeds and bruises in a different way each night, fights the Geist that follows her, kills and dies in sleep a dozen times an hour. Come the day, the Bleeding One stands for a principle. She faces the violence in the world head-on.

Marks and Signs: A Torn often feels drawn to mark who he was with the paraphernalia of a violent world, colored perhaps by the way he died.

He might have a penchant for militaria: old army badges worn in unconventional places, bits of old-fashioned dress uniforms from wars long gone, army caps, battered boots, or torn and patched fatigues stitched together and worn until they fall to pieces for good. She may have died on the streets, and still adopts the style of the street, with all the aggressive glamour of the gang soldiers who drip with gold and guns. Maybe she wears the colors of a gang that hasn’t existed for years, almost as a means of tempting fate: the bandana says *come and get me*. It says *I have survived*.

An icy-cold Torn who fully embraces violence as a means to his end might take great care in choosing arms: an antique Webley with a handle of inlaid ivory, a Civil War cavalry saber kept in polished, pristine condition, engraved with the name of a soldier long-dead. It could be something more current: a butterfly knife plated with silver and inlaid with the name of a dear one, a Ruger semi-automatic with a mother-of-pearl handle, or a set of brass knuckles engraved with intricate patterns and kept polished to a bright shine. It could be something rougher that still bears a personal touch, weird violent folk-art like a chair leg hand-carved with verses and images from Scripture.

Blades and bullets feature quite heavily in the imagery that the Torn share. They appear on T-shirts, business cards, and jewelry. The Torn sometimes appropriate other violent stereotypes of media and folk legend, but the image never seems to come out quite right, either through some conscious or unconscious irony or a lack of conviction in the stereotype. A tobacco-stained faux-Mafioso’s suit seems almost too shabby to hang on his shoulders. A trench-coated cowboy seems too heavily covered with dust, even in the middle of the city. An ersatz martial arts hero with chiseled, defined muscles sports always-fresh cuts and deep, deep scars across his wrists and chest.

In other parts of the world, some of the stereotypes hold; others don’t. One Japanese Torn wears a brightly patterned shirt. Look closer, look a second time, and see the symbols of death worked subtly into the print, a woven pattern in a shirt, or on a headscarf, or printed into something abstract on a T-shirt, so that you have to look twice before you see it.

Character Creation: Torn characters often favor Social Attributes as much as Physical Attributes: a high proportion of the Torn are instigators as much as performers. A lot of them do favor Physical Skills. A Sin-Eater who was never really physically oriented in life may feel led to learn how to defend herself, or just get better at running away.

Wrath is a common Vice among the Torn. It’s obvious, really — forced into this existence through violence, it’s easy to lash out. It’s easy, with the dreams and the flashbacks, to develop a core of anger. Many of the Torn want to put things right, and Justice is a common Virtue... but so is Charity. It makes sense for some of the Torn to have Fighting Style Merits, but the Inspiring Merit is disproportionately common.

Geists: The Torn often attract vengeful Geists, bloodied Geists, vicious Geists. Their Geists often have something of the victim about them. Of all the Sin-Eaters, a Torn finds it hardest to come to terms with the creature that almost possesses him.

A drug dealer’s teenage runner, killed in a drive-by shooting joins with the specter of a thin man, face hidden under a blood-drenched hooded sweater, bleeding constantly, leaving behind a smell of cordite and poverty. The Geist drives the runner to find the man who shot him, but every gang soldier he finds and maims or kills takes him further from his initial goal, even though the boy lays to rest every ghost that these men created in his vengeance.

A prostitute murdered in a backstreet and left to bleed out attracts a skinless woman with knives on her fingers and wire for hair. The Geist cries out for revenge against innocent and guilty alike. She inspires the vengeful spectral legions of murdered and abused women to take their revenge and find a kind of completion.

Here’s a merchant banker who shot himself when his stocks dwindled to nothing and his wife found about his affair: a whispering ghost made of what seems like money and old rope torments him, drives him to find other potential suicides — the ones whom he thinks, like him, don’t deserve to live — and urge them on, creating new ghosts and forcing them to pass on.





A private soldier who stood next to an exploding bus in Basra carries with him a weird composite thing made of a hundred innocent voices. They constantly scream and weep in English and Hebrew and Arabic. Perhaps it was this Geist who compelled the soldier to lay down his gun forever and seek a better way. He defeats the ghosts of war now, and keeps them from feeding from further conflict.

A man's terrorized wife puts rat poison in his chilli. Awakening on a hospital gurney covered with his own bloody feces, he vows to reform. But reformation doesn't come easy. The specter of a bruised woman with shards of glass embedded in her bloodied face whispers that he'll never be forgiven. His wife and kids aren't going to forgive him, anyway. She got acquitted, and he's under a restraining order keeping him a mile away from his family. The whispering woman's getting to him. He takes out his frustration on the ghosts of abusers and bullies. He does everything he can for the ghosts of victims, but it's thankless. They don't thank him either.

A quiet man, an office worker, is one of thirty people on the train when the terrorists blow it up, but he's the only one who walks away. He's differ-

ent now, cold-eyed and vicious, and the shredded boy who walks alongside him approves. The only thing that matters is vengeance. It doesn't matter on whom.

Deathsight: It comes violently: everything looks normal for a moment, and then comes a brief, blinding headache. It passes, leaving behind the thinnest film of blood over the Sin-Eater's eyes. And now, the dead appear in all their bloody glory. Every contusion, every cut, every bullet hole, it all appears clearer than the day, in impossible Technicolor detail. Wounds still ooze. Bruises appear in a rainbow of sickening colors. The telltale froth of poisoning coats lips and spatters spectral clothing. The same goes for the marks the Torn themselves bear: bright, gory evidence of exactly what kind of murders took them.

Keys: Stigmata or Passion

Concepts: Murdered housewife turned martyr, pacifist deserter from the military, executed felon striving for reformation, postal worker with an arsenal, Gandhian ex-gangster, crossfire-caught peace campaigner turned avenger, formerly corrupt police officer, crusading attorney.

STEREOTYPES

The Silent: So what, you want more stuff? You came back from the dead, and all you want is *stuff*?

The Stricken: Nah, it's okay. After the things I saw, there isn't anything can sicken me.

The Prey: I get it. Although I don't see how it's any better when they don't mean it.

The Forgotten: For the last time. We are going *this* way. I do not care what your intuition tells you. I have a job to do.

Vampires: You're all violence. It defines you. I face it. And that means I'm going to have to take you. Bring it.

Werewolves: I hope I give you indigestion.

Mages: If I had pulled the trigger just then, there wouldn't be a single magic spell that could have saved you. Think on that.

Mortals: Just stay behind me. Stay behind me, and don't look too hard. And please, shut the fuck up.

THE SILENT: DEATH BY DEPRIVATION

He comes back. His mouth wide open, he takes a deep, juddering breath, a cry somewhere between horror, relief, and triumph. He begins to hyperventilate. His stomach cramps up and he curls up. It takes a long time for him to come to himself, and it is only when he does that he realizes just how hungry he is, just how thirsty. And the creature curled up inside that empty stomach cries out from inside, demanding to be fed.

He is one of the Silent, the Starving Ones, and he died from deprivation and came back in need. Silent because he joined the multitude of the starved, who die in their thousands every second of every day.

A Silent Sin-Eater died in desperate poverty, one of a million victims of a famine that could have been avoided if only the rich had the concern to do something and the courage to antagonize the government where she lived. Another still slept rough on the streets of a big city near you, and kept her dignity, even above the simple supply of basic needs. She starved on a restaurant doorstep and came back to life in the dumpster the staff left her in rather than call the cops and have the place shut down. Cops throw a man into a prison cell in some town in the southwest for a burglary he didn't commit, and think they'll teach him a lesson for protesting so loudly. They leave him there for three days, and in that time he dies of thirst and comes right back again, ready to take whatever they've got to throw at him.

An old man suffocates thanks to the carbon monoxide leaking from a gas pipe in his son's house. A man suffering from the worst rhinovirus anyone knows about gets tied up and gagged with a sock by a burglar. As he suffocates because his nose is so badly blocked, he thinks: *what a stupid way to go*. And something hears him, makes him awaken among the splintered remains of a chair and pieces of torn rope, breathing more freely than he ever has for years.

Another Starving One was killed by another sort of hunger: the bottle took him right from the day he decided that he couldn't cope with college anymore and killed him before he was even thirty. The teenage daughter of a good



The Starved Ones, Victims of Neglect, Marked by Starvation and Need, Chosen of the Black Horseman

suburban family ended up sleeping in a squat. She shot up with badly cut heroin one time too many and still feels the agony running through her veins every hour of every day.

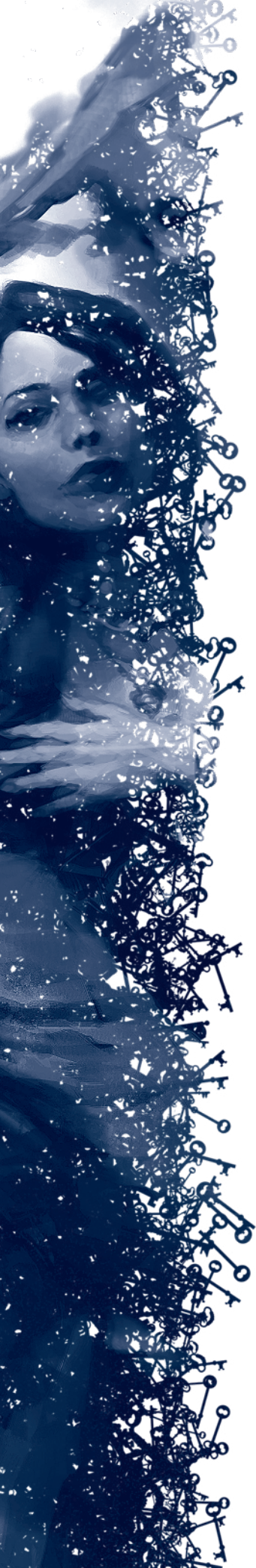
Why a hungry geist picks a dying man or woman is hard to say. In the end, these creatures have inexplicable, consuming appetites and it seems that something about the person and the way he or she dies draws the geist, nourishes it in some way. Maybe the final release of life-energy at the climax of a slow, drawn-out death is exquisitely tasty. Maybe the creature is drawn unwillingly by urges it cannot understand to a hungry soul with which it must join.

Whatever the geist's reasons, coming back from this sort of death alters the

Silent One in one important way: he is now able to endure things he could never have dealt with before.

The starving so often go quietly, robbed of the means of living, robbed of the energy to protest, robbed of a voice. They say the suffocated man or the starving man experiences a weird kind of peace in the moment before he dies. The Sin-Eater retains that peace and brings it back from the Underworld with him. He has died, and he has come back. He's still here. He can take anything.

How that manifests itself in behavior depends upon the Sin-Eater. One of the Silent develops something approaching a level, zen-like calm, even while his friends are running and screaming around him. Another becomes cock-sure and blasé about the dangers she faces: *bring it on*, she says to the world. Another becomes an enigma, reacting to the horrors, sufferings, and dangers he faces in a bizarre, withdrawn manner. He doesn't talk much, even for one of the Silent — and every one of these Sin-Eaters justifies the name "Silent," not only in respect of the metaphorical voicelessness that comes from true poverty and degradation, but also in respect that you can tell a Silent Sin-Eater because he really doesn't talk much. His demeanor might be sullen, or enigmatic, or saintly, or haughty. He might bark the few things he has to say or whisper them. But he speaks when he has something to say, which is far less than most people think.



No thanks. I'm good.

Even though a Starving One cannot express it in words, the geist that joined with her at the final extremity of deprivation makes the Starving One *need*, more keenly than she ever has before. But it's a different need. It's like this: the Sin-Eater needs to find, to see, and to experience the restless dead. She needs to see the underworld. Death has become an addiction for her.

In her dreams, the Silent Sin-Eater finds herself returning each night to a vast, empty edifice that — in the way that dreams make sense when you're dreaming — is within her, as if her body is a labyrinthine, decrepit building that she explores, a new room and corridor every time, each housing a lost friend, or a dead enemy. Maybe this is what the Underworld looks like.

Marks and Signs: A Silent Sin-Eater doesn't usually fuss too much about what he wears. His clothes are hardwearing, and often cheap and simple. The Silent Sin-Eater keeps hair short and austere, and has no time for grooming products or make-up. The tokens that reveal a Bound's true nature are subtle: in the West, measuring scales, weights and measures are a common motif (the scales are the symbol of the Black Horseman in the Book of Revelation). An American Starving One has a tattoo on the nape of her neck, easily visible beneath the line of her brutally short hair, showing a simple, stylized pair of scales. Another Sin-Eater wears a conservative off-the-peg suit and has the sign of the scales on his tie pin. Hardly anyone asks him about it. Most people think it's the sign of some sort of lodge. A Silent One working on a building site wears it on a T-shirt he designed himself and had printed at the store down the street. A social worker whose work takes her to the most deprived places imaginable wears it on a pendant.

A big bruiser of a man, a former boxer who killed himself with alcohol, carries as his weapon of choice two one-kilogram measuring weights linked together on a chain. A reformed addict who works in a half-way house has the symbol carved into his arm. A young woman who withered away from heartbreak now wears the symbol in her locket to fill the void that silenced her.

Character Creation: Silent characters often come, almost by definition, from deprived backgrounds, backgrounds where hunger and addiction are normative. A Silent Sin-Eater may not have had much of an opportunity to receive a full education: although exceptions exist, Mental Skills are very rarely primary. Silent characters endure a lot of things, and have the capacity to endure more: they favor Resistance Attributes above others — Composure, Resolve, and Stamina. Physical traits get more attention than Mental Attributes (a likely lack of education doesn't preclude being smart).

The most common Virtues among the Silent are Fortitude and Temperance, while the most common Vices are Envy and Lust.

Geists: A Silent Sin-Eater endures his geist for the longest time before coming to terms with it. She and the creature communicate grudgingly, their mutual resentment and dependence never really developing into real anger.

A young woman, not even out of her teens, dies of hunger on the streets of the big city where she thought she'd find a new start. Her geist, when it appears, seems to be the creeping edge of some shadowy, decrepit, labyrinthine building made of concrete and broken glass: turn a corner within it and be lost, forever. It speaks to her through whispers that seem to come from empty corridors, behind cracked windows. It reaches out with shadows. She always seems to find herself in places where the building seems to fit, and finds ghosts for the geist to eat.

A middle-aged man who died after overdosing on the over-the-counter painkillers he was addicted to finds himself accompanied by a geist who looks a little like him, only older, and with blank orbs of alabaster for eyes, and with a hundred rusty needles in place of teeth. He's always hungry.

A young man with a shamanic calling went on a vision quest in the middle of a desert somewhere, and died of thirst. He came back out of the desert with a geist that resembles nothing more than a sphere of howling nothingness, a creature that sucks in light and hope in equal measure, but has as yet failed to consume his hope. Resolutely cheerful, he taps the creature's powers over and over again.

A junkie who died and returned to life after shooting up in the back seat of a stolen car on the side of the highway has to live alongside a six-armed trash goddess, a hotshotted heroin-chic named Kali, with sunken cheeks and scabs on her lips and filthy sweat pants. The junkie leads a recovery group that has almost become a cult of personality: she manipulates her followers with promises of methadone and less-permitted substances, and threats of terrible fates if they leave or tell. No one seems to get to the end of the program, but none of the addicts who come to her is haunted anymore, and none of them leave the group willingly.

A region in the developing world is struck with civil war; the war inevitably causes famine, and among the famine's millions of victims, no one notices a young woman who passes from refugee camp to refugee camp, until finally she winds up crossing the ocean and seeking asylum in the West. No one noticed when she died, and no one notices her now. She's just another migrant. The geist that brought her back from dying of hunger in the old country is something primal, something old and empty. It appears as a hollow woman's skin flayed and tanned and removed in one continuous winding strip. When she uses its powers, it winds around her, covers her, and she speaks with a different voice.

A lonely, unemployed man who died alone in his apartment for no reason, starved of hope and human companionship as much as food, experiences a second lease on life in some respects, finding companions and seeking out the loneliest and most tragic of the dead. He gives them some sort of resolution. He's still forgettable, and people still don't really see him. His geist is a kind of absence, a nothing that surrounds him in a psychic vacuum, and which communicates only in terms of absences, of the things you didn't hear said, of the things you didn't see.



A Sin-Eater who died of anorexia cannot bear to look at the geist that follows her, which looks nothing more than an upright pig: grossly fat, covered with blood and bits of half-eaten food, with eyes like tiny holes that go down forever.

Deathsight: The sight comes slowly, like the dawning of hunger, and brings with it a gradual appearance of decay and deprivation. A Sin-Eater looks impossibly thin, with skin that appears dry and cracked. A fly lands without being brushed off, or hungry shadows circle in the air far above, their cries impossible to

avoid for the one who can see. Ghosts look threadbare, empty, distant. The sight of a ghost might make a Silent One feel hungry, thirsty, or short of breath.

Keys: Stillness or Cold Wind

Concepts: Recovering alcoholic with a coffee obsession, forgotten elderly loner, once-imprisoned survivor of familial abuse, survivors' group enabler, social worker, binge drinker who never seems to get drunk anymore, the lonely guy no one ever talks to, heroin-chic fashion model, refugee, homeless wino who talks to more than himself.

STEREOTYPES

Torn: You can fight it and fight it, but it won't change a damn thing.

Stricken: You've got an idea about what waste means, I think.

Prey: Some things you just have to leave. Maybe there is no point. Have you ever thought of that?

Forgotten: But then again, maybe there is a point. Why default to despair?

Vampires: Christ. There but for the grace...

Werewolves: You're so hungry, and you've no way to help that. What the hell can you do?

Mages: Some things can't be beaten. Even with magic.

Mortals: You have so much. Why are you taking it for granted?

THE PREY: DEATH BY NATURE

She comes back, vomiting water or the tears in her flesh knitting in lumpy white scar tissue and the eaten parts of her body growing back in a new pale unhealthy form, or her skull regaining its shape and reforming and her arms and legs knitting together in almost the same shapes they were in before, or the blackness almost leaves the bloated arm, retreats to the flesh around the bite. Time goes backwards and suddenly she is whole again. Nature gave her back. Nature didn't have any choice in the matter.

Call the cause of her death natural causes. Call it an act of God. But the manner of her resurrection makes her one of the Prey, the Eaten Ones, the Drowned Ones. Nature killed her, the way it one day will kill everyone.

The world has a massive, inescapable cycle, an order — or at least it's all but irresistible for an Eaten One to think in those terms. One travels lonely roads and paths further from the beaten track, seeking out patterns in the way that people die. He follows hurricanes and twisters, draws intricate casualty maps, aiming to show the way Gaia claims her dead. He looks for the ghosts, trying to figure out how they fit into that same pattern, and bringing to rest those whose deaths weren't part of the plan — but were any of them?

Another aims to understand a bigger picture, trying to work out how all this life and death and resurrection, how all the monsters and demons and spirits and ghosts and people getting on with their lives are part of the vast system that surrounds us. The myth of Eden can't be taken literally: things have to die for life to survive, and the freaks and monsters are all part of that. Maybe that means laying a ghost for the sake of truly understanding it. But just as often, it means knowing what it is and where it comes from. It means finding its final meaning.

Even the geists, in all their appalling ferocity, are the products of nature, and in a twisted way, a sign of the way that Nature has her loopholes. Nature gives second chances, just like people do.



The Eaten and Drowned Ones,
Victims of the Elements,
Marked by Claw, Wave and Earth,
Chosen of the Pale Horseman

Nothing is more natural than dying, even if nature ends lives before they've done with living. And these untimely but "natural" deaths arrive in all sorts of ways.

A man was in a rented beach-house with his family when the tsunami hit. His wife, his children, his house, it swept them all away. And when the water went down, only he was left to mourn and live, alongside the watery fury that brought him back. Or maybe they were buried under thousands of tons of masonry when the fault line moved, crushed beyond recognition, except for him. Or maybe they were under the house when the hurricane hit.

One drowned, falling from the boat and sinking like a stone, found by the coast guard floating face down on the water and be-

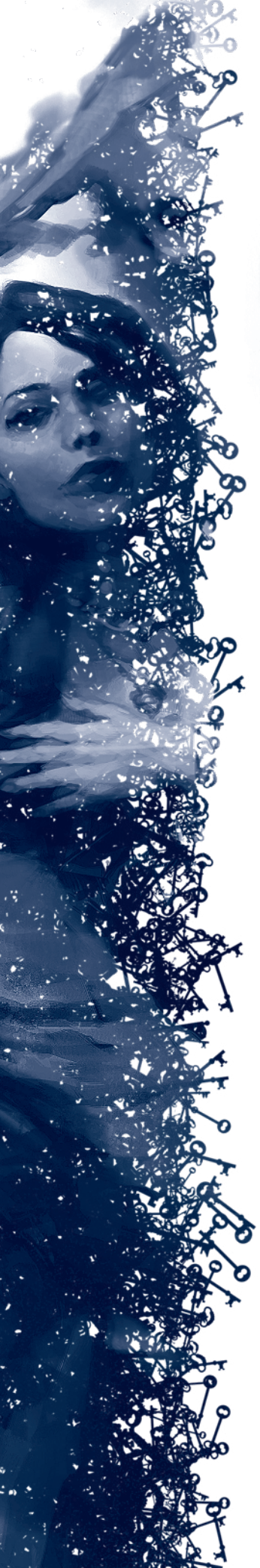
ing impossibly alive after days in the open.

A hiker goes up the side of a mountain and expires of hypothermia when the blizzard rises. He comes back not long before the search party finds him. He loses two fingers to the frostbite, but otherwise he's none the worse for wear.

A young woman spends three days on the streets and fails to find a warm place to stay on the wettest, windiest night of the year. She dies of exposure on the steps of a theater, and the rich patrons step right over her to get to their taxis.

Another vagrant gets half-eaten by stray dogs as he lies in a drunken stupor, unable to fight them off and dies of blood loss. Or maybe it was the rats that got him, gnawing at his extremities, leaving him a bloodied mess that nonetheless returns in the morning to some sort of scarred, pinkish wholeness.

She was getting back to nature, and she set up her tent too close to an ant hill, and the ants burrowed a gory corridor directly to her heart, and ate out her insides. Or she disturbed Africanized bees while walking through the woodlands and the cloud outpaced her and stung her two or three hundred times, leaving her to die of toxic shock,



See? The rocks fell and broke his bones the same way they broke hers... and his. Every time. Every time, a pattern.

surrounded by dozens of tiny corpses, twitching just like her. She came back and finished her trip a day late, and the buzzing will never leave her again.

A perfectly ordinary man walks home from the bar and something big and vicious and unknown tears him to pieces, unseen by anyone: one of those big cats that they say got loose in the 1970s and started breeding loose in the wild, perhaps, or something even bigger and less mundane. He comes to himself in the alley the thing dragged his corpse into, his clothes in rags, a whole 24 hours lost to him.

A pet shop clerk puts his hand in a snake cage, not experienced enough to know that the wrong kind of snake is in there. One bite later, and the dizziness and the swelling, and he collapses in the staff lavatory. He wakes up in the dark, in a cold pool of his own vomit long after the boss has locked up and gone, and his hand is still black and always will be.

Another tries to clean out the junk in her back garden and puts her arm straight on top of a black widow. And another still, an environmentalist on a trip to the Brazilian rain forest, brushes her hand across the back of some terribly rare species of tree frog, and dies before her friends can get her back to base camp... except in the morning she's all right.

The further afield you go, the more things can eat you, or crush you, or drown you: bears, lions, sharks, alligators, cougars, and other creatures rarer and more dangerous still. Avalanches and mudslides can swallow a man before he even knows what hit him. An active volcano lets out a single blast of superheated air at the wrong moment, and a woman's lungs are charred instantly from the inside, a black coat covering cooked meat. Even animals that don't eat meat can be fatal: a bull gores a wannabe rodeo rider in the stomach; a hippopotamus — never the friendly, funny animal from children's books — pursues, crushes, and chews an unwise zoo visitor who thinks he'll get a better picture if he climbs into the enclosure; a moose batters into tender steaks a woman who tries to get it to move off the road.

Maybe it's because these deaths seem so random and sudden that a Prey makes such an effort to find a pattern. Perhaps he finds some sort of evolutionary principle at work. Perhaps instead it's a question of something more numinous, more like a divine system at work. It doesn't matter if these things don't make any real sense. It doesn't matter if observation doesn't bear these things out. What matters to the Sin-Eater is the appearance of a pattern. He sees a cycle not only of life, but of death. The ghosts are a sign that the cycle continues in some way beyond death, and the Underworld is part of the world.

In his dreams, the Sin-Eater runs, constantly, outrunning falling stones and rushing waters, eluding beasts and swarms. Where is he going? He doesn't know. He'll know when he gets there.

Marks and Signs: In the Western occult tradition, the Pale Horseman is Death himself, bearer of the scythe, accompanied by Hades, empowered to clear one-fourth of the Earth of life. The Grim Reaper is a common element in dress and paraphernalia — painted on the back of a leather

jacket or on a motorcycle, or on the hood of a car, all flames and laughing skull and shining scythe. More obliquely, the number four gets some use, tattooed on the nape of a young woman's neck, or represented by four marks on the knuckles of a man's left hand, or blazoned on the front or every one of the dozen sweat shirts, football shirts and T-shirts the Sin-Eater wears, or carved into his calf with razors to leave a vivid scar.

One of the Prey might find some perverse comfort in carrying around some part of an animal — a lucky rabbit foot, or a fly in amber on a chain, or a shark tooth, or an unbroken wishbone in a box. Another might carry around a handful of polished stones in his pocket, which he jingles together when he is deep in thought. Animal skulls are a common heraldry here, or emblems of poisonous nature such as spider webs and black widow hourglasses.

Another Sin-Eater, who has something of a fetish for empirical observation, always carries around an antique pair of binoculars, and perhaps some other scientific tool, like a pair of dividers, or an old round compass. A krew composed wholly of Prey all carry notebooks and pencils, and fill them with observations that make no sense to anyone but themselves.

Drowned Ones and Eaten Ones who go armed tend to prefer to carry around hand-crafted weapons and tools, of every kind of quality, from a beloved cudgel roughly carved from a torn-off tree branch right through to a lovingly-made machete with an intricate bone handle.

Character Creation: The Prey really can be anyone, from any background at all. Mother Nature is not fussy about whom she kills. After his resurrection, an Eaten One likely develops his Physical Attributes, although Composure and Wits are often high. The Prey don't really have any preference for a category of Skills. Pretty much any Skill might have use — Science is just as likely as Athletics, and Empathy might be developed just as much as Brawl.

The most common Virtues among the Prey are Fortitude and Justice, both Virtues common in those who see patterns in the world. The most common Vices are Sloth and Lust.

Geists: The geist belonging to an Eaten One seems somehow more elemental than other geists. A lot of geists left behind their human appearance long ago, but these creatures don't appear ever to have been human at all. The Prey react to the geists that inhabit them as being dangerous creatures that they must elude and outwit, like a smart outdoorsman outwits the pack of wild dogs on his tail.

The man who lost his family in the tsunami returns with an invisible monkey on his shoulder, which leaps and bites and foams and screeches and sometimes talks to him in a high-pitched sing-song voice.

The mountaineer now seems to have what amounts to a small storm cloud gathering around her and beside her, a black lightning cloud with black empty eyes and mouth, and huge fists on the end of dark, brooding appendages.

A predatory creature, a biped with a snarling maw and soulless eyes and a still-bleeding leather jacket sewn straight onto its chest, accompanies the man who was eaten on his



way home from the bar and intimidates him into seeking out the meanings in the world around him and the ghosts that validate those meanings.

A huge, clicking thing that looks almost entirely unlike a giant wasp or bee and almost as much unlike a woman licks at the girl who it accompanies with a long honey-sweet proboscis tongue. And every time, it makes her shudder, but she knows that the geist's sting is at her disposal, if only she will allow it to kiss her.

A demonic bipedal pig thing never talks to the lonely, quiet man it haunts. He battles it as much as he draws from its filthy, vile power. Even when he cannot see the thing, he can hear it padding on the border of his consciousness.

Another geist appears as a never-ending hail of stones. It grasps with arms made of shale. It speaks through the clatter of falling gravel.

A torn-up, half-eaten man, representing something not unlike the death of the once-homeless man it brought back, seems to revel in seeing the ghosts of people who died just like its Sin-Eater did.

A tall, sinuous thing like a screaming flesh-tree wraps its bleeding branches around the limbs of the woman who died of exposure. Its roots reach into her stomach, curl around her neck, and dig into her brain. It's always there. She can't bear to be touched anymore.

A woman once crushed under a rockslide finds herself followed by a geist resembling a person so ruined as to be of indeterminate in gender, a bag of raw meat and broken bones, razor-sharp shards of bone protruding from the flesh at desperately painful angles. Its every movement makes the sounds of crunching and grating shards of bone, tearing flesh, gurgling blood. Its voice is smothered under blood, difficult to understand under a shredded tongue. It speaks, and it's almost too terrible to hear.

A man reduced to a weird bestial form, with his fingernails like bird claws and his hair matted like feathers and his skin carrying the thick, hard under-the-skin layer of black that the long-time homeless have crawls grotesquely on hands and calloused knees behind a lonely man like some unwanted, abused hound. He — it — can only make the sounds of a beast.

Deathsight: The visions that beset the Prey never go away, and the scars, crushed limbs, ends of broken bones and punished meat that they reveal appear more solid and full than the true sights they cover.

Keys: Primeval or Grave-Dirt

Concepts: Animal rights protester gored by ungrateful zoo animal, unsuccessful big game hunter, cross-country skier with poor sense of direction, deep sea diver, extreme naturalist, crazy cat lady, amateur geologist, disaster tourist, cryptozoologist.

STEREOTYPES

Torn: You have to understand that violence is part of the Plan. Trying to do something about it is completely missing the point.

Silent: You have the right attitude, I guess. But aren't you *curious*?

Stricken: No! You have to respect it. It's not something you control. You can't.

Forgotten: It's sudden, yes. But there *is* a point. There has to be.

Vampires: You're not half as unnatural as you seem to think you are, friend.

Werewolves: What are you going to do? Eat me again?

Mages: That's cheating.

Mortals: There *is* meaning; but not like that. But you have to be there. And I wouldn't wish that on you.

THE STRICKEN: DEATH BY PESTILENCE

She comes back with a scream, convulses, hands fluttering at her sides, drool flying from her mouth, her eyes almost perfectly circular discs of sightless white. It ends, and when she blinks and looks around her, she moves with a grace she never had before she died; she stands and has the look of someone who has defeated a terrible enemy. And the geist that came back with her whispers: *you have conquered; you have more to conquer still.*

Stricken and destroyed by sickness or poison, but a conqueror of its effects. She has survived, and having survived, she will overcome the conditions of this world and triumph. The figure of the White Horseman, Pestilence, bears a bow and crown. He conquers. He rules over all he sees. And the Stricken rule over him.

It's usual to talk about a battle against life-threatening disease, and while a Ravaged One knows that for most people, it's just an empty cliché ¶ it either gets you or you don't and it's not really up to you what it does ¶ for the Sin-Eater it has some meaning. Pestilence got him, but now has the capacity to win other battles, not least the battle against the inner foe, the monster that leans on his shoulder, hides in his veins. But the victory comes ¶ so the Sin-Eater understands ¶ through side-stepping death. The Sin-Eater comes out on top with finesse and grace, and maybe a little duplicity. If the Silent Sin-Eater beats Death by enduring it and coming out the other end of it, the Stricken One challenges the Horseman to a game of chess and wins by swapping some of the pieces around when the Adversary is momentarily distracted.

The penchant for finding winning solutions, then, is the one thing that the Stricken can be said to have in common with each other. Certainly, "pestilence" is a vast catch-all term for any number of different ways to die.

Bacterial infections and viruses can claim us in any number of ways from the exotic to the mundane. The common cold rarely gets bad enough to take someone's life, but here's a man – a policeman, maybe, or a soldier – brought low by injuries sustained in the line of duty and



*The Ravaged Ones, Victims of Plague,
Marked by Poison, Virus and Bacterium,
Chosen of the White Horseman*

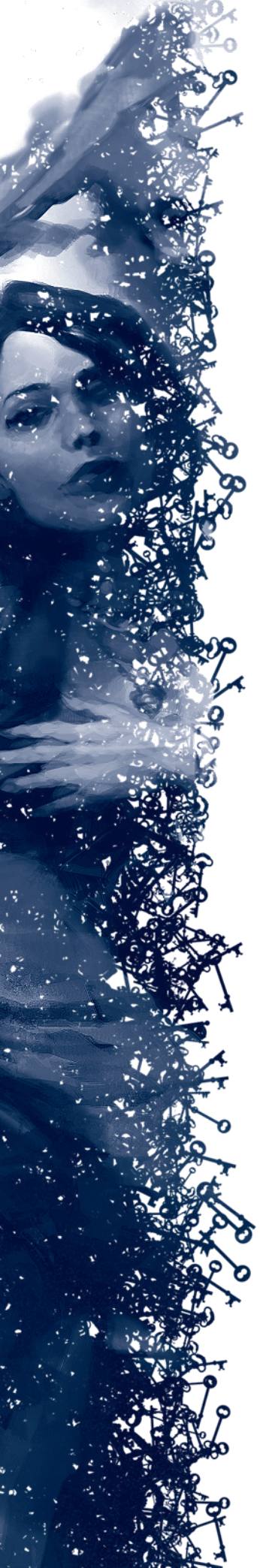
run down by fatigue. He gets a little blast of the bug that's been going around, and he's dead and cold and back in the land of the living before anyone at the hospital even knows. For that matter, hospitals are the quintessential home of secondary infections. Respiratory infections claim old and young alike (a young woman recovers from an appendectomy just fine, only the pneumonia gets her the night before she comes home). Other, nastier infections have become more and more powerful, more immune to treatment – some might even say supernaturally so. A fighting-fit man in overnight for a routine removal of some stitches he got a few weeks before catches MRSA and ends up dying in intensive

care, and the IV and the drugs and the oxygen mask do no good at all. And a brutal infection eats a woman's face from the inside out, opens out her stomach to the open air. She dies; she returns with her flesh knitted together with the most garish scars.

Other diseases hide in the trappings of our everyday lives, catch us when we don't expect it. Eat a bad egg or a bit of uncooked chicken, get salmonella. Eat the wrong burger – watch the CJD reduce your brain to a useless spongiform mess, before the creature comes and wraps its tendrils around the useless lump of offal in your head and turns it into something that works once more, in its way. Things like bird flu don't cross over to humans as much as people seem to think they do, but sometimes it's these bizarre, tragic ways to die that seem to attract the geists to the Stricken: the one-in-a-million farm worker who gets the plague from the dying chicken that pecks him in the hand as he tries to take it out of the coop is a prime subject for a geist's attentions.

Sometimes it's the injustice of it all that brings the geist calling. Or the justice of it all. Or both at the same time.

A married man at a business conference, far away from home, picks up a girl one night, and he finds her gone in the morning. He goes to wash and finds "Welcome to the HIV club" scrawled on the hotel room mirror in bloody red



*I fought the laws of the universe,
and the laws lost.*

lipstick. He got full-blown AIDS and died of it within a year, except he can't have had it at all — the doctors must have been mistaken — because he reached the lowest point and then by some bizarre occurrence got better, all at once.

The tireless aid worker who's first on the scene seems to have had Ebola — but it can't have been, it must have been something very like it, because after the vomiting of the blood and the voiding of the bowels, she just gets better. The four months in quarantine she has to sit through convince the medical workers that she's perfectly healthy and that they never, ever want to meet her again. She goes home, without a job, or at least without a paying one.

Sometimes the pestilence comes from within. The Z-list celebrity makes sure the cameras are following her every step of the way as she dies of stomach cancer, all the way through the chemo and the hair loss and the failure of her body, because having them watch her dying is better than *not* having them watch her at all. They lose interest after she has the miracle against-all-odds recovery, and the paparazzi and the TV cameras start shunning her. Cancer comes in any number of forms: lung cancer, throat cancer, melanomas, testicular cancer, brain tumors, cervical cancer, breast cancer... it's almost as if each kind is its own creature, with its own sentience, its own desires, the way they talk about it in the hospitals and in the medical pages.

Psychological illnesses can kill you indirectly, but sometimes the relationship a Sin-Eater and a Sin-Eater's geist has with the depression or delusory illness that made her stop eating or take an overdose or jump in front of a train makes all the difference. Psychological illness is a common companion, and if a geist replaces the tragic, delusory voices the Sin-Eater had before, who's to notice?

Poisoning is a brother to pestilence. A worker in a nuclear power station gets a freak blast from a damaged reactor that the authorities covered up rather than spend the money to fix — he's all right for a day, and his body ceases to work, and then he gets up and he's fighting fit, and the management breathe a sigh of relief and say, look, there's nothing wrong with our reactor. He's fine.

A whole village gets dangerous levels of aluminum in its water supply. People's hair turns green, sickness and cancers follow. Only one person dies of it in the short term, and she comes right back, still stuck with the sickly greenish tint in hair that once was golden.

Coming out through the other side of death, the Stricken Sin-Eater understands that survival is an active thing. The Ravaged One does not endure: her survival is an active thing, and that survival brings with it a supernatural grace. She looks upon the existence of the unquiet dead as a challenge, a puzzle to solve, an adversary against whom to pit herself. The geist drives her to see the dead as a challenge, and in return, the Sin-Eater engages in a battle of will and wits for ultimate control of her soul.

In her dreams, she imagines that she stands on the edge of a precipice, and that everyone she has ever loved rushes towards her and past her into the bottomless black. She can only catch a few. Who does she catch? How to find a solution?

Marks and Signs: In the West, the symbols of the crown and the arrow have a common parlance: a girl with impossibly bright eyes has a knotwork crown tattooed on her shaved head; a brutal-looking, heavy-set man with the scars of necrotizing fasciitis on both cheeks has arrows tattooed on the backs of his hands; a small, bespectacled man in a bespoke suit has a small crown design woven into the collar of his shirt; a man in his early 20s who lost his hair, eyelashes, and eyebrows to chemo and never got them back wears an old tunic under his coat that once got worn by a rock-breaker on a chain gang 70 or more years ago, covered with genuine prison arrows.

Sin-Eaters all over the world sometimes adopt medical imagery, made somewhat off-kilter, somehow *wrong*. Conquest and medicine go hand in hand here: a woman in her thirties trades off the “kinky nurse” stereotype, with precipitous heels and an old-fashioned white dress that isn't really a nurse's dress so much as it looks a bit like one; a man dresses in clothes that vaguely suggest without any concrete signs a paramedic or an on-call doctor, wearing that slightly square, slightly buttoned-up style that's almost uniform.

Those Stricken who go armed more than they don't prefer the quiet, more subtle weapons: a slim pistol with a silencer, a needle-thin stiletto, an ivory-handled switchblade.

Wherever they are, whoever they are, the clothes and style can tend to be expensive, the better to fit the style of the conqueror. The femme fatale and the besuited professional come up quite a lot; on the other hand, the signs of wealth don't necessarily mean taste, and urban style, with its ostentatious chains and rings, can be just as attractive.

Character Creation: Anyone can get sick. And the Stricken can come from any background at all. Rich or poor, educated or uneducated. The *kind* of illness that killed the character is another question: most people who died of intestinal worms were not from an affluent background. Most people who died of the worst sexually transmitted diseases were highly sexually active, either because they're part of a scene in which it's common, or because they're forced to be, because it was what they did for (what passed for) a living. Many people who died of hospital-contracted infections were people who had access to hospital care (which in the US at least presupposes a certain degree of affluence).

Stricken characters often concentrate on Finesse Attributes (Dexterity, Wits, and Manipulation) and many have Social Attributes as their best category. Social Skills come out best, too, although Physical Skills can come in handy. Social Merits are common: the influence of a Stricken Sin-Eater passes through society like a plague. An uncommonly high proportion of the Stricken have a dot in the Fame Merit (because sometimes miraculous recoveries make the news: “Oh, aren't you that guy who recovered from AIDS?”)

The most common Virtues among the Stricken are Prudence and Fortitude. The most common Vices are Envy, Greed, and Lust.



Geists: A man who died alone of a virulent strain of malaria while backpacking in India comes back with a figure made of a swarm of insects that buzzes around him, forming and reforming, staring out at him through eyes made of iridescent wings, speaking to him with a tongue made of insect bodies, through teeth made of thoraxes and compound eyed heads.

A huge tumor, possessed of small round black eyes and tiny sucking mouths, travels across a woman's body, sometimes stretching out razor-sharp tendrils to grasp and lacerate.

A flamboyant transvestite is shadowed by a creature that looks just like him/her, but for the huge black compound eyes and the proboscis that sometimes flicks out from her mouth.

A woman who died of a plague that no one had caught in her city for decades wishes she could be rid of the man who has the impression if not the literal look of a massive, frothing, matted rat.

A hospital doctor who killed himself from schizophrenia-induced despair has his own nurse: a charred, eyeless corpse-woman in a bloodied and filthy nurse's uniform, grasping scalpels in both of her hands.

The aid worker who died of Ebola always seems to be slightly damp: his geist is a creature, all tentacles and watery points, apparently composed of fetid, murky water and parts of dead animals, its claws so diseased and vile they seem to shed visible motes of pestilence when they pass through the air.

A middle-aged dockworker who died after the slow, slow onset of asbestosis attracts a geist that appears as a thin man coated in choking dust. The geist talks in wheezes and coughs. It reaches forward and strangles its victims without ever touching anyone.

Deathsight: It appears in stages over the space of a few seconds, but not so you'd notice until it's too late. One minute, it's just a guy you're looking at, and the next, you can see the progress of the disease that took him, the way the bacteria or virus or poison or whatever it was spreads as if it has a weird sort of non-color all of its own. And the ghosts have a miasma around them, that same colorless hue of pestilence that breaks off in tiny wet motes of sickness all around. And the corpses have tiny little traces of the pestilence-color, buzzing around among the flies, leaving tracks in the air.

Keys: Phantasm or Tear-Stained

Concepts: Pimp who sampled the merchandise and got everything he deserved, angel of mercy who knew exactly what she was exposing herself to, ordinary Joe who never got told that he was working with toxic chemicals, crusading doctor who ironically caught HIV during some dental work, tragic celebrity cancer victim, depression suicide, thirty-a-day lung cancer sufferer, student who ate just the one bad burger, kinky nurse drag queen, chemo zombie, euthanasia advocate.

STEREOTYPES

Torn: You can't hit tuberculosis. I'm just saying.

Silent: Don't just sit there and take it. Do something about it.

Prey: Yeah, I understand exactly what happened. But I don't see why I have to bow down to it.

Forgotten: If you ever figure out how you do that, let me know, will you?

Vampires: I've dealt with worse diseases than you.

Werewolves: I saw what happened after you got bitten. You can explain it away, but it seems obvious to me.

Mages: If you're so hot, cure them. Cure them all. Show me what you have.

Mortals: Don't get too involved with me. You can't. I'm poison.

THE FORGOTTEN: DEATH BY CHANCE

She comes back, in a sudden jerk, to terror-struck wakefulness, as if leaving a nightmare. For what seems like an eternity, she lies there, feeling the thing sitting on her chest. She's felt this before, the classic hypnagogic nightmare, only this time the thing sitting on her is real, and it wants in. Even after she's joined with the thing and can move again, she can't believe her senses. She did not die. It did not happen.

But it did. She died so suddenly, so abruptly she didn't even realize it happened, and she died in such a strange and unlikely fashion that she could only attract something terrible to her, that she could only come back as one of the Forgotten, the Victims of Mischance.

Of all the deaths that the Sin-Eaters have experienced, the death of a Forgotten One is the strangest, and it seems to be these unusual deaths that attract their geists.

It might have been flying debris. A man stands in his back garden, and a chunk of ice flushed from a jet liner's toilet falls out of the air and lands on him, killing him instantly. Before the ice has even melted, before anyone notices that anything is wrong, the monster comes for him and remakes him. Or he's nearly a quarter of a mile from the attack site, but when the terrorists blow up the building, the single one-pound lump of debris that flies further than anything else hits him square between the eyes and goes two inches into his brain.

Or a car runs into a water hydrant while this man is walking past it. The hydrant flies into the air and lands on him, killing him instantly.

Her car is brand new, and she isn't to know that the juvenile squirrel whose corpse even now lies jammed up inside the chassis gnawed through the brake cable. Or the traffic lights malfunction at the crossroads, and a green light should be red. Or her car hits a cow in the middle of the night, and the cow lands on the car and crushes her, before dying itself. Or she's scared of spiders, and sees one hanging from her rear view mirror — she tries to swat it and veers in front of a bus.

Or she eats the one and only badly prepared bowl of puffer fish soup at the Japanese restaurant, gets high and



The Lightning-Struck, Victims of Misfortune, Marked by Fate's Injustice, Chosen of the Gray Horseman

walks straight in front of an articulated truck. Or a fish-bone lodges in her throat.

The man in London who doesn't realize he's just about to dig up the very last unexploded World War II bomb comes back with small white seams between the pieces the explosives blew away. Or he lives in New York and doesn't realize the hand grenade he found in his late grandfather's effects is still live.

A man takes his girlfriend up to the roof of a high building. While they're in the throes of passion, a freak gust of wind causes them both to tumble 50 stories to the ground. The girl gets up and stumbles away, bones knitting, a whispering in her ear.

Some of the deaths seem ridiculous — but is death ever a laughing matter. It's easy to laugh at the narco-

leptic window cleaner who collapses into his own bucket and drowns, or the wine grower who bangs his head and falls into his wine vat, or the farmer who tries to get rid of rabbits by wiring up a high voltage cable and electrocutes himself, but each time someone died, and each time, something terrible took its chance.

An old woman yells after the man who stole her bag, *I hope you die!* The petty thief gets fifty paces and drops dead of a heart attack. He comes to himself in the ambulance. Something sits beside him, waits patiently for him to awaken.

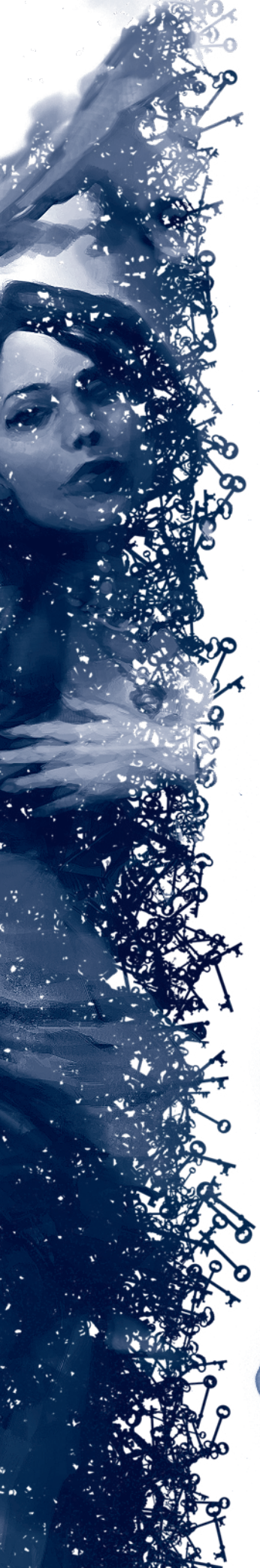
A woman turns on a tumble dryer, not realizing that the end of her scarf is caught in the machine. It strangles her. The geist comes for her before the drying cycle is finished.

A cattle farmer gets out of his tractor to check the front of the machine. His dog jumps up into the cab and accidentally hits the forward button, crushing the farmer against the wall.

A man at a beach party comes out of a swimming pool and heads for the karaoke, still dripping wet. The moment he takes the mic, he electrocutes himself.

Every death is unique, and the only thing in common seems to be plain bad luck.

But to the Sin-Eater, saddled now with a hideous ghostly companion, bad luck isn't a simple thing. It's the mark of Fate. Only a couple of years ago, an American Forgotten



Lucky I came along, really.

named Averil Drake had a vision of a fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse: the Gray Horseman, the Bearer of the Gun, the Thrower of the Dice. She told the trusted few friends she had. Within a few weeks, one of them had posted it on a weblog. After a month, it passed around the Internet, and a large proportion of English-speaking Sin-Eaters, many of whom had never heard of Averil Drake, began to talk about the Thrower of the Dice as if they had seen him, as if they knew him. The Sin-Eaters who consumed the story wholesale started suggesting that he was real, and some of them used the swift spread of the story as evidence. He became something slightly more than a myth.

Is there really a Thrower of the Dice? A few Sin-Eaters have gone looking for him — or her — or it — in the Underworld. The ones who got back haven't found him. But even the ones who didn't find the Gray Horseman come back changed, more able to understand. They seem to think they found the Thrower of the Dice in another sense. They point at this simple fact: the Forgotten, unlike the other Sin-Eaters — the Torn who face violence, the Silent who endure, the Stricken who conquer, and the Prey who understand — don't seem to have any real compulsion to find the restless dead or explore the world they're in. And yet, no matter where the Lightning-Struck go, no matter how much they might try to hide or escape, their world *finds them*. The ghosts and the monsters and the craziness turn up wherever a Forgotten One goes.

In his dreams, a Forgotten One imagines himself at a table in an infinite casino, sometimes playing blackjack, sometimes playing roulette. The croupier wears a gray cloak, and the Sin-Eater cannot see his face. Everything that happens now is down to luck.

Marks and Signs: The Forgotten can look like anyone. Recognizing the role of chance in their new lives, the Forgotten do sometimes affect the paraphernalia of chance or fate, the goods of the fortune teller or the gambler: a pair of cufflinks or ear rings that look like dice, or a pendant in the form of a “make your mind up” coin, or a shirt with an ace of spades printed on it. Some Forgotten carry dice, packs of playing cards, or Tarot packs. Tattoos of Tarot arcana (particularly the Wheel, the Tower, and the Fool) or I-Ching hexagrams are commonplace.

Some make use of cheap fortune-telling books. Some roll dice to see where they go next. As if by accident, the Forgotten ends up looking like a clown or a saint or a tramp or a preacher or a *sadhu* or a Bodhisattva or several of those things at once. Most of them wear something gray.

Character Creation: Of all the Sin-Eaters, except maybe for the Prey, the Forgotten have the least homogeneity. Lady Luck really doesn't seem to care whom she scorns: anyone at

all can be Forgotten. Forgotten Sin-Eaters don't favor any one category of Attributes or Skills, although many have higher than average scores in Wits, Resolve, and/or Composure.

Temperance is a slightly more common Virtue than the others among the Lightning-Struck; Envy is likewise more common than the other Vices.

Geists: A Forgotten has a wild card relationship with his geist. Sometimes he works together with the creature. Sometimes he fights it tooth and nail. He never knows where he is with it.

A woman slipped while getting in the bath and knocked herself out; she drowned without regaining consciousness, until the geist brought her back. The geist, an emaciated man with no eyes and a mouth that sometimes gapes wide enough to swallow a grown man whole, always seems to lead the Sin-Eater into the jaws of new perils, no matter where she wants to go.

The man whose brakes fail wakes up wrapped in a moaning, jangling creature like a bed sheet made of bloodied chains.

Another man, who died when lightning struck his mobile phone, has the eternal company of a woman wrapped tightly in barbed wire who bleeds forever and sings rather than speaking.

A bloated black thing with no hands, no face, and no feet follows the man who died when volcanic air charred his lungs. It terrifies him, but not as much as his companion's geist, a monster so awful to look at that no one can remember what it looks like, only feel the cold terror.

Another Forgotten, a narcoleptic who fell asleep while driving, finds himself wrapped coldly in a thing made wholly of keys and string.

Meanwhile, the man crushed by the fire hydrant keeps seeing a multiple-headed devil-like beast of the apocalypse. His wife leaves him; he can't keep from shivering in their marriage bed, and he becomes obsessive about the ghosts that keep haunting him. She gets a divorce.

A terrible flame-haired angel pursues the electrocuted farmer, while the woman who ate the dodgy fish in the Japanese restaurant has to contend with the rigid limbed girl in the bloody once-white shift dress, lank black hair obscuring her face.

Deathstight: It's like everything appears at once, a kind of visual collage. The mish-mash of elements flashes before the Sin-Eater, just a few at a time, the scene of death playing out behind her mind's eye, both for the people to whom she owes money and the people for whom she is selling books. It's most distracting.

Keys: Industrial or Pyre-Flame

Concepts: Accident-prone everyman, card shark, collector of occult literature, funeral parlor director, faithless priest, eternally lost traveler, next best thing to a traveling angel, Jonah.

STEREOTYPES

Torn: Fight it. Keep it up. Give in and the world has no time for you.

Silent: How can you be so calm?

Stricken: You're running before you can walk.

Prey: What is the point of seeing all that stuff when you don't do anything to get us out of the predicament we're in?

Vampires: And you thought I was unlucky.

Werewolves: You're the worst kind of luck. Keep away.

Mages: How about bringing some of that good fortune over here, sweetheart?

Mortals: Don't risk it. It's a mug's game, man.



M anifestations

The most powerful implements in any Sin-Eater's arsenal are her Manifestations, those strange and unearthly powers which are born of the fusion of living and dead. As a living vessel for a geist, the Bound also serves as a channel for its power — a power the two now share. All Sin-Eaters have access to Manifestations, but relatively few dedicate themselves to studying all or even most of them. Fewer still completely master more than a single Manifestation. Each Manifestation represents a fairly general power usually associated with ghosts (a genus of which the Sin-Eater's geist is merely an unusual specimen). When a Sin-Eater makes use of a Manifestation, she is often said to “unlock” the Manifestation. This is because Manifestations are closely connected with several metaphysical concepts which the Sin-Eaters refer to as Keys. Different Keys may cause a Manifestation to function very differently depending on how it is unlocked.

Each Manifestation is rated from 1 to 5. Keys require no rating: when a Sin-Eater learns a new Key, she may apply the benefits of that Key to any Manifestation she possesses. When a Sin-Eater learns a new Manifestation or improves her rating in a Manifestation, she can apply any Keys she knows to it. Though particular effects of a Manifestation are associated with certain dot levels, they aren't purchased separately: any effect is available to any Bound who possesses the requisite dots in Manifestation and an appropriate Key.

Each Manifestation is associated with a particular Attribute. Each Key is associated with one or more Skills which may vary depending on the Manifestation unlocked. In order to unlock a Manifestation with a particular Key, the Sin-Eater's player must roll (the Manifestation Attribute) + (the Key Skill) + (the character's rating in that Manifestation). The successes rolled on this activation roll are referred to, naturally enough, as *activation successes*. The activation successes determine the initial properties of the Manifestation once it is unlocked. Unless expressly stated otherwise, a Manifestation, once unlocked, lasts for a scene.

While a Manifestation remains unlocked, it will typically provide the Sin-Eater with several additional powers that branch off the Manifestation's basic functions. For example, once the Stillness Oracle has been unlocked, the Sin-Eater has several additional powers that he can use while the Stillness Oracle Manifestation remains in operation. Some of these subsidiary powers simply modify the effects of the activation roll in some manner. Regardless, the dice pool for such subsidiary power is almost always (Attribute) + (Skill) + (activation successes). That is, the successes rolled for the Manifestation's initial activation usually add

to dice rolls for subsidiary powers, although there are some exceptions to this general rule.

Most Manifestations are fairly cheap, requiring only 1 plasm for activation and usually no more than 1 or 2 for subsidiary powers. Some exceptionally potent subsidiary powers require significant amounts of plasm and sometimes even Willpower expenditure in order to function.

The Keys

There are ten Keys, four of which are tied together loosely. As noted previously, each Key is associated with one or more Skills when paired with a particular Manifestation. For example, the Stillness Key is usually associated with Stealth (which is used when the Sin-Eater wishes to conceal his movements) and Subterfuge (which is used when the Sin-Eater wishes to conceal his intentions).

Keys represent a particular way of interfacing with the energies of death and the Underworld. They are, in a sense, crystallized symbols that take on supernatural relevance to a character. The Stigmata Key, for instance, represents a particular connection to the flow of blood and ectoplasm. Perhaps a Sin-Eater with this Key was drenched in his own blood during the Bargain, and the Key emerged from this pivotal moment. Or perhaps his geist is a thing of weeping wounds, the Key a measure of its own nature. By using a Key to unlock a Manifestation, a Sin-Eater gives that ghostly energy focus and form. A Sin-Eater begins play with two Keys, but may purchase others with experience points. The purchase of a new Key usually represents the geist evolving into something greater and more versatile even as the Bound gains mastery over a new aspect of death: only together can they become something greater than they were at the moment of the Bargain.

The *Elemental Keys* are a cluster of four separate Keys, each of which must be purchased individually. Loosely associated with the four elements of classical alchemy, each of these Keys combines an archetypal element with the symbolism of death and decay. The *Cold Wind Key* is associated with the element of air, with storms and cold, and with the last gasp of the dying. The *Grave-Dirt Key* is associated with the element of earth, with subterranean environments, and with cemeteries and catacombs. The *Pyre-Flame Key* is associated with the element of fire, with ashy remains, and with those who have died of immolation. Finally, the *Tear-Stained Key* is associated with the element of water, with drowning, and with burial at sea. Generally, an Elemental Key may only be used to unlock a Manifestation in an elementally favorable environment or else the Manifestation will be less useful in a contrary elemental environment.

The *Industrial Key* grants influence over the trappings of (relatively) modern society. Manifestation effects that allow the Sin-Eater to control machinery, to “see” through a telephone, or to destroy a computer with a mere touch require the Industrial Key to unlock. However, the Industrial Key is usually only of use within a civilized setting and is of little utility in rural areas. Ironically, it is also less valuable in areas that are *too* civilized. The Industrial Key works best on archaic or anachronistic technology and suffers heavy penalties when affected with modern technological devices, generally according to the following chart.

The *Passion Key* allows the Sin-Eater to shape the emotional responses of other people and to instill emotional resonances within places or things. If a particular house frightens away children or a particular lake attracts young lovers, it is likely because such locales carry the emotional resonances governed by this Key. Use of this Key can alter the Sin-Eater’s own emotions, though to a much lesser degree, as something of a side effect – many Bound find themselves moved by haunting currents of wrath or sorrow when they unlock another’s passion.

The *Phantasmal Key* aids the Sin-Eater in shaping illusions. But these illusions are far more than simple glamours – when used to unlock the most powerful Manifestations, the Phantasmal Key can create an illusion so terrifying that it can drive men mad or so realistic that it can cause physical injury. The Bound who use this Key frequently are themselves given to glimpses of odd hallucinations now and again. Experience allows a Sin-Eater to ignore these figments easily enough, but some grow to almost enjoy the experience.

The *Primeval Key* unlocks Manifestations that grant influence over nature and forests. It also grants authority over

the animal kingdom and allows the Sin-Eater to acquire animalistic traits. Finally, it allows for influence over certain phenomena associated with ancient fertility rites pertaining to death and rebirth. The Primeval Key is the Key most commonly associated with raw physical power and with nature. Primeval Manifestations may trigger a faint feral response in the Sin-Eater for their duration. The Sin-Eater does not lose her cognitive abilities, but she grows somewhat more prone to think in terms of “fight or flight.”

The *Stigmata Key* uses blood and sacrifice to assert dominance over the spirit world. To Sin-Eaters, blood is more than a bodily fluid – it is the river of life, and it has been used both to propitiate and to bind both ghosts and spirits since time immemorial. Manifestations unlocked by the Stigmata Key allow the Sin-Eater to influence or even harm ghosts and spirits, to bind them in place, and to mimic their special properties. Unless stated differently under a particular Manifestation’s description, a character unlocking a Manifestation with the Stigmata Key may choose to take a point of lethal damage in lieu of spending a Willpower point, or a point of bashing damage instead of spending a point of plasm. The damage must be deliberate and ritualistic in nature. Damage inflicted in combat (whether upon the Sin-Eater or by him) will not satisfy this requirement.

The *Stillness Key* assists the Sin-Eater in her more subtle endeavors. Manifestations unlocked with it aid in stealth, invisibility, and in dulling the senses of others. The Stillness Key seems to work best when the Sin-Eater remains utterly silent. Be it superstition or something more potent, those who use this Key tend to avoid speaking even to friends when its powers are in play.

ANACHROTECH MODIFIERS

Sin-Eaters who favor the Industrial Key find that its powers function more effectively with older, disused technology than with cutting-edge devices. Many Sin-Eaters refer to this preference for anachronistic technology by the neologism “anachrotech.”

The following dice modifiers apply to all Industrial Key rolls to directly affect some technological device. The “invention date” of a device provides a rough guideline to how modern or archaic the device is. With some technologies, the Storyteller should consider when the device entered widespread use rather than its date of invention. For example, the first computer is often thought to be Charles Babbage’s analytical engine invented in the 19th century, but modern computers did not become truly widespread until the 1990s. Consequently, the Storyteller should probably impose a –4 penalty on a desktop computer that became widely available in the 90s, a –5 penalty on a state-of-the-art laptop, but perhaps only a –1 penalty on manipulating a creaking IBM mainframe installed in 1964.

| Dice Modifier | Invention Date |
|---------------|---|
| +3 | The technology is more than 100 years old. |
| +2 | The technology was invented before 1920. |
| +1 | The technology was invented before 1940. |
| 0 | The technology was invented before 1960. |
| –1 | The technology was invented in the 1960s. |
| –2 | The technology was invented in the 1970s. |
| –3 | The technology was invented in the 1980s. |
| –4 | The technology was invented in the 1990s. |
| –5 | The technology was invented in the last 10 years. |





The Boneyard allows the Sin-Eater to spread her awareness of a large area and to assert control over her environment, usually by triggering “haunting” effects.

Attribute: Wits

- **Cold Wind Boneyard:** The Sin-Eater can manipulate weather and “cold” phenomena over the affected area.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Grave-Dirt Boneyard:** The Sin-Eater gains additional insights when unlocking the Boneyard within a cave system or across a graveyard.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Industrial:** The Sin-Eater gains additional insights and abilities when unlocking the Boneyard within a building or structure.
Key Skill: Crafts
- **Passion Boneyard:** The Sin-Eater can sense and influence emotions within the affected area.
Key Skill: Empathy
- **Phantasmal Boneyard:** The Sin-Eater can generate simple illusions across the affected area.
Key Skill: Persuasion
- **Primeval Boneyard:** The Sin-Eater gains additional insights and abilities when activating the Boneyard within a forest or wooded area, including influence over animals and plants.
Key Skill: Survival
- **Pyre Flame Boneyard:** The Sin-Eater gains influence over any flames or heat sources within the affected area.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Stigmata:** The Sin-Eater can perceive and affect ghosts within the affected area and can extend his perception into Twilight.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Stillness:** The Sin-Eater can dull the perceptions of others within the affected area and even make them fall asleep.
Key Skill: Subterfuge
- **Tear-Stained Boneyard:** The Sin-Eater gains additional insights and abilities when activating the Boneyard while on or within a body of water.
Key Skill: Occult

The Caul permits the Sin-Eater to reshape his own body as needed, often in esoteric and frightening ways.

Attribute: Stamina

- **Cold Wind Caul:** The Sin-Eater’s body adopts the characteristics associated with cold air.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Grave-Dirt Caul:** The Sin-Eater’s body gains the durability of earth and stone.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Industrial Caul:** The Sin-Eater can physically merge with mechanical devices.
Key Skill: Crafts
- **Passion Caul:** The Sin-Eater merges more fully with her geist, gaining greater intelligence and empathic abilities.
Key Skill: Empathy

- **Phantasmal Caul:** The Sin-Eater can shape his body into horrific forms.

Key Skill: Persuasion

- **Primeval Caul:** The Sin-Eater can acquire animal traits and even animal forms.

Key Skill: Animal Ken

- **Pyre Flame Caul:** The Sin-Eater’s body generates light and tremendous heat.

Key Skill: Occult

- **Stigmata Caul:** The Sin-Eater can manipulate his own blood in bizarre and esoteric ways.

Key Skill: Occult

- **Stillness Caul:** The Sin-Eater can merge with shadows.

Key Skill: Stealth

- **Tear-Stained Caul:** The Sin-Eater’s body gains the characteristics of water.

Key Skill: Occult

The Curse enables the Sin-Eater to afflict her enemies with strange curses and ailments and to subtly influence their minds.

Attribute: Presence

- **Cold Wind Curse:** The Sin-Eater can cause inclement weather to dog his target.

Key Skill: Occult

- **Grave-Dirt Curse:** The Sin-Eater can inflict claustrophobia, insomnia and despair on her enemy.

Key Skill: Occult

- **Industrial Curse:** The Sin-Eater can cause his enemy to suffer penalties when using technology.

Key Skill: Crafts

- **Passion Curse:** The Sin-Eater can inflict emotional turmoil on her enemy.

Key Skill: Empathy

- **Phantasmal Curse:** The Sin-Eater can change the perceptions and beliefs of her target.

Key Skill: Persuasion

- **Primeval Curse:** The Sin-Eater can turn animals against the target and even turn the target into an animal.

Key Skill: Animal Ken

- **Pyre-Flame Curse:** The Sin-Eater can cause fire, electricity and other forms of power to refuse to function for the target.

Key Skill: Occult

- **Stigmata Curse:** The Sin-Eater can inflict sickness, stigmata and hauntings on his enemy.

Key Skill: Medicine

- **Stillness Curse:** The Sin-Eater can inflict invisibility and anonymity on her enemy.

Key Skill: Stealth

- **Tear-Stained Curse:** The Sin-Eater can give his enemy an irrational fear of water.

Key Skill: Occult

The Marionette allows the Sin-Eater to control physical objects, animals and even other people, manipulating their bodies like a twisted puppeteer.

Attribute: Manipulation

- **Elemental Marionette:** All four versions of the Elemental Key (Cold Wind, Grave-Dirt, Pyre-Flame and Tear-Stained) allow the Sin-Eater to create a homunculus from the element used.
Key Skill: Subterfuge
- **Industrial Marionette:** The Sin-Eater can telekinetically manipulate manmade objects.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Passion Marionette:** The Sin-Eater can influence the emotional states of those around her.
Key Skill: Empathy
- **Phantasmal Marionette:** The Sin-Eater can control his own geist, projecting his mind into its spectral form.
Key Skill: Intimidation
- **Primeval Marionette:** The Sin-Eater can directly control animals and plants. *Key Skill:* Animal Ken
- **Stigmata Marionette:** The Sin-Eater can control ghosts and compel them to possess mortals on her behalf.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Stillness Marionette:** The Sin-Eater can animate and command corpses, raising them as zombie slaves.
Key Skill: Occult

The Oracle grants the Sin-Eater heightened sensory powers, clairvoyance and even precognitive abilities.

Attribute: Intelligence

- **Elemental Oracle:** By subjecting herself to environmental trauma associated with an Elemental Key, the Sin-Eater can astrally project.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Industrial Oracle:** The Sin-Eater can gain supernatural insights into machines and crafted items.
Key Skill: Investigation
- **Passion Oracle:** The Sin-Eater gains supernatural insights into the emotional states of others.
Key Skill: Empathy
- **Phantasmal Oracle:** The Sin-Eater gains the power to see through illusions and lies and acquires the gift of prophecy.
Key Skill: Investigation
- **Primeval Oracle:** The Sin-Eater gains powerful animalistic senses.
Key Skill: Survival
- **Stigmata Oracle:** The Sin-Eater gains insights into ghosts, geists and the spiritual world in which they travel.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Stillness Oracle:** The Sin-Eater gains supernatural insights about corpses and can even draw upon the knowledge once contained by the deceased.
Key Skill: Medicine

The Rage represents the Sin-Eater's power to strike at others with pure, unadulterated power.

Attribute: Strength

- **Elemental Rage:** The Sin-Eater can make elemental attacks against another.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Industrial Rage:** The Sin-Eater can damage or destroy mechanical devices.
Key Skill: Crafts
- **Passion Rage:** The Sin-Eater can terrorize her enemy so much that he dies of fright.
Key Skill: Intimidation

- **Phantasmal Rage:** The Sin-Eater can create illusions capable of harming an enemy.
Key Skill: Persuasion
- **Primeval Rage:** The Sin-Eater can summon animals to attack her enemy.
Key Skill: Animal Ken
- **Stigmata Rage:** The Sin-Eater can make the target bleed with a touch.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Stillness Rage:** The Sin-Eater can strike his enemy in subtle and indirect fashion.
Key Skill: Stealth

The Shroud governs effects which alter or improve the Sin-Eater's own aura in some way, most often by strengthening it into a form of protection. The geist may materialize itself, forming around the Bound. Most versions of the Shroud add armor equal to the activation successes, but some do not.

Attribute: Resolve

- **Cold Wind Shroud:** The Sin-Eater can create a Shroud of cold air which inflicts bashing damage on those who attack her. At higher levels, the Sin-Eater can create a Shroud of electricity which inflicts lethal damage. The Cold Wind Shroud is more durable in cold climes.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Grave-Dirt Shroud:** The Sin-Eater can inflict feelings of crushing claustrophobia in any who touch him. The Grave-Dirt Shroud is more durable when the Sin-Eater stands on dirt or rock.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Industrial Shroud:** The Sin-Eater can defend more easily against weapons of any sort and can destroy man-made items with a touch.
Key Skill: Crafts
- **Passion Shroud:** The Sin-Eater can extend his Shroud's resilience to defend against mental attacks, and she can more easily manipulate or intimidate others.
Key Skill: Empathy
- **Phantasmal Shroud:** The Sin-Eater can use her Shroud to deceive others and to hide her own features.
Key Skill: Persuasion
- **Primeval Shroud:** The Sin-Eater can augment his own physical traits and manifest animal weaponry such as claws.
Key Skill: Animal Ken
- **Pyre Flame Shroud:** The Sin-Eater can sheathe herself in ghostly flames which are intimidating to attacks. At higher levels, these flames become real and can burn those who touch her.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Stigmata Shroud:** The Stigmata Shroud grants improved resistance to Numina and Manifestations, and allows the Sin-Eater to enter Twilight.
Key Skill: Occult
- **Stillness Shroud:** The Sin-Eater can become invisible and intangible.
Key Skill: Stealth
- **Tear-Stained Shroud:** The Sin-Eater can breathe underwater and drown others with a touch. The Tear-Stained Shroud is more durable while the Sin-Eater is totally immersed.
Key Skill: Occult



Unlocking the Manifestations

Each Key unlocks a Manifestation in a different and mutually exclusive way. A Sin-Eater may activate two or more Manifestations simultaneously with different Keys, but he cannot unlock the same Manifestation with more than one Key without terminating the earlier activation. There are seven major Manifestations: the *Boneyard*, the *Caul*, the *Curse*, the *Marionette*, the *Oracle*, the *Rage*, and the *Shroud*. Brief descriptions of each Manifestation, along with how its effect vary according to the Key used to unlock it, are below, with more in-depth descriptions of the many possible Manifestation effects to follow.

The Boneyard

Attribute: Wits

When a Sin-Eater calls forth the Boneyard, he allows his geist's plasm to flow forth from his body to stain the surrounding area with plasmic residue. In this way, the Sin-Eater may extend his senses across a large area and affect his environment in ways associated with the Key used to unlock the Boneyard. While the Boneyard is unlocked, the Sin-Eater's body must remain in a trance-like state. The Sin-Eater's body need not rest in the center of the Boneyard, but he must be somewhere within the affected area. If taken by surprise (not an easy thing against the master of a Boneyard), the Sin-Eater typically loses his Defense against attackers. This Manifestation ends instantly if the Sin-Eater suffers any damage. If his body is otherwise disturbed, he may attempt to retain control of the Boneyard with a Resolve + Composure roll.

The basic (one-dot) power of the Boneyard allows the Sin-Eater to create a plasm-tainted area within a particular area whose size is governed by his Manifestation rating and his activation successes. Some Keys may modify the size of the Boneyard in thematically appropriate ways. For example, the Primeval Boneyard may be bigger than other Boneyards if unlocked within a forest or heavily wooded area. While the Boneyard is unlocked, the Sin-Eater can generally sense any particular person or thing within the affected area which she wishes to locate without a roll, provided that the object of her search is not actively hiding from her (either magically or through mundane means). She can project her senses to any spot within the Boneyard and examine the area as if she were standing there. Many Keys allow the Sin-Eater to use more esoteric senses from any vantage point within the Boneyard.

Once the Boneyard is unlocked, the Sin-Eater can unlock additional Manifestations as desired, and can target their effects against anyone or anything he can perceive within his Boneyard. If an additional

Manifestation is unlocked using the same Key as the one used to unlock the Boneyard, the Sin-Eater may add the Boneyard's activation successes to the next activation roll. If the Keys are different, however, the Boneyard's activation successes do not apply. There is one exception to this rule: a Sin-Eater may not direct the Rage Manifestation against a target outside his immediate presence through the Boneyard.

Boneyard Activation

Cost: 1 plasm

Dice Pool: Wits + (Key Skill) + Boneyard rating

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The land is thirsty. The Boneyard fails to manifest, and the character loses two extra points of plasm.

Failure: The attempt to manifest the Boneyard fails.

Success: The Sin-Eater creates a Boneyard lasting for one scene. With Boneyard 1, the radius of the Boneyard is equal to (activation successes x 10) yards. With Boneyard 3, this radius increases to (activation successes x 100) yards. With Boneyard 5, this radius increases to (activation successes) in miles. Once its confines are established, the area covered by the Boneyard is fixed and cannot be modified by the Sin-Eater.

Once established, the Boneyard cannot be dispelled prematurely, and the Sin-Eater may not create any new Boneyards while a previously unlocked Boneyard still stands. However, a Sin-Eater may attempt to replace an already existing Boneyard (whether one he created or one created by another Sin-Eater) with a new one, either to improve the Boneyard's qualities or to assert dominance over another Sin-Eater. In the latter case, whichever Boneyard has more activation successes takes precedence over the other one. The Boneyard's radius is fixed — although it is initially centered on the Sin-Eater, it does not move with her. Activation successes modify many higher-level Boneyard powers but only while the Sin-Eater remains within the Boneyard he created.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater recovers the plasm spent in unlocking the Boneyard. If wounded, the Sin-Eater may still maintain the Boneyard with a successful (Resolve + Composure) roll, but not if he is rendered unconscious or leaves the Boneyard.

Fighting Over Boneyards

Any Sin-Eater with even one dot in Boneyard will immediately know when she has entered into a Boneyard territory created by another Sin-Eater. The intruding Sin-Eater can attempt to establish her own Boneyard within the same area, but the

original Sin-Eater may reflexively inflict a penalty equal to his activation successes on attempts by others to establish additional Boneyards within his demesne. If two (or more) Sin-Eaters successfully unlock overlapping Boneyards, the Sin-Eater with the most activation successes is considered to be the master of the Boneyard, and can reflexively apply a penalty equal to his activation successes against his rivals on all Boneyard-related rolls.

The Elemental Boneyards

Skill: Occult

Area of Effect: Varies

The Sin-Eater instills the essential characteristics of one of the four elements into the fabric of her Boneyard.

The Cold Wind Boneyard

The Cold Wind Boneyard draws upon frigid cold and the devastating power of storms. If the Sin-Eater unlocks the Cold Wind Boneyard while out-of-doors and in cold weather or during a heavy rainstorm, she may add her Occult rating to the activation successes for purposes of determining the maximum area.

Cold Wind Boneyard ••: The Sin-Eater can target any person within the Boneyard's area with a powerful sensation of bone-chilling cold. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Occult + activation successes), resisted by the target's Stamina. If the Sin-Eater is successful, the target suffers a dice penalty on all actions equal to the Sin-Eater's activation successes for as long as the Sin-Eater maintains concentration on him, as the air around him plunges into bitter cold. With an Exceptional Success, this dice penalty will persist for as long as the Boneyard does, even without the Sin-Eater's continued concentration. This power costs 1 plasm.

Cold Wind Boneyard •••: The Sin-Eater can target multiple targets within the Boneyard with even stronger weather effects, such as bitterly cold winds or freezing rain. Mechanically, this power functions just like the one before it except that the Sin-Eater may target multiple individuals with dice penalties caused by inclement weather. Each target rolls her Stamina separately, and those who fail to get more successes than the Sin-Eater are affected. This power costs 1 plasm per target to be affected.

Cold Wind Boneyard ••••: The Sin-Eater can target an individual with a cold-weather attack. The precise nature of each attack depends on the extant environmental conditions – depending on the nature of the weather summoned, an attack might manifest as a lightning bolt, a gust of wind which blows a tree limb down onto the target, or even a snow flurry of incredible force which buries him under several feet of snow and ice. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Occult + activation successes). Generally, because such an attack comes as part of an environmental effect, a targeted character does not receive his Defense. However, living creatures do have some innate resistance to harmful weather phenomena, if only in the form of having enough sense to get out of the rain. Subtract the target's Stamina from all weather-based attacks. Mundane armor

rarely protects against inclement weather, but many forms of magical protection will apply. Each success inflicts one level of bashing damage, and each attack costs 1 plasm.

Cold Wind Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater may now inflict lethal damage on any target within the Boneyard's area. This power functions just the same as the 4-dot version, except that all damage is lethal instead of bashing, and each attacks costs 3 plasm.

The Grave-Dirt Boneyard

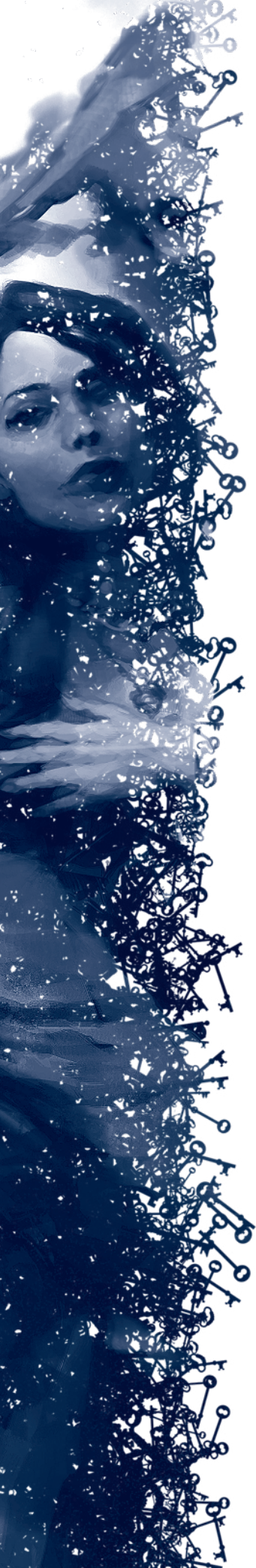
The Grave-Dirt Boneyard draws upon the resonance of cold, dead earth. If the Sin-Eater manifests a Grave-Dirt Boneyard in either an actual cemetery or in a completely subterranean environment such as a network of caverns or underground tunnels, he may add his Occult rating to the activation successes for purposes of determining the affected area. Such an underground environment may be manmade, such as a catacombs, but the environment must be predominantly stone or earthen. The Sin-Eater does not gain the extended range of the Grave-Dirt Boneyard in a completely artificial underground environment such as in subway tunnels.

Grave-Dirt Boneyard ••: The Sin-Eater can afflict any person within the Boneyard's area with a powerful sense of claustrophobia. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Manipulation + Occult + activation successes), resisted by the target's Composure. If the Sin-Eater is successful, the target suffers a dice penalty on all actions equal to the Sin-Eater's successes for as long as the Sin-Eater maintains concentration on him, as the oppressive gloom of the environment preys upon his mind. With an Exceptional Success, this dice penalty will persist for as long as the Boneyard does, even without the Sin-Eater's continued concentration. This power costs 1 plasm.

Grave-Dirt Boneyard •••: The Sin-Eater can cause one or more targets to become lost, whether in the twisting tunnels of a catacomb or amid the menacing tombstones of a cemetery. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Manipulation + Occult + activation successes), resisted by the target's Composure. If the Sin-Eater is successful, the target suffers a dice penalty equal to the activation successes on all attempts to navigate through his current environment. The Sin-Eater may direct this power against multiple targets, with each target rolling Composure separately. This power costs 1 plasm per target to be affected, and the effects last as long as the targets remain within the Boneyard.

Grave-Dirt Boneyard ••••: The Sin-Eater can cause the very earth itself to rise up against a target. Stones hurl themselves against her, and sinkholes open up to trap her feet and knock her to the ground. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Occult + activation successes, minus Defense). Each success inflicts one level of bashing damage, and each attack costs 1 plasm.

Grave-Dirt Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater may now inflict lethal damage on any target within the Boneyard's area. This power functions just the same as the 4-dot version, except that all damage is lethal instead of bashing, and each attacks costs 3 plasm.



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The Pyre-Flame Boneyard

The Pyre-Flame Boneyard draws upon the resonance of fire, heat and ash. If the Sin-Eater manifests a Pyre-Flame Boneyard in either in a hot, desolate area like a desert or within the confines of a burnt-out structure, she may add her Occult rating to the activation successes for purposes of determining the affected area.

Pyre-Flame Boneyard ••: The Sin-Eater can afflict any person within the Boneyard's area with a feverish disorientation. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Manipulation + Occult + activation successes), resisted by the target's Stamina. If the Sin-Eater is successful, the target suffers a dice penalty on all actions equal to the Sin-Eater's successes for as long as the Sin-Eater maintains concentration on him, as he begins to burn with fever. With an Exceptional Success, this dice penalty will persist for as long as the Boneyard does, even without the Sin-Eater's continued concentration. This power costs 1 plasm.

Pyre-Flame Boneyard •••: The Sin-Eater can inflict the previous penalty on multiple targets, each of whom becomes disoriented by the sensation of acrid, burning smoke pouring into his lungs. This power costs 1 plasm per target to be affected, and the effects last as long as the targets remain within the Boneyard. Any target who rolls more successes on Stamina than the Sin-Eater is unaffected.

Pyre-Flame Boneyard ••••: The Sin-Eater can ignite flammable materials within the Boneyard's area. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Resolve + Occult + activation successes). This roll may gain +1 to +5 bonus dice on attempts to ignite particularly flammable materials, like oily rags or dry brush, or it may suffer a -1 to -5 penalty on attempts to ignite fire retardant materials, like wet cloth or foam insulation. The Sin-Eater may not target any moving object with this power, nor any living being. This power costs a variable number of plasm points equal to the size of the fire to be created. Lighting a candle costs 1 plasm, while blowing up a car might cost 10.

| Plasm Cost | Size | Description |
|------------|--------------|--|
| 1 | 1 or smaller | A book. |
| 2 | 2-3 | A trash can, a bush. |
| 3 | 4-6 | Roughly man-sized. |
| 4 | 7-10 | Up to the size of a small car. |
| 5 | 11-15 | Up to the size of a large truck. This is the maximum Size which can be targeted with this power. |

Pyre-Flame Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater may now inflict lethal fire damage on any target within the Boneyard's area. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Occult + activation successes). Defense does not apply to this roll, but it takes a few seconds for a burning target to take damage from the flames, allowing a quick-witted target to "drop and roll" to put out the flames without taking damage. Any target subject to a successful use of this power may roll (Wits + Athletics) to put out the flames without taking damage. The target's successes on this roll are subtracted from those rolled for the Sin-Eater, with each remaining success inflicting one level of lethal damage (or aggravated damage for beings who are especially vulnerable to fire). Each attack made with this power costs 3 plasm.

The Tear-Stained Boneyard

The Tear-Stained Boneyard draws upon the cold embrace of the sea. If the Sin-Eater extends the Tear-Stained Boneyard to cover a large body of water, he may add her Occult rating to the activation successes for purposes of determining the maximum area. In order to gain this benefit, the Sin-Eater must either actually be on the water far enough from shore to be over her head (although the Boneyard may be unlocked from a boat) or the Sin-Eater must be within (Boneyard rating x 100) yards of the spot where someone has drowned within the last ten years.

Tear-Stained Boneyard ••: The Sin-Eater can target any person within the Boneyard's area and afflict them with the psychological sensation of drowning. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Occult + activation successes), resisted by the target's Composure + Psyche. If the Sin-Eater is successful, the target suffers a dice penalty on all actions equal to the Sin-Eater's activation successes for as long as the Sin-Eater maintains concentration on her, as she becomes unable to draw breath and becomes convinced that she is drowning. With an Exceptional Success, this dice penalty will persist for as long as the Boneyard does, even without the Sin-Eater's continued concentration. This power costs 1 plasm.

Tear-Stained Boneyard •••: The Sin-Eater can target multiple targets with the 2-dot version of this power. Mechanically, this power functions just like the one before it except that the Sin-Eater may target multiple individuals with dice penalties caused by inclement weather. Each target rolls her Composure separately, and those who fail to get more successes than the Sin-Eater are affected. This power costs 1 plasm per target to be affected.

Tear-Stained Boneyard ••••: The Sin-Eater can target an individual with a watery attack even on dry land, as a flood of brackish sea water manifests to strike the target at the Sin-Eater's bidding before disappearing. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Occult + activation successes). The target's Defense applies to this roll. Each success inflicts one level of bashing damage, and each attack costs 1 plasm. If the target is actually in the water (whether swimming in the sea or lounging in a bathtub), this power costs nothing to activate.

Tear-Stained Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater may seek to drown his victim even on dry land. This power functions just the same as the 4-dot version, except that each net success inflicts two points of bashing damage, and each attacks costs 2 plasm.

The Industrial Boneyard

Skill: Crafts

The Industrial Boneyard draws upon the relentless inhumanity of the machine and the sterility which separates man-made structures from natural ones. If the Sin-Eater unlocks the Industrial Boneyard inside a building of any kind, he may add his Craft rating to the activation successes for purposes of determining the maximum area, but when he does so, the Boneyard's area can never extend beyond the physical structure of the building itself. In order to gain this benefit, the Sin-Eater need not be inside the structure, but he must be able to touch one of its outer walls. With Industrial Boneyard •••, the Sin-Eater can extend his control to encompass multiple connected buildings which are part of the same unit (such as a mansion and its guesthouse or all the cookie-cutter houses in a residential subdivision) but not any place outside of a structure. With Boneyard •••••, the Sin-Eater's gaze even covers the grounds of a large estate or the yards and streets of a residential neighborhood.

Industrial Boneyard ••: The Sin-Eater can target any mechanical device she is capable of perceiving within the Boneyard and turn it on or off at will. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Craft + activation successes) and spend 1 plasm. In addition to this power, the Sin-Eater may reflexively add her activation successes to any Wits-related roll to perceive or understand any aspect of the structure within which she stands. She can easily perceive hidden passages, concealed safes and the like. This aspect of the power costs nothing.

Industrial Boneyard •••: The Sin-Eater can completely control a single device within the Boneyard, directing it as he wishes, using the same dice pool as the previous power. However, he can only cause such devices to do things normally within their purview. That is, he could cause a vacuum cleaner to begin cleaning a rug but he could not cause it to fly about the room. This power costs nothing provided that the target device does not require any electricity or is already plugged in if it does require power. Feats such as activating an unplugged appliance or moving an unplugged vacuum cleaner cost 1 plasm per target to be affected.

Industrial Boneyard ••••: The Sin-Eater can telekinetically move any non-living item which he can perceive within the Boneyard. He can cause items to fling themselves at targets or he can turn on a television and cause it to display whatever images he desires. Controlling inanimate objects in this manner costs a number of plasm points equal to the size of the item. The player must roll (Resolve + Craft + activation successes) to activate this power. If the Sin-Eater attempts to hurl the item at a target, the roll is (Resolve + the object's Size + activation successes, minus the target's Defense). The Sin-Eater may only make one such attack per turn, and also costs plasm equal to the item's Size.



Industrial Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater gains dominion over every object within the Boneyard's reach. Unlocking the Boneyard at this level raises the activation cost to 5 plasm, but thereafter, the Sin-Eater pays nothing to use any of the preceding Industrial Boneyard powers. Additionally, while this power is in effect, the Sin-Eater can spend 3 plasm to cause an object to do something completely unnatural, such as causing a chair to wrap its arms around someone sitting in it and restrain her or rearranging the oil on a painting to change what it depicts. These unnatural effects only last as long as the Boneyard does before the object reverts to its prior shape.

The Passion Boneyard

Skill: Empathy

The Passion Boneyard grants the Sin-Eater understanding of the emotional states of any thinking beings caught within its confines. While the Passion Boneyard is active, the Sin-Eater may add her activation successes to all Empathy rolls to judge the emotional nature of anyone she observes within.

Passion Boneyard ••: The Sin-Eater can instill the area with a particular emotional resonance such that anyone who enters may be compelled to feel that emotional state. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Manipulation + Empathy + activation successes). For each point of plasm spent, the Sin-Eater may taint an area with a 10-yard radius with a particular emotion. Anyone who enters the tainted area whose Composure + Psyche is less than the activation successes will be compelled to feel that emotion for as long as they remain within the area. Whenever an affected character attempts to act contrary to the instilled emotion, he suffers a dice penalty on the action equal to the activation successes.

Passion Boneyard •••: The Sin-Eater can taint any part of the Boneyard or all of it with an emotion, using the rules described under the 2-point version, for a flat cost of 5 plasm.

Passion Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater gains the power to actually feed off the strong emotions inculcated with the Passion Boneyard like a psychic vampire. Whenever a character affected by an emotional resonance instilled by the Sin-Eater acts on it in some important way, the Sin-Eater regains plasm and, in some cases, Willpower. There is no roll associated with this power.

| Traits Regained | Situation |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 plasm | The target spends a Willpower in furtherance of the emotion |
| 1 plasm | The target achieves an Exceptional Success or a Dramatic Failure in furtherance of the emotion |

| | |
|--|---|
| 1 plasm per health level | The target injures himself as a result of the strong emotion |
| 3 plasm | The target either loses Morality or gains a derangement as a result of the strong emotion |
| 1 plasm per health level, plus 1 Willpower | The target dies as a direct result of the strong emotion |

Passion Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater can damage someone psychically through the power of emotional resonance. Once a target has come under the effect of an emotional resonance created through the Passion Boneyard, the Sin-Eater may attack them emotionally, draining them of Willpower and even health. Activating this power costs 3 plasm, and the Sin-Eater's player must roll (Intelligence + Empathy + activation successes, minus the target's Composure). Each net success on the attack roll causes the target to lose one point of Willpower. If the target is totally drained of Willpower, she becomes emotionally overcome as any remaining successes inflict one point of bashing damage each.

The Phantasmal Boneyard

Skill: Persuasion

The Phantasmal Boneyard grants the Sin-Eater the power to see through any illusions which exist within the Boneyard's area. While the Phantasmal Boneyard is active, the Sin-Eater may add his activation successes to all rolls to detect invisible objects or beings or to see through illusions within the Boneyard. He may also add his activation successes to any Resistance traits subtracted from rolls to manipulate his own perceptions.

Phantasmal Boneyard ••: The Sin-Eater can affect the perceptions of a single individual within the Boneyard. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Manipulation + Persuasion + activation successes). This roll is resisted by the target's Composure + Psyche. If the roll succeeds, the Sin-Eater may alter the target's perceptions of her environment for as long as he maintains concentration on her. With an Exceptional Success, the illusion will persist for the entire scene even without the Sin-Eater's continued concentration, although it will remain static and incapable of interacting with the target absent such concentration. Creating such an illusion costs 1 plasm.

Phantasmal Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater can create illusions capable of fooling multiple individuals, at a cost of 1 plasm per target. If the targets remain close together, the Sin-Eater can cause the illusion to interact with them all. If they split up, he must choose the target with whom the illusion will interact, but the other targets are still susceptible to

this power for the duration of the scene. In other words, the Sin-Eater may not split his attention between different locations within the Boneyard, but so long as he can focus on one area, he can totally control the perceptions of affected targets found there.

Phantasmal Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater can target any part of the Boneyard or all of it, cloaking its true appearance in an illusion of his choosing. A dilapidated hovel can become a stunning mansion, while a desolate graveyard can suddenly become home to a carnival. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Manipulation + Persuasion + activation successes), paying a flat cost of 5 plasm. Any character who enters the affected area and whose Resolve is less than the successes rolled for this power sees the area however the Sin-Eater wishes.

Phantasmal Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater can harm someone with an illusion. None of the preceding powers are directly harmful, although they can indirectly harm a target by, for example, concealing a flight of stairs or the edge of a cliff. This power, on the other hand, allows the Sin-Eater to create illusions that can kill. The resulting illusion has an ambulatory form and acts as an extension of the Sin-Eater's will. The Sin-Eater can cause her illusion to attack anyone who believes in it. The illusory killer's attacks inflict bashing damage if the Sin-Eater spends 3 plasm to activate this power or lethal if she spends 6 motes. Regardless, each attack the killer makes requires the Sin-Eater's player to roll (Wits + Intimidation + activation successes). Defense does not apply since the killer is illusory and therefore will always "hit" if the Sin-Eater wishes it to. However, the target's Composure subtracts from the attack roll. Furthermore, if the target's Composure + Psyche exceeds the activation successes, he is immune to the phantasmal killer.

The Primeval Boneyard

Skill: Animal Ken

Manifesting the Primeval Boneyard puts the Sin-Eater in tune with any wild area within the Boneyard's radius and any wild animals within, allowing her to perceive the movements of such creatures with a thought. If the Sin-Eater unlocks this Boneyard within a heavily wooded or forest area, she can add her Animal Ken to the activation successes for purposes of determining the area. However, in such a case, the area of the Boneyard may never extend beyond the range of the forest in question, and its effects are blocked by signs of encroaching civilization ~ the Primeval Boneyard's range cannot extend across any road which cuts through the forest, nor any fence constructed within the last ten years, nor may the Sin-Eater perceive within any manmade structure erected within the Boneyard.

Primeval Boneyard ••: The Sin-Eater can target a specific animal within the Boneyard and trigger the creature's fight or flight instinct. Any affected animal will either flee the Boneyard as fast as it is able or attack the first human it encounters in a rage, whichever the Sin-Eater desires. This power costs 1 plasm. There is no roll unless the animal is magical or otherwise sentient, in which case the Sin-Eater's

player must roll (Wits + Animal Ken + activation successes, resisted by the animal's Composure). With an Exceptional Success, any affected animal gains a two-die bonus to any actions made under this power's compulsion, such as Athletics rolls to flee or Brawl rolls to attack.

Primeval Boneyard ••••: The Sin-Eater may target multiple animals with the preceding power at a cost of 1 plasm per creature. He may also target one specific animal and control it completely. This aspect of the power costs 2 plasm but uses the same mechanical rules as the previous power. If the Sin-Eater spends 3 plasm, she can even speak through the animal with her own voice.

Primeval Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater may now engineer more complicated responses in the creatures of the forest. With this power, the Sin-Eater may target a single individual within the Boneyard's area and instill within him a powerful aura which provokes atavistic rage in most animals. While the target is under this baleful effect the target will automatically provoke a rabid, bloodthirsty frenzy in any and every creature he encounters within the Boneyard, and all but the smallest and most cowardly of such creatures will invariably attack him on sight. This power costs 3 plasm, and the Sin-Eater's player must roll (Manipulation + Animal Ken + activation successes, resisted by Composure + Psyche). In addition to any other effects, the target of this power is reduced to a Chance Die on all Animal Ken rolls while in the Boneyard. With an Exceptional Successes, the taint placed on the target is so pervasive that it persists for a full day even after the target leaves the Boneyard.

Primeval Boneyard •••••: The Sin-Eater can now manipulate plant life within the Boneyard, causing vines to grapple his enemies or trees limbs to smash them. Each attack costs 1 point to inflict bashing damage or 2 to inflict lethal damage. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Brawl) for grapple attacks or (Wits + Weaponry), adding the activation successes as bonus dice. The target's Defense applies.

The Stigmata Boneyard

Skill: Occult

While this Manifestation is active, the Sin-Eater can perceive ghosts anywhere within the Boneyard's radius. The Sin-Eater also automatically senses pathways to the Underworld which exist anywhere within the Boneyard's radius. **Although all Sin-Eaters can normally see ghosts automatically, a Sin-Eater cannot perceive ghosts outside his immediate presence through a Boneyard unless it has been unlocked with the Stigmata Key.**

Stigmata Boneyard ••: The Sin-Eater can ward a location within the Boneyard against spiritual intrusion, forbidding all but the most powerful of ghosts to enter her domain. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Presence + Occult + activation successes). The radius of the protected area is generally equal to five yards per plasm spent. However, wards of this nature tend to conform to structural boundaries, so if the radius is approximately equal to the area of the house in which the Sin-Eater stands, usually the ward will be



coextensive with the house's walls instead of forming a true circle. Any ghost will be unable to pass through the ward's boundaries unless the ghost's Power exceeds the successes rolled for this power. A ghost who cannot pass through the ward will also be unable to target anyone inside it with Numina. Any ghosts who are already within the confines of the ward when it is erected will be trapped within unless powerful enough to escape.

Stigmata Boneyard •••: The Sin-Eater may create wards which endure even past the termination of the Boneyard itself. For every extra plasm spent, a ward created with the 2-dot version of Stigmata Boneyard will endure for one hour after the Boneyard is terminated. For every lethal level of damage the Sin-Eater inflicts on herself, the ward will persist for one full day after the Boneyard falls.

Stigmata Boneyard ••••: Having mastered the art of warding, the Sin-Eater progresses to the more difficult art of binding. With this power, the Sin-Eater can temporarily bind a spirit or ghost to a location, sticking the entity's spiritual body to the spot like a butterfly caught in a web. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Occult + activation successes, resisted by the ghosts's Power). If the roll is successful, the ghost will be bound to a spot within the Boneyard's area of the Sin-Eater's choosing for one hour per plasm spent in activating the power. With an Exceptional Success, double the number of hours the ghost is bound. If the Sin-Eater voluntarily suffers two levels of lethal damage, the ghost will instead be bound for one day per plasm spent. While bound, the ghost is incapable of leaving the location to which it is chained and it suffers a dice penalty on all Numina equal to (activation successes + 1 per lethal health level suffered by the Sin-Eater), which is normally enough to render most ghosts helpless. The Sin-Eater may choose to negate the Numina penalty as she wishes, and she can also free a bound ghost as a reflexive action. The Sin-Eater may also compel any ghost she has bound to materialize or dematerialize as she wishes, and she gains a dice bonus equal to the activation successes on all Social rolls to influence or manipulate the ghost.

Stigmata Boneyard •••••: With this, the ultimate affront to the dignity of the dead, the Sin-Eater may drain Essence directly from a ghost, converting it into plasm. No physical or spiritual contact is necessary, as the Sin-Eater may target any ghost she can perceive within the confines of the Boneyard. There is no plasm cost. Instead, the Sin-Eater must spend either 1 Willpower point or inflict 1 lethal health level on himself per roll. The Sin-Eater's player must then roll (Wits + Occult + activation successes, minus the ghost's Power). Each net success drains the ghost of one point of Corpus which is converted into 2 plasm. The Sin-Eater cannot store more plasm than her normal limit, but that does

not limit the number of Essence or Corpus levels he can steal ~ extra plasm is simply lost.

The Stillness Boneyard

Skill: Subterfuge

The Stillness Boneyard is a subtle place compared to the Boneyards unlocked with the other Keys. Where the Phantasmal Boneyard allows the Sin-Eater to shape what his enemy sees, the Stillness Boneyard allows him to determine what she overlooks. While this Manifestation is unlocked, the Sin-Eater can confer a dice bonus equal to the activation successes on all Stealth-related rolls made for any allies of his choice at a cost of 1 plasm per person.

Stillness Boneyard ••: The Sin-Eater can target any single individual (including an animal) within the Boneyard's area and inflict on her a dice penalty equal to the activation successes on all Wits rolls pertaining to perception or observation. Doing so is a diceless action which costs 1 plasm per affected target. The Sin-Eater may only inflict this penalty on a character if the activation successes exceed her Resolve, and she may affect no more targets than the activation successes.

Stillness Boneyard ••••: The Sin-Eater can silence his enemies, afflicting them with blindness, deafness and dumbness. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Subterfuge + activation successes, resisted by the target's Composure + Psyche). If the roll succeeds, the Sin-Eater may rob the target of her sight, her hearing or her speech for as long as the Sin-Eater maintains concentration on her, at a cost of 2 plasm. By spending 4 plasm, he can rob her of two of those abilities, and by spending 6 plasm, she can affect all three. With an Exceptional Success, the effect will last as long as the Boneyard does, and no further concentration is required.

Stillness Boneyard •••••: Using her own plasm to leech away the very life force of her enemies, the Sin-Eater can inflict a powerful ennui on a specific target. Usually, this will cause the target to fall asleep or, at the very least, to ignore everything around him. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Subterfuge + activation successes). Every character within the Boneyard whose Resolve is less than the successes rolled for this power will fall asleep for the duration of the Boneyard. For 2 plasm, this is a natural sleep from which a target can be roused by physical contact or simply a loud noise. For 4 plasm, this is an unnatural sleep from which no affected target can be roused until the Boneyard ends.

Stillness Boneyard ••••••: The Sin-Eater may ensnare a target with tendrils of invisible plasm which burrow into her soul and leech it of its vitality. A successful use of this power will cause the target to lose points of Willpower. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Wits + Subterfuge + activation suc-

cesses, minus the target's Resolve). Each net success causes the target to lose one point of temporary Willpower. If the target is completely drained of Willpower, she lapses into unconsciousness and cannot be aroused for at least twelve hours.

The Caul

Attribute: Stamina

Of all Manifestations discovered by Sin-Eaters, the Caul is certainly the most intimate. When a Sin-Eater dons the Caul, he invites his geist deep into his body, allowing its plasm to flow outwards through his every cell, filling him from the inside out. Sharing his body with his geist is an incredibly intimate act, one that strengthens the ties between the Bound and the geist. Once it's within his body, the geist can change his flesh, molding it in ways defined by the Key used to unlock this Manifestation. The Stigmatic Caul allows a Sin-Eater to control his blood as it seeps from his body, and even to sever limbs to act as homunculi. The Elemental Cauls by contrast suffuse their bodies with the purity of their element. While the Shroud wraps a geist around a Sin-Eater, the Caul bonds the two together. Unless otherwise noted under the unlocking Key, the gross physical changes caused by the Caul are visible to everyone who looks at the Sin-Eater.

The basic power of the Caul invites the geist into the Sin-Eater's body. These powers all affect the Sin-Eater directly, rather than other people or ghosts. Activation successes on this roll normally inform the magnitude of the subsidiary powers that branch off each version of this Manifestation. Where secondary powers require dice rolls, the activation successes are added to the dice pool as normal. The Caul normally lasts until the end of the scene, though a Sin-Eater can choose to dismiss his geist sooner if he so chooses. Most of the subsidiary powers of the Caul are cumulative as the fusion of Sin-Eater and geist warps into a more powerful form. All powers under a single Key that don't require a roll or plasm expenditure to activate are cumulative; the Sin-Eater gains all benefits as soon as he dons the Caul. Naturally, a Sin-Eater can have a Caul tied to only one Key at a time.

Caul Activation

Cost: 1 plasm

Dice Pool: Stamina + (Key Skill) + Caul rating

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater and geist reject each other on a subconscious level. The Sin-Eater cannot access the Caul until the next sunset.

Failure: The attempt to manifest the Caul fails.

Success: The Sin-Eater draws his geist within him, infusing his body with plasm and joining into one.

Exceptional Success: Both Sin-Eater and geist act in harmony. Any rolls to activate the subsidiary powers of the Caul gain the 9-again quality.

The Elemental Cauls

Skill: Occult

The geist suffusing the Sin-Eater's flesh transforms it into the associated element.

The Cold Wind Caul

The Cold Wind Caul chills the Sin-Eater's body. He always feels cold and slightly clammy, as if he's been dead for several hours, and turns translucent and indistinct. The Sin-Eater adds his activation successes to any Stealth rolls, and cannot be detected on thermal imaging equipment.

Cold Wind Caul ••: The Sin-Eater is blown by a cold wind rather than walking. He remains roughly two inches above the surface of the ground, and can walk on water just as easily.

Cold Wind Caul •••: The Bound may drastically reduce his body temperature, freezing up to a gallon of water with a touch and dealing his Caul rating in bashing damage to any opponent he grapples.

Cold Wind Caul ••••: This power renders the Sin-Eater as insubstantial as the air. He can reflexively spend two points of plasm to completely ignore any attack that occurs after his initiative.

Cold Wind Caul •••••: The Sin-Eater merges with the winds. By spending two points of plasm, he vanishes and can re-form anywhere within his Caul rating in miles just a minute later. The departure and arrival point must both be outdoors.

The Grave-Dirt Caul

The Grave-Dirt Caul transforms the Sin-Eater's body into dirt and rock from the inside out. While this Caul is unlocked, she becomes immune to being stunned or knocked out (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 166-167).

Grave-Dirt Caul ••: The Sin-Eater's bones turn to thick stone. She takes bashing damage from firearms instead of lethal.

Grave-Dirt Caul •••: The Manifestation transforms even the Sin-Eater's flesh to dirt and gravel. She gains temporary Health dots equal to her activation successes.

Grave-Dirt Caul ••••: The Sin-Eater's bones and nails become diamond-hard. Her unarmed attacks deal lethal damage rather than bashing.

Grave-Dirt Caul •••••: Unlocking this power allows the Sin-Eater to transform herself into a living statue, sometimes called "the Cemetery Angel." The player spends two plasm and rolls Stamina + Occult + (activation successes). Success indicates that the Sin-Eater becomes a stone statue. She cannot move in this form but is surprisingly resistant to damage. She gains one point of Durability per success, and Structure equal to her Durability + Size. She can remain in this form for up one day per point of Psyche, during which times he heals at twice the normal rate. Any Structure lost in this form is ignored when she reverts to human form. In this form, the Sin-Eater is effectively unconscious and unaware of her surroundings, though she retains some sense of the passage of time. On an exceptional success, she remains aware of her surroundings.



The Pyre-Flame Caul

The Pyre-Flame Caul kindles a flame within the Sin-Eater's breast that eventually consumes his body. He always feels warm to the touch, as though he's running a fever, and can cause his body to glow as bright as a bonfire. Anyone trying to attack the Sin-Eater suffers his activation successes as a penalty to the attack roll.

Pyre-Flame Caul ••: The Sin-Eater's body is a crucible. He can take one point of lethal damage to gain three points of plasm.

Pyre-Flame Caul •••: The character gains swift and agile movement. He can spread his activation successes between his Initiative, Speed, and Defense; each two successes grant a +1 bonus.

Pyre-Flame Caul ••••: The Sin-Eater's body shines incredibly bright. Anyone who looks directly at him is blinded for a number of turns equal to his activation successes.

Pyre-Flame Caul •••••: The Bound can transform plasm in his internal crucible. He may spend a number of points of plasm up to his activation successes. Each three points allows him to distribute an extra 2 points among his Finesse Attributes as long as he manifests the Pyre-Flame Caul.

The Tear-Stained Caul

The Tear-Stained Caul infuses the Sin-Eater's body with brackish, cold water. She may move through water without penalty, swimming at her full running Speed.

Tear-Stained Caul ••: The Sin-Eater holds her foes with the crushing inevitability of the seas. She adds her activation successes to her Strength when grappling someone.

Tear-Stained Caul •••: This level allows the Sin-Eater to flow around attacks. She applies her Defense against firearms attacks.

Tear-Stained Caul ••••: The character can meld with any body of water, reappearing elsewhere. She must be standing in a body of water to unlock this power. Upon doing so, she transforms into liquid form, merges with the body of water, and emerges up to her Caul rating in miles at a different point within the same body of water at the end of the scene.

Tear-Stained Caul •••••: The Sin-Eater can transform herself into a crashing wave. She travels 30 feet straight forwards, dealing her activation successes in lethal damage to everyone within 10 feet of her path.

The Industrial Caul

Skill: Crafts

The Industrial Caul melds the Sin-Eater and his geist into a figurative ghost in the machine. She blurs the line between living creature and machine,

able to bond with man-made devices, and at higher levels can implant things into his body. Subsidiary powers of the Industrial Caul don't involve dice rolls, and even those that do often deal with more than one piece of technology at once. The power's effects are considerably surreal, replacing science with what some Bound call "necrotech."

Most powers of the Industrial Caul allow the Sin-Eater to meld with pieces of technology. Once she's implanted a piece of technology, she adds her modified activation successes to her dice pool when using it. When using the Industrial Caul, she can't properly relate to humans, suffering a -2 modifier to all Presence rolls.

Initially, the Industrial Caul allows a Sin-Eater to implant simple man-made items of up to Size 3 into his body. Every item costs a point of plasm to implant. Whatever she melds with cannot rely on electronic or chemical power sources. She can hide or reveal the objects as a reflexive action.

Industrial Caul ••: The Sin-Eater can implant anything of Size 3 or below, including firearms and power tools. She can hold a total number of items in her body up to her Caul rating, though she can only use two items at once (extending each through one of her arms).

Industrial Caul •••: At this level, the Sin-Eater may manifest all the objects stored within her simultaneously, growing extra "arms" (which appear as mechanical constructions) as necessary.

Industrial Caul ••••: The character may meld with larger objects, up to Size 10 + the Sin-Eater's Psyche. She can't store any other items within herself while joined with a large device, and it costs two points of plasm to join with it. Her hands and legs flow into the machine while she controls it.

Industrial Caul •••••: The Sin-Eater can store items within her body when bonding with larger machines, and reveal them as for Industrial Caul •••, though each item she grows an arm for costs a point of plasm.

The Passion Caul

Skill: Empathy

The Passion Caul invites the geist to share the Sin-Eater's mind as well as her body. This is the ultimate intimacy, as she shares her every thought and notion with her geist. She can have no real secrets while she dons the Passion Caul, but in exchange she gains her geist's help in matters of both body and mind. The Sin-Eater adds her Caul rating as bonus dice to all Intelligence rolls she makes while manifesting the Passion Caul (save those to activate Manifestations).

Passion Caul ••: The Sin-Eater can work in parallel with her geist to focus on a specific problem.

She can turn any mundane Mental Skill roll into a rote action by spending a point of plasm.

Passion Caul •••: The character can understand the emotional responses of others on a deeper level than before. She adds her activation successes as bonus dice to all mundane Empathy, Intimidation, Persuasion, Socialize, or Subterfuge rolls.

Passion Caul ••••: With a touch, the character can forge a strong emotional bond with another person. She can make another person love her for as long as she manifests the Passion Caul. If her target's actively trying to avoid her, she may first need to succeed at a Dexterity + Brawl roll to touch him (the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 157). The player spends two plasm and rolls Manipulation + Empathy + (activation successes) versus the target's Composure + Psyche (resistance is reflexive). Success infuses the target with an overwhelming admiration for the Sin-Eater, coupled with a desire to keep her from harm. He will not take a violent action against her while she manifests the Passion Caul. Some people (especially those with the Virtue of Charity or Justice or Pride or Wrath as their Vice) will go further, fighting on her side because of their infatuation with her. When the effect ends, her target knows that he was manipulated. He gains a +3 modifier to his Composure when dealing with the Sin-Eater until the end of the chapter.

Passion Caul •••••: The Sin-Eater and geist share complete control of their mind and soul. Any supernatural powers that directly target the Sin-Eater's mind are diffused and deflected as the geist takes over; another use of the power against the geist simply returns the Sin-Eater to majority control. The Sin-Eater can apply a -5 penalty to any use of a mind or emotion-controlling power used against her by spending a Willpower point; this is a reflexive action.

The Phantasmal Caul

Skill: Persuasion

The Phantasmal Caul infuses the Sin-Eater with the essence of illusion and madness. His body becomes soft and pliable as ectoplasm under his hands, able to take on terrifying shapes and impossible forms. The Sin-Eater can alter his body's shape as an Instant action. While this doesn't directly alter his traits, a suitable modification can add his activation successes to a Physical Skill roll.

Phantasmal Caul ••: The Sin-Eater can augment his altered form to inflict paralyzing fear in anyone who sees it. The player spends two plasm and rolls Stamina + Expression + (activation successes) - (the highest Composure rating of any witnesses). Success means whoever sees the Sin-Eater during this activation suffers terrible fear. Viewers suffer a penalty equal to the number of successes rolled for this power on any action that doesn't involve either covering in fear or running directly away from the Sin-Eater. This penalty lasts for one turn per success rolled.



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Phantasmal Caul •••: The Sin-Eater's body becomes virtually spectral in its pliability. Any bashing damage he takes is halved (rounding down).

Phantasmal Caul ••••: The Sin-Eater can warp his body in strange ways, stretching his chest into a cage or growing extra limbs. He may spend one plasm to add his activation successes to any Brawl roll, including those made to grapple foes.

Phantasmal Caul •••••: The Sin-Eater can shift into a form that induces utter madness in a single target. The player spends 2 plasm and 1 Willpower, and rolls Manipulation + Expression + (activation successes) versus target's Composure + Psyche (resistance is reflexive). Success inflicts the target with a new minor derangement, or the major form of an existing minor derangement. This derangement lasts until the end of the scene.



The Primeval Caul

Skill: Animal Ken

Unlocking the Primeval Caul allows a Sin-Eater to take on aspects of animals to enhance his body. Taking on the aspects of all manner of wild animals, the Sin-Eater can add his activation successes to any Perception rolls. If blinded, he can track foes by sound or scent (adding his activation successes to the Wits + Composure roll, as noted on p. 167 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). He also adds his activation successes to any Survival rolls to follow trails.

Primeval Caul ••: The Sin-Eater gains an animal's instinctive awareness of what to do in a dangerous situation, and uses the higher of his Wits or Dexterity to determine his Defense. He may also spend one plasm to add his activation successes to his Speed for a turn.

Primeval Caul •••: His body taking on new bestial features, the Sin-Eater can distribute his activation successes among his Physical Attributes. These changes carry through to derived totals such as Initiative and Health. This power costs one Willpower to activate for a scene.

Primeval Caul ••••: The character can twist his body into that of an animal with Size between 3 and 7. He must first eat some of the animal's flesh and spend a point of plasm to internalize its form. He can store one animal form per dot of Psyche, but loses them after a month. The player spends 1 plasm (per point of the animal's Size) and 1 Willpower, and rolls Stamina + Animal Ken + (activation successes) as an instant action. Success grants the animal's form. If the animal is smaller, add the difference in Size to the Sin-Eater's Dexterity and subtract it from his Strength and Stamina. If the animal is larger, add the difference in Size to Strength and Stamina but subtract it from his Dexterity. No matter the Size, the Sin-Eater's Physical Attributes cannot be reduced below one dot.

In animal form, the Sin-Eater must communicate nonverbally. Where he can use Social Skills, he does so with a three-dice penalty. He gains the bonuses to Perception and Defense for Beast Caul • and ••, but cannot access other powers of the Beast Caul without reverting to human form. The Sin-Eater can remain transformed until the end of the scene, but can revert to human form at any point.

The player may activate this power, or the following, without calling on the one- to three-dot powers associated with the Primeval Caul.

Primeval Caul •••••: The Sin-Eater can split his body into a group of small animals — a murder of crows, a swarm of rats, or a cluster of spiders. The player spends 2 plasm and rolls Resolve + Animal Ken + (activation successes) as an instant action. Success splits his body into a group of animals, disintegrating where he stands.

In this form he can do little else than move at four times his Speed each turn — controlling so many distinct bodies is difficult, and makes attacking practically impossible. He gains five dice to all Stealth rolls to avoid pursuit, and anyone attacking the swarm with a normal weapon can't do damage enough to affect the Bound when he re-forms. Only fire and gas attacks can damage the group. This power lasts until the end of the scene or until the character chooses to end it, and he does not receive other benefits of the Beast Caul when it is active. The Sin-Eater can reflexively spend a point of plasm to remain disincorporate for an hour.

The Stigmata Caul

Skill: Occult

Blending with his geist in the Stigmata Caul grants the Sin-Eater power over his own body, controlling even autonomic functions like respiration. The core of blood within him is all that a Sin-Eater needs to control his body. At the most basic level, the Sin-Eater can control his metabolic functions. He does not need to breathe, eat, or sleep while manifesting the Stigmata Caul, and is immune to penalties from hunger or fatigue.

Stigmata Caul ••: The character can control his own spilt blood. He must infuse the blood with a point of plasm. While he's focusing his senses on a pool of infused blood he can move it up to his Speed each turn. The blood cannot climb walls, but the Sin-Eater can form it into specific shapes and even letters, or manipulate objects with an effective Strength of 1.

Stigmata Caul •••: The Sin-Eater can focus for a moment and see through a pool of his own blood. Spilling enough blood to see through costs him a single point of bashing damage. He can choose to see through any pool of his own shed blood while bound in the Stigmatic Caul, but he can only look through one pool at a time and shifting his vision takes an instant action. While looking through a pool of blood the Sin-Eater isn't aware of his own surroundings and can't apply his Defense to any attacks.

Stigmata Caul ••••: Perhaps the most disturbing power available to Sin-Eaters, this ability allows the Sin-Eater to detach one of his own arms and control it at range. The limb can move up to the Sin-Eater's Speed, and has his Physical Attributes and Speed, but is Size 2 and has half of his Health. Controlling his arm takes the Sin-Eater's full concentration only when it's out of his immediate area; if it's in the same room he can control it as a reflexive action. The arm is only destroyed if it suffers its entire Health in aggravated damage, and does

not bleed. The Sin-Eater has to collect his own limb, and cannot heal any damage taken by it until he re-attaches it to his body. Attaching the limb is an instant action.

Stigmata Caul •••••: The Sin-Eater can craft a homunculus out of his own blood. This costs 2 points of plasm, and the amount of blood necessary means the Sin-Eater takes an additional point of lethal damage in addition to the damage taken when invoking the Stigmata Caul. The creation has the same Attributes and Skills as the Sin-Eater, but is only Size 2, and has half the Sin-Eater's Health. He can see and hear through the homunculus, and control it directly, but doing so gives him a 3-dice penalty on any actions taken by his "main" body. Even when not under his direct control, the homunculus has enough awareness to apply Defense to attacks and resist supernatural powers.

The Stillness Caul

Skill: Stealth

Manifesting the Stillness Caul bonds the Sin-Eater to the essence of the Underworld's shadows. As he unlocks greater powers of the Stillness Caul he can travel through shadows and even subsume his body into living shadow. Simply manifesting this Caul applies his activation successes as a penalty to all Wits + Composure rolls made to detect him by sight, sound, or scent.

Stillness Caul ••: The Sin-Eater's shadowy body slips around attacks. He may add his Caul rating to his Defense.

Stillness Caul •••: The Sin-Eater may step through shadows. He has to be standing in a patch of shadow large enough to conceal himself, and can move to any patch of shadow within 10 yards per activation success. He spends 1 plasm to shadow-step, vanishing utterly, and appears in the destination shadow at the beginning of his next turn.

Stillness Caul ••••: The Sin-Eater can become living shadow. He may spend a point of plasm to transform into a shadowy, quasi-solid form for the remainder of the scene. As a part-shadow, he can pass through windows and under doors, and may flow or creep up flat surfaces at his full Speed.

Stillness Caul •••••: The Sin-Eater can reflexively shift between solidity and incorporeal shadow with the expenditure of one plasm. While incorporeal, he becomes immune to physical damage (though not the attacks of entities in Twilight). However, he can only move along flat surfaces, and cannot manipulate objects while in his shadow form.

The Curse

Attribute: Presence

Manifesting the Curse lets a Sin-Eater's geist off the leash just a little. It doesn't directly attack his opponents, instead leaving just a hint of its plasm. Through that plasm, the geist can touch the world. Unlike other Manifestations, the geist can only nudge events around the victim, rather than interacting with her directly – the Beast Curse may turn every animal she meets against her, while the Stig-

mata Curse ensures that her wounds bleed and attract the attentions of the unquiet dead. Though its effects are subtle, without a geist's direct intervention, supernatural creatures who can perceive auras or magic can still pick up on signs of the Curse.

The basic power of the Curse places a hex on a single person, out to a range of her Psyche dots x 10 yards. The effects of the hex depend on the Key used to unlock the Manifestation. Though the target is normally unaware of being cursed she still resists the geist's influence, though with the lower of her Resolve and Composure. A curse plagues its target for a limited duration, defined by the activation successes. The hex may take effect immediately; alternately, the Sin-Eater may define a specific occurrence as a trigger for the curse, such as the victim seeing a red-headed man, or the next time she eats meat. Attaching a condition to a curse imposes a -2 modifier on the roll. If the victim doesn't meet the condition within one day per activation success, the curse dissipates.

Curse Activation

Cost: 1 plasm

Dice Pool: Presence + (Key Skill) + Curse rating - lower of target's Resolve and Composure

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hex backfires. The Sin-Eater suffers the effects of his hex for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The attempt to manifest the Curse fails.

Success: The Sin-Eater leaves a trace of his geist's plasm on his victim. This trace lasts for one day per success, during which time the curse affects its victim. If the Sin-Eater attached a condition to her hex, the duration starts from the point when the victim meets the condition. If the condition isn't met within one day per success, the hex does not apply.

Exceptional Success: The victim can sense the presence of the curse, and it weighs on her. She suffers a -1 penalty to any rolls made to resist degeneration or gaining derangements while the hex remains in effect.

A person can only be under one hex at a time. A Sin-Eater can end the effects of his own Curse as a reflexive action, though he does have to touch the victim. Another Sin-Eater can force a new hex onto a target, but must roll more activation successes than the existing hex. This applies even if the initial curse was set with a condition that hasn't yet been met.

A Sin-Eater with this Manifestation can also spend a plasm to attempt removing an application of the Curse. If his activation rolls equal or exceed those of the activation successes made to lay the hex in the first place, the curse is removed. If the Sin-Eater attempting to remove the Curse does not have the appropriate Key, the roll suffers a -2 penalty.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Presence + (Key Skill) + Curse rating - existing curse's activation successes



Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The curse lasts longer than it normally would. Determine the duration as if the original hex had two more activation successes.

Failure: The Sin-Eater cannot remove the curse.

Success: The Sin-Eater removes the curse, though whoever set the hex is aware that someone has tampered with his handiwork.

Exceptional Success: The curse slips off without a problem. Whoever set the curse is unaware that it has been removed.

The Elemental Curses

Skill: Occult

The Elemental Keys tear at the psyche, grasp the heart and roil the blood. They draw on the power of the elements to affect the human soul.

The Cold-Wind Curse

The Cold-Wind Curse is a subtle one. It is a curse of bleak skies and bitter winds, all felt in the psyche. The victim feels the effects of exposure to wind, rain and chill even indoors or on a sunny day. When outdoors, the curse intensifies, inflicting a penalty equal to half the activation successes on any rolls while exposed.

Cold Wind Curse ••: The Sin-Eater may increase the duration of the psychic bleakness to three days per activation success by spending an extra point of plasm.

Cold Wind Curse •••: The general temperature drops, and the victim perceives it as below freezing. Whenever she attempts to use a Physical Skill outdoors suffers a -2 modifier as she tries to keep her balance.

Cold Wind Curse ••••: Shivering and unable to concentrate, the victim cannot ever get warm enough. All her actions suffer a -2 modifier.

Cold Wind Curse •••••: The gloom reaches into the target's very soul. The victim must succeed at a Resolve roll or lose a point of Willpower at the end of each hour. This effect is not negated by shelter.

The Grave-Dirt Curse

A victim of the Grave-Dirt Curse feels the weight of the world pressing down upon him. Normally it's nothing that a couple of cups of coffee won't deal with, but at night the weight crushes his chest and stops him breathing just long enough to wake him right back up. This curse lasts for six hours per activation success. The victim cannot sleep for the duration of the hex (see "Fatigue," *World of Darkness Rulebook* p. 179, but note that the victim automatically succeeds at Stamina + Resolve rolls).

Grave-Dirt Curse ••: The base effect of the Grave-Dirt Curse applies to anyone who attempts to share a bed with the hex's victim.

Grave-Dirt Curse •••: The victim suffers even when he's not sleeping. He's short of breath before any exercise. For the duration of the curse, the victim loses one point of Stamina (to a minimum of 1). This effect costs an additional point of plasm, and only affects the victim of the curse.

Grave-Dirt Curse ••••: The weight felt by the victim increases again, restricting his arms and limiting his movements. The Sin-Eater spends an extra point of plasm, but reduces his victim's Dexterity by 1 for every two activation successes (to a minimum of 1).

Grave-Dirt Curse •••••: The victim's limbs feel like they're wrapped in a thick layer of mud. He can't feel anything. Rolls requiring fine manipulation suffer a penalty equal to the activation successes. Every day the victim goes without touching something, he loses a point of Willpower due to sensory deprivation. The Sin-Eater must spend two extra points of plasm to activate this effect.

The Pyre-Flame Curse

As man created fire to hold back the dark, the Pyre-Flame Curse steals it back. The only Elemental Curse with largely physical effects, the base curse simply prevents her from making fire: lighters spark but don't catch, and matches break when she tries to strike them. If she tries to take a flame from another source, say by lighting a piece of paper, the flame dies as she watches.

Pyre-Flame Curse ••: The fire-blocking effect extends to a range of 10 yards per dot of Psyche if the Sin-Eater spends an extra point of plasm when hexing the victim. Not only can nobody make fire in that radius, existing fires go out—especially dangerous in an apartment with a gas stove.

Pyre-Flame Curse •••: Sparks of electricity refuse to fire for the victim. Any device that runs on electricity, from computers to light switches, will not work.

Pyre-Flame Curse ••••: This power costs an extra point of plasm but extends the effects of Pyre-Flame Curse ••• out to 10 yards per dot of Psyche. Electrical devices simply stop working when they come into range.

Pyre-Flame Curse •••••: Even the sun turns its face from the victim. She's struck blind for the duration of the hex. Any visual perception rolls automatically fail, and she uses the Fighting Blind rules (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 166) in combat.

The Tear-Stained Curse

Hexes of sorrow and regret, the potent magics of the Tear-Stained Curse are as varied and capricious as the seas. The initial curse instills the victim with an irrational fear of water for one hour per activation success. Often, she can't get close enough to drink a

single glass for the duration of the curse. The victim gains the derangement: hydrophobia for the duration of the hex.

Tear-Stained Curse •••: The Sin-Eater can inflict a bout of powerful depression in place of hydrophobia, as the victim's past failures come back to haunt her. She loses a point of Willpower, and can't spend Willpower until the curse wears off.

Tear-Stained Curse ••••: If the Sin-Eater pays an extra point of plasm, the curse lasts for one day per activation success.

Tear-Stained Curse •••••: The geist bombards its victim with images of failures and lost loves from throughout her life. This costs the Sin-Eater an extra point of plasm, but inflicts an additional -2 modifier to all dice pools, over and above the effects of Tear-Stained Curse ••.

Tear-Stained Curse ••••••: The victim is unable to stand the sight of water at all. For one day per activation success, the victim suffers the hysteria derangement with regards to water. This costs two points of plasm in addition to the activation cost.

The Industrial Curse

Skill: Crafts

The Industrial Curse makes its victim anathema to the modern world. While the Pyre-Flame Curse simply causes items to fail, the Industrial Curse instills devices around the victim with a degree of malevolence. Computers come down with viruses and spyware even if they're not connected to the Internet, tools slip out of the victim's hands, and his car's brakes fail at the worst possible moment. The Sin-Eater using this hex must choose the most recent technology that the curse will affect, and use the appropriate modifier listed under the Industrial Key. The hex won't affect any newer technology — so hexing a victim hard enough to screw with her laptop won't fuck with her hybrid car.

The base effect of the Industrial Curse reduces the equipment modifier of a piece of technology to 0. Devices with a negative modifier aren't affected. The device doesn't stop functioning, but it fights the cursed character every step of the way.

Industrial Curse •••: Every piece of technology the victim owns turns its bonus into a penalty. The more a device has helped in the past, the more it hinders now. Items that already give a penalty, whether through shoddy workmanship or inherent instability, have their penalty increased by two.

Industrial Curse ••••: Every roll the victim makes involving the item deals one point of damage to the item per activation success. This damage is affected by Durability as normal.

Industrial Curse •••••: An affected device twists in the victim's hands, sharp edges protruding surprisingly deep. Every roll the victim makes with an affected piece of technology deals him three dice of bashing damage. The Sin-Eater must spend an extra point of plasm to activate this effect.

Industrial Curse ••••••: Accidents happen. Brake lines snap and loaded guns go off before the victim's had a chance to draw them. The Sin-Eater must spend two points

of plasm to activate this effect. One item of technology with an equipment modifier of less than or equal to the activation successes deals (3 x its equipment modifier) dice of lethal damage to the victim.

The Passion Curse

Skill: Empathy

Love and hate tug at the heart of a victim of the Passion Curse, often over people he's never seen before. The value of the Passion Curse comes from its unpredictability. Even the Sin-Eater unlocking the Manifestation doesn't know what results the hex will have, only which emotions she encourages her geist to spike.

The victim of this curse finds whichever emotion the Sin-Eater specifies acting as a recurrent theme in his life for the duration of the hex. He doesn't necessarily feel the emotion directly, but people around him do, and that's sometimes worse — a man cursed with the passion of love might watch the girl he's lusted after fall for his best friend, or he makes a move only for her husband to find out.

Initially, the emotional resonance only passes on to people the victim touches, but increasing ranks may extend this effect. A person interacting with the victim in such a manner that the curse may affect him makes a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll. If he does not achieve more than the Sin-Eater's activation successes, the curse takes hold.

Phantasmal Curse •••: Anyone the victim speaks to in person may feel the pull of emotion.

Phantasmal Curse ••••: Anyone within 10 feet of the victim feels the pull of emotion. Any actions that further the emotion gain a bonus equal to the hex's activation successes, while those that go against the chosen emotion suffer a penalty equal to the activation successes.

Passion Curse •••••: The Sin-Eater must spend two extra points of plasm to empower this version of the hex. Whenever the victim takes an action in some way related to the emotion (attempting to seduce a beloved target, trying to dodge an attack made under the influence of wrath), the roll receives a -4 penalty. This version of the curse can only last for one hour per activation success.

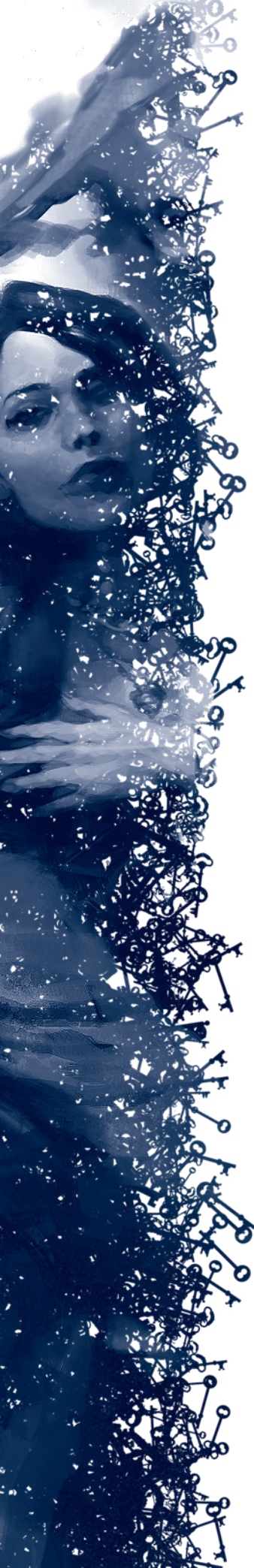
Passion Curse ••••••: This level feeds the emotional resonance of the hex back to the Sin-Eater. Every dramatic failure arising from the four-dot hex gives her a point of plasm.

The Phantasmal Curse

Skill: Persuasion

The Phantasmal Curse is a curse of illusion and madness. The victim may see or hear things that aren't there at lower levels, while at higher levels the illusions can follow him around and drive him insane. A particularly nasty Sin-Eater can leave someone under the Phantasmal Curse for long enough that his victim is diagnosed with schizophrenia, leaving him alive but very much unable to interfere in the Sin-Eater's plans.

To a victim of the Phantasmal Curse, distances warp and twist. Initially, he just appears clumsy and awkward — bottles and jars slip from his grasp, and he can't write coherently



worth a damn. He suffers a penalty to Dexterity and Perception rolls equal to the activation successes. That's just the start of his torment.

Phantasmal Curse ••: The Sin-Eater can insert fictitious characters in the victim's mind. These characters appear real to the victim, talk to him, and generally act just like other people. The hallucination can be anything from a Manifestation of how the victim wants to look and act to a six-foot three-and-a-half inch talking rabbit. The Sin-Eater can craft one character per activation success, or leave the precise details up to the recesses of her victim's subconscious. Once created, the fictitious characters are under the control of the victim's subconscious, not the Sin-Eater.

Phantasmal Curse •••: The victim's sense of balance erodes as distances warp and become thoroughly malleable. All Dexterity rolls to do more than walk forwards slowly are reduced by an additional three dice for a scene when the curse takes hold.

Phantasmal Curse ••••: The Sin-Eater may change the facts of the world as the victim understands them. She can make one simple statement per activation success: "The government can read your thoughts through the fillings in your teeth," or "Government satellites beam cows into your brain every night," or "The world is a two-dimensional playpen for higher beings." The victim believes these statements as objective truths for the duration of the curse, though he may spend a point of Willpower to ignore the effects of the belief for a scene. If the

implanted belief puts him in danger (such as believing he can fly while atop a building), he may spend a point of Willpower to end the curse's effects entirely. Screwing with a victim's reality in this manner costs two extra points of plasm.

Phantasmal Curse •••••: By spending a point of Willpower when she lays the hex on her victim, the Sin-Eater may apply the basic penalty to Dexterity and Perception rolls to all Resolve or Composure-related rolls as well.

The Primeval Curse

Skill: Animal Ken

A man suffering from the Primeval Curse has the natural world turn against him. In the city, he suffers attacks from rats, pigeons, and feral cats and dogs — though if he travels through the sewers, he might find out the truth behind all those alligator stories. In the wilderness, the Curse can make enemies of wolves, cougars, and all manner of other creatures. All effects of the Primeval Curse last for an hour per activation success.

To begin with, the Primeval Curse just sours its victim's relationship with any and all animals: for the duration of the Curse, all the victim's Animal Ken rolls suffer a penalty equal to the activation successes.

Primeval Curse ••: Animals of a specific type (canines, birds, snakes or the like) seek the victim out. Though they don't attack, a number of animals equal to the activation successes home in on the character. These animals follow the victim for the



duration of the curse, trying to get as close as possible to him. If he enters a building, the animals drawn by the curse will try their best to break in to be with him.

Primeval Curse ••••: The animals attracted by Primeval Curse •• are more directly hostile in nature, and will attempt to harm the victim, though not if the only way to do so is suicidal.

Primeval Curse •••••: The focus of the curse shifts to the victim directly. A hex of this form costs two extra points of plasm. The Sin-Eater summons a ghostly animal that affects the target's peace of mind – a dead pet, an animal he accidentally or deliberately killed, or the like. The ghost animal silently stalks the target for the curse's duration, imposing a penalty to Resolve and Composure rolls equal to the activation successes. The shade is an actual ghost, and can be dealt with by other Sin-Eaters, though any rolls to do so suffer a -2 penalty if the intercessor does not possess the Primeval Key.

Primeval Curse ••••••: The Sin-Eater conjures a stalking ghost as in the four-dot power, but the bestial shade is of more dire aspect. Once per day, if it catches its target alone, it may attack with a dice pool equal to the activation successes. The victim loses one Willpower point per success.

The Stigmata Curse

Skill: Medicine

Other curses are subtle, playing with the victim's perceptions and mental state. Not so the Stigmata Curse, which afflicts the blood and humours. Stigmata wounds that refuse to clot or heal, strange diseases, and the attentions of the unquiet dead are the domain of these curses.

At base, the Sin-Eater can inflict a wound that bleeds profusely for the duration of the curse, though it only deals a single point of lethal damage. Bandages can't stem the flow of blood, though the wound remains strangely pain-free, and the target doesn't suffer the effects of blood loss. This hex lasts for one hour per activation success, at which point the victim stops bleeding and the wound heals.

Stigmata Curse •••: Roll one die each scene; if the result is equal to or lower than the activation successes, a new stigmatic wound opens. Some Christian Sin-Eaters enjoy making their victims bleed from the wrists, the feet, and from the side of the torso – the classic wounds of Christ. Others create bloody lines along the victim's forehead, or write strange symbols in their victims. The target suffers no damage from this bleeding.

Stigmata Curse ••••: The Sin-Eater can instead inflict a terrible wasting disease. For the duration, the victim takes one point of lethal damage per hour, and suffers a penalty equal to the activation successes on all Social rolls given the lesions and open sores. Despite its appearance, the disease caused by this hex is not contagious.

Stigmata Curse •••••: The smell of the target's blood calls to the restless dead in the area. The victim becomes an anchor to old ghosts, long enough gone that they don't remember what it means to be human. One apparition or poltergeist per activation success gains the victim as an anchor for the

duration of the hex. The Sin-Eater must spend an extra point of plasm when casting the hex to gain this effect.

Stigmata Curse ••••••: This hex actually "bleeds away" the target's very flesh, forcing him into Twilight for the duration of the curse, though it costs the Sin-Eater two extra points of plasm. The victim cannot materialize until the curse ends.

The Stillness Curse

Skill: Stealth

A man walks through a crowded city street. People bump into him, but they don't even realize he's there. He asks for help, begs for someone to pay him any heed, and screams at a world that's forgotten him. And in the darkness, a Sin-Eater watches and laughs. Such is the power of the Stillness Curse, a nightmarish power that excises its victim from human contact – initially just from sight but later from thought entirely. Anyone who labors under the Stillness Curse for too long may be able to attend his own funeral, but only if people remember him for long enough that he's declared dead.

The basic power of the Stillness Curse removes its victim from the limelight in his own life. All Presence and Manipulation rolls suffer a penalty equal to activation successes, as he has a hard time bringing people around to his way of thinking – or having them pay him much attention at all. To begin with, it's annoying. But that's just the start.

Some Sin-Eaters have even used this Curse upon themselves in the interests of anonymity. They find, somewhat to their chagrin, that the powers of the Curse cut them off from their own krewes as well as their enemies – and that the dead still remember them all too well.

Stillness Curse •••: People don't remember the victim unless something prompts them, be that a letter arriving for the victim or his actions. While it might be nice to have a landlord forget about the three months of back rent, the victim likely can't deal with going to a club and watching his girlfriend hit on a guy until he reminds her that he's right there sat next to her – and then having her shrug and carry on the second he leaves. The victim loses access to all Social Merits for the duration of the curse.

Stillness Curse ••••: The Sin-Eater spends an extra point of plasm. Even when the victim's present, people forget him. If they see him, they don't remark upon it. If they hear him it doesn't make a difference. For the duration of the curse, the victim's simply a nonentity, forgotten by the mundane world. The victim suffers a -3 penalty to Social rolls and gains the depression derangement for the duration of the curse.

Stillness Curse •••••: The Sin-Eater laying the curse can spend two points of plasm when setting the curse to remove the target's ability to understand others. Everyone he meets has indistinctly blurred features, and seems to speak in whispered gibberish.

Stillness Curse ••••••: The target is stricken with supernaturally intense aphasia. He cannot speak in understandable phrases, and any attempt to write produces meaningless tangles of keystrokes or doodles.



The Marionette

Attribute: Manipulation

Perhaps the most invasive and frightening Manifestation, the Marionette, as its name implies, allows the Sin-Eater to reach out with her plasm to seize control of objects, animals, and even people. To those with the sight to see it, the Sin-Eater reaches out with her hand, and invisible tendrils of plasm reach out to the object of her desire, ensnaring it (or him) and compelling obedience. The Marionette does not inspire loyalty in affected persons – the victim remains free-willed and often vocally opposed, but his body has been enslaved. Some Marionette powers can transform living human beings into virtual zombies, and Sin-Eaters steeped in the traditions of Vodoun and its sister religions often describe slaves bound with Marionette as zombies in order to take advantage of local beliefs about those religions.

The precise nature of the control depends upon which Key is used to unlock the Marionette. The Primeval Key and Industrial Key are used to control animals and machinery, respectively, but other Keys provide for more... abstract methods of control, such as the Passion Marionette, which manipulates the emotions of another person, or the Stillness Marionette, which seizes control of her body. The Phantasmal Key unlocks the power to create mystical puppets under the Sin-Eater's control, while the Stigmata Key allows her to manipulate ghosts and spirits. Generally, the target of the Manifestation must be within the Sin-Eater's line-of-sight. If the Sin-Eater has an active Boneyard or Oracle Manifestation that allows her to see the target, she may influence it even outside her immediate vision as long as the target is within the range of the other Manifestation. Once control is established, the Sin-Eater can usually perceive her slave and maintain control for the duration of the Manifestation.

Marionette Activation

Cost: Varies

Dice Pool: Manipulation + (Key Skill) + Marionette rating. Other sentient beings targeted for control by the Marionette resist by rolling Resolve + Psyche.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The activation attempt fails, and the Sin-Eater may not attempt to use any Marionette-related power for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The attempt to unlock the Marionette fails.

Success: The Sin-Eater exudes a tendril of plasm that reaches out and invisibly ensnares the object of the Manifestation, forging a sympathetic connection, which allows for the possibility of control. The

activation successes add to other Marionette-related rolls. Unless stated otherwise in the power's description, the sympathetic link lasts for one scene unless the Sin-Eater chooses to end it prematurely. Once a link is established, the Sin-Eater can maintain it for longer periods at a cost of 1 plasm per hour.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater regains one point of spent plasm.

The Elemental Marionettes

The Elemental versions of the Marionette Manifestation works quite differently from other versions of this power. Instead of manipulating or shaping some other creature, thing or emotion, the Sin-Eater fashions a tiny homunculus from the spiritual remnants of a living being. In order to create a homunculus, the Sin-Eater must create a small fetish called a homunculus egg. The materials required for the egg vary according to the element upon which the homunculus is to be based. Air calls for the dying breath of a human being. Earth requires a handful of dirt from a grave into which a body has been interred within the last hour. Fire requires a handful of ash from a cremated human body or residue from a human being who was burned to ash. Water requires a small quantity of water drawn from the lungs of a drowning victim or a like amount of sea water drawn from the ocean near where a person was buried at sea within the last few minutes.

Once the Sin-Eater has acquired the appropriate elemental material, she must forge it into a homunculus egg by spending one point of plasm per dot of Size the creature is to have, as well as one permanent Willpower point. The Sin-Eater may not spend more plasm than his Elemental Marionette rating. The appearance of the egg varies according to the elemental type, as does the appearance of the homunculus it carries. Any type of egg will be able to fit inside a person's hand easily.

An egg can be destroyed – each egg has Durability equal to the Sin-Eater's Marionette rating and Structure equal to its Durability + activation successes. Destroying an egg ends the Manifestation automatically. While it endures, the Sin-Eater may invest the egg with a point of plasm at any time and cause the homunculus to emerge and do her bidding. While the homunculus is active, the Sin-Eater has total control over it and can perceive through its senses and speak through its mouth, but she must maintain constant concentration and can take no action other than to focus on the homunculus. If the Sin-Eater's concentration wavers or if the homunculus suffers enough damage to otherwise kill it, it automatically reverts back to a homunculus egg. It will also do so, wherever it is, at the end of the scene unless the Sin-Eater spends another plasm to maintain its activity for an additional scene.

Marionette Activation (Elemental Version)

Cost: 1 plasm per dot of Size + 1 permanent Willpower
Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult + Marionette rating.
 Generally, there is no opposition roll, but if the deceased person whose body is used as the basis for the homunculus egg exists as a ghost, she may resist the attempt to violate her remains with a reflexive Resistance + Power rating.
Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attempt to create the homunculus egg fails. The ghost of the deceased used as the basis for the egg (regardless of whether the deceased was previously active as a ghost) is summoned to the area and immediately becomes hostile towards the Sin-Eater, who is treated as an Anchor for the ghost for the duration of the scene.

Failure: The attempt to create the homunculus egg fails.

Success: The Sin-Eater fashions a homunculus egg that can be used to birth a homunculus with the characteristics outlined below. The egg endures for a time period equal to one month per activation success, at the end of which the Sin-Eater may spend another permanent Willpower to preserve the egg for another term of the same length.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater and homunculus are well-connected. While the homunculus is active, the Sin-Eater can divert his attention away from directing its action for a number of turns equal to the activation successes before it collapses back into its egg. During that time, the homunculus will continue to follow its last instruction.

The basic characteristics of a homunculus forged with Elemental Marionette • are as follows: the creature starts with Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, and Size equal to the Sin-Eater's Elemental Marionette rating. The homunculus will always use its creator's Mental and Social Attributes, as well as her Skills (since it is merely an extension of her will and personality), but it suffers a -3 dice penalty on all Presence rolls due to its disturbing appearance. Each homunculus closely resembles the person whose death gave rise to it. That is, a Grave-Dirt homunculus will resemble the person whose grave was disturbed to create the egg. Although the homunculus acts according to the dictates of its creator, it will speak with the voice of the dead person it resembles and often have many of its mannerisms and personality quirks so long as they do not interfere with the Sin-Eater's control.

A Cold Wind homunculus is fashioned from a person's dying breath. It looks like a tiny version of the dead person but with pale blue skin suggestive of cyanosis. Cold Wind homunculi have wings that allow them to fly at three times their normal Speed. Also, Cold Wind homunculi are very difficult to see and add the activation successes to all Stealth rolls. However, they are highly vulnerable to fire- or heat-based attacks, either of which adds a +3 dice bonus to all attack rolls. The egg for a Cold Wind homunculus is an ice-cold shard of glass etched with the face of the deceased person moaning in agony.

A Grave-Dirt homunculus is formed from the fresh soil of a recently interred body. It also resembles a tiny version of the deceased but with gray rocky skin and the constant aroma of decay. Grave-Dirt homunculi are stronger and more durable than other types, adding +1 to all Strength-based rolls and gaining Armor equal to the activation successes. However, they recoil from water which, in sufficient quantities, can turn their flesh to mud and destroy their material consistency. Water-based attacks inflict lethal damage on Grave-Dirt homunculi, and being totally submerged for more than one turn will instantly turn one back into an egg. The egg of a Grave-Dirt homunculus appears as a brownish-gray rock upon which is etched the image of the deceased.

A Pyre-Flame homunculus is forged from the ashes of a recently cremated body or directly from the remains of someone who was burned alive. It resembles the deceased but with black, cracked skin, and an ashy aroma. Like their Cold Wind cousins, Pyre-Flame homunculi have wings and can fly, though at only their normal Speed. Pyre-Flame homunculi are also totally immune to fire or heat-based damage. Like their Grave-Dirt kin, however, these homunculi are highly vulnerable to dousing. Water-based attacks inflict lethal damage on Grave-Dirt homunculi, and being totally submerged for more than one turn will instantly turn one back into an egg. The egg of a Pyre-Flame homunculus appears as a lump of coal, uncomfortably warm to the touch, which smells of burnt flesh.

Finally, a Tear-Stained homunculus is borne of water either drawn from the lungs of a drowning victim or from the immediate area where a human body was buried at sea earlier in the same scene. Such homunculi usually have greenish-blue, constantly wet skin with jet-black eyes. Most also have webbed hands and feet. The homunculi can breathe underwater and can swim at triple its normal movement rate. If the Sin-Eater wishes, the Tear-Stained homunculus may have a fish tail in place of legs. Such a specimen can swim at four-times its normal Speed but can move at only half its normal Speed while on dry land. Like their Cold Wind cousins, Tear-Stained homunculi are highly vulnerable to fire- or heat-based attacks, either of which adds a +3 dice bonus to all attack rolls. The egg of a Tear-Stained homunculus is a tiny glass snow globe. If one looks closely, one can see that the "snow" appears to be made of fingernail scrappings.

When the Sin-Eater reaches Elemental Marionette •••••, the homunculus gains the potential for quasi-sentience. In addition to Physical Attributes and Size, the homunculus begins with one dot in each of the Mental and Social Attributes, and the Sin-Eater may spend activation successes to give the creature dot ratings in Mental or Social Attributes (on a one-for-one basis) or in Skills (at a ratio of three Skill dots per activation success spent). Such a homunculus can follow the orders of its creator without



her constant supervision, allowing the Sin-Eater to focus on other things while her obedient servant carries out her wishes.

It is possible for one Sin-Eater to steal a homunculus away from its creator. To do so, the poacher must first acquire the egg and then attempt to harmonize it. The creator intuitively senses when such a theft attempt takes place and can resist reflexively. The creator can also sense the location and distance of a stolen egg with a successful Wits + Composure roll and can find it unerringly absent some type of magical occlusion.

Roaching a Homunculus

Cost: None but the poacher must have physical possession of the egg.

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Marionette rating (sentient beings usually have a resistance roll described under each specific Manifestation)

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attempt to steal the homunculus fails, and the egg's true owner knows exactly where the egg is and who has it.

Failure: The attempt to steal the homunculus fails.

Success: The Sin-Eater acquires ownership of the egg but must immediately spend one dot of Willpower to reset the lifespan of the egg for a time span (based on the original activation successes rolled for the creator).

Exceptional Success: The new owner automatically gains control over the egg, which will endure for (activation successes) months without the expenditure of a Willpower dot.

The Industrial Marionette

Skill: Crafts

With this power, the Sin-Eater exercises dominion over mechanical and technological devices, as well as crafted items such as furniture, building fixtures, and works of art. Any activation roll for the Industrial Marionette is subject to the dice modifiers listed under the Technology Level Modifiers chart on pg. 111. The basic activation roll simply allows for a form of telekinesis – the sympathetic link forged between the Sin-Eater and the affected object allows her to move it around the area at will. Unless combined with the Boneyard or the Oracle, the Sin-Eater must be within line-of-sight of any object he wishes to manipulate with this Manifestation. Some of the higher-level effects associated with the Industrial Boneyard duplicate the powers of this Manifestation, but Industrial Marionette is usually cheaper, sacrificing range and versatility for efficiency.

With Industrial Marionette •, the Sin-Eater can manipulate any device or object up to Size 5.

Each additional dot in this Manifestation adds +5 to the maximum Size. With Industrial Marionette •••••, the Sin-Eater can manipulate a device or object up to Size 25 freely, but he can also manipulate even larger objects by suffering a dice penalty equal to -1 per 10 points of Size to be manipulated in excess of 25. The Sin-Eater may only exceed the normal Size cap with the five-dot version. Unlocking the Industrial Marionette requires the expenditure of plasm equal to the minimum rating needed to affect the device based on its Size.

Once he has succeeded on the activation roll, the Sin-Eater can command the affected device to perform any of the following actions with no further plasm cost:

- The Sin-Eater can turn any electrical or mechanical device on or off. This action can be performed reflexively.
- The Sin-Eater can telekinetically manipulate the device as if he were exercising a Strength against it equal to the activation successes. That is, if the player had rolled four activation successes and the device could be lifted by someone with a Strength + Athletics pool of 4 or less, then the Sin-Eater could freely move the device through will alone. This action requires limited concentration – the Sin-Eater may undertake another action while moving the object, but he suffers a -2 dice penalty on the action.

The Sin-Eater also has access to the following additional power options, all of which require the expenditure of additional plasm:

- If the activation successes exceed the minimum requirement for moving the device by 1, the Sin-Eater can slide it forcefully across the floor towards a target as an attack. The dice pool for this attack is Resolve + activation successes (- target's Defense). If the activation successes exceed the minimum requirement for moving the device by 2, the Sin-Eater can telekinetically hurl the device towards the target, using Resolve + activation successes + object's Size (- target's Defense). Either form of attack costs 1 plasm per attack and requires total concentration and a full action on the part of the Sin-Eater.
- While the Sin-Eater maintains concentration, she can cause the device to do anything that would normally fit within its design parameters, even if it could not normally perform such an action unaided. For example, she could command an electric vacuum cleaner to begin sweeping a floor, or she could cause a radio to produce whatever sound she wished or a television to show whatever images she desired. Using this power costs 1 plasm, and control lasts for a scene or until the Sin-Eater is distracted. If control is lost, the Sin-Eater must spend another plasm to reassert it. Generally, the roll for any such

sophisticated activity is Wits + Resolve unless some other Attribute or Skill combination seems more relevant (such as Wits + Drive to operate a car through this power, or Intelligence + Computer to hack a computer system). Any actions performed with this power require a full action on the part of the Sin-Eater.

Finally, at the ultimate level of the Industrial Marionette, the Sin-Eater may unlock this power:

Industrial Marionette •••••: Infusing the object of her attention with plasm, the Sin-Eater can overload it, causing it to explode violently. This power can affect only devices that are either electrical or mechanical in nature. The player spends 1 plasm per point of the targeted device's Size, and rolls Resolve + Craft + (activation successes) as an instant action. If successful, the targeted device explodes violently, inflicting one level of lethal damage per success on everyone within (device's Size x 3) yards of the device. Characters aware of what is happening may attempt to leap for cover as a reflexive action, with each success on a Dexterity + Athletics roll reducing the damage inflicted by one point.

The Passion Marionette

Skill: Empathy

Passion Marionette ••: The Sin-Eater can unlock the Marionette to forge a sympathetic link to the emotional core of another person. The Sin-Eater must first make a standard Marionette activation roll, resisted by the target's Composure + Psyche. Once the sympathetic link is formed,

the Sin-Eater gains an intuitive insight into the target's personality. For the duration of the Manifestation, the Sin-Eater may add his activation successes to all Presence- or Manipulation-related rolls made to influence the target through mundane manipulation, in addition to adding activation successes as normal to any other invocation of the Marionette.

Passion Marionette ••: Having gained insight into the emotional nature of her victim, the Sin-Eater can trigger an emotional response of her own choosing. The player spends 1 plasm and rolls Manipulation + Empathy + (activation successes), reflexively resisted by Composure + Psyche.

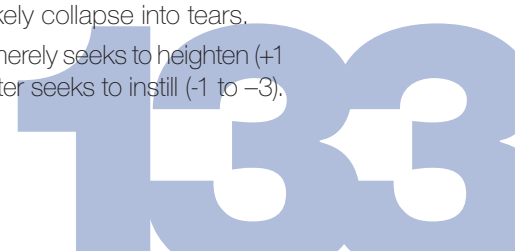
If the roll is successful, the target immediately assumes a new and intense emotional state of the Sin-Eater's choice. The target's response to the emotion should be appropriate to the chart below. In addition to any specific emotional responses, an affected target also suffers a penalty on all dice actions equal to the Sin-Eater's successes on this roll due to being emotionally overcome. The target can negate this penalty by spending one Willpower point per action undertaken in contravention of the emotion. For example, the character would need to spend points of Willpower to take an action to save someone he is compelled to hate, but he would not need to spend Willpower to attack that person. When the target has spent a total number of Willpower points equal to the activation successes, the Sin-Eater's control ends, and she may not target that character for emotional manipulation again during the same scene.

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

Below are some of the most common emotional attacks associated with Passion Marionette. The Storyteller has discretion to modify these responses to fit the specific situation.

| Emotion | Response |
|----------|--|
| Despair: | The target is overcome with ennui and a sense of utter hopelessness. Passion Marionette ••••• allows the Sin-Eater to trigger suicidal impulses in the target. A suicidal character must spend 1 point of Willpower per scene under the effects of this power to resist the urge to do herself harm. |
| Fear: | The target is overcome with an indescribable dread. This fear is not focused towards any particular person or object (as in the case of a phobia). Instead, the target is filled with an irrational panic over the situation in which he finds himself. A vampire affected by this power suffers a dice penalty on all rolls to resist Rotshrek equal to the activation successes. |
| Hate: | The target is overcome with a violent antipathy towards another character. With Passion Marionette •••, the Sin-Eater may determine the focus of the target's ire. Otherwise, the Storyteller should determine it randomly. |
| Joy: | The target is overcome by laughter and will be inclined towards irrational optimism and inappropriate humor. Observers may well believe that the target is high on drugs. |
| Love: | The target falls in love with another character, becoming fixated on his well-being. With Passion Marionette •••, the Sin-Eater may determine the object of the target's affection. Otherwise, the Storyteller should determine it randomly. |
| Rage: | The target is overcome with a violent, psychotic rage that drives her to destroy everything in her path that she can. Supernatural beings subject to frenzy suffer a dice penalty on all rolls to resist that state equal to the activation successes. |
| Sadness: | The target is overcome by a pronounced melancholy and will most likely collapse into tears. |

Suggested Modifiers: The target already feels the desired emotion, which the Sin-Eater merely seeks to heighten (+1 to +3). The target currently feels an emotion diametrically opposed to the one the Sin-Eater seeks to instill (-1 to -3).





With **Passion Marionette ••**, the Sin-Eater merely inflicts a strong emotion. She has no influence over the nature of the target's response, and if, for example, she triggers a homicidal rage in a target, she must take care not to be the target's first victim.

Passion Marionette ••••: The Sin-Eater may choose to associate the emotion she inflicts with a particular person or object. Thus, she may cause her target to fall in love with her (or with anyone else of her choice). She may cause the target to develop a specific phobia, such as arachnophobia. Or, she may cause the target to associate his feelings of euphoria with a specific stimulus, whether a drug or some more exotic stimuli, like extreme bondage or even a specific television show.

Passion Marionette •••••: The Sin-Eater may extend the effects from the usual scene's duration to last for a full day by increasing the cost of each manipulation to 2 plasm. Each additional point of plasm extends the emotion's duration by an additional day.

Passion Marionette ••••••: Having mastered simple emotional states, the Sin-Eater may now choose to instill within the target an emotional state so severe that it rises to the level of a derangement. Mechanically, the roll for inflicting a derangement is the same as the roll for manipulating emotions. However, instead of inflicting an emotional state on her victim, the Sin-Eater curses him with a derangement chosen by the player from the list beginning on pg. 97 of the **World of Darkness** corebook. The derangement is mild unless the roll results in an Exceptional success, in which case it is severe. The effects of this derangement last for one day per plasm spent.

The Phantasmal Marionette

Skill: Intimidation

Instead of exercising control over some external thing or person, the Sin-Eater seizes direct control over her own geist. With this power, the Sin-Eater can cause her geist to manifest externally as a spiritual body that she may then possess and control. While the geist-body is manifested, the Sin-Eater's own body collapses into a comatose state, and she is completely unaware of what goes on in her vicinity. The Sin-Eater must make a normal Marionette activation roll, but the plasmic tendrils do not extend outward from the Sin-Eater to his target but instead coalesce in front of him, forming a phantasmal body under his control.

Phantasmal Marionette •: At its most basic, the geist-body has traits equal to the Sin-Eater's own normal traits, but it has its own, usually horrific, appearance. As such, the geist-body gains a dice bonus on all Intimidation rolls equal to the activation successes. While possessing her own geist, the Sin-Eater may materialize and dematerialize at will with the expenditure of 1 plasm, and she has access

to all of her normal powers while in this state.

Phantasmal Marionette ••: The Sin-Eater gains an additional four dots that may be distributed among the geist-body's Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Presence, Size, or Speed, although no more than two points may be added to a single trait. Once the player assigns these dots, they are fixed and cannot be reassigned to any other traits in a later use of this power. The Sin-Eater gains an additional four dots to distribute among those same Attributes with **Phantasmal Marionette •••**, **••••** and **•••••**.

Phantasmal Marionette ••••: Four dots are gained. The player may also choose to spend these dots to acquire the power of flight instead of on improving traits. If the player allocates one dot to flight, the geist-body can fly at its normal Speed. Each additional dot allocated to flight increases the geist-body's Speed by itself. Thus, by spending three dots on flight, the Sin-Eater could possess a geist-body that flies at three times his normal Speed.

Phantasmal Marionette •••••: Four dots are gained. The player may also choose to spend dots on a personal weapon for the character's geist-body. She may grant the geist-body either natural weaponry such as talons or a disemboweling spike, a melee weapon that is an intrinsic part of the geist-body, or simply a freezing or burning touch that allows the geist-body to inflict more damage with Brawl attacks. For every two points allocated to the geist-body, it gains a +1 lethal damage bonus to a certain form of attack.

Phantasmal Marionette ••••••: Four dots are gained. There is no additional effect besides potentially further augmenting Attributes, flight or lethal attacks.

The Primeval Marionette

Skill: Animal Ken

The Sin-Eater can influence the actions of any single animal she can perceive (whether directly or through the Boneyard or Oracle Manifestations). With a successful activation roll, the Sin-Eater first establishes a bond with the target animal. Then, the Sin-Eater may influence the animal in a variety of ways. The basic level of control allows the Sin-Eater to direct the animal's actions.

Activating this power costs one plasm per animal, and is an instant action. **If successful**, the animal does as the Sin-Eater directs for as long as he maintains concentration. The Sin-Eater can perceive through the animal's senses and even speak through it as a normal speaking action. An animal controlled with this power might be able to chew through the brake lines of a car or carefully stalk a target and drive her into a trap. If the Sin-Eater's concentration lapses, he still maintains his basic connection but must roll this power again to resume direct control.

With Primeval Marionette •, the Sin-Eater can command a single animal up to Size 2.

Primeval Marionette ••: The Sin-Eater can command a single animal up to Size 5 or two animals of up to Size 2.

Primeval Marionette •••: The Sin-Eater can command a single animal up to Size 10, two animals up to Size 5, or up to (activation successes) in animals of up to Size 2. In addition, the character may insinuate his plasm into the fibers of a plant, animating the plant into motion according to his will.

To animate a plant, the player spends 1 plasm per dot of Size (up to a maximum number of points equal to the Sin-Eater's Psyche) and rolls Manipulation + Resolve + (activation successes). As long as the Sin-Eater maintains concentration, he can cause the plant to move as he directs. He can cause its branches to reach out and strike a target. He can cause a mass of vines to wrap up and strangle a target. He can even cause a plant to uproot itself and move about according to his will. If the Sin-Eater wishes to have the plant attack some target, the attack roll is always based on Wits + Brawl + activation successes, with Defense subtracted as normal. The Manifestation lasts for the scene or until the Sin-Eater's concentration lapses. The Sin-Eater may take no other actions while maintaining control over the plant.

Primeval Marionette ••••: The Sin-Eater can command a single animal of any size or any combination of animals whose total Size does not exceed 20. The Sin-Eater suffers no penalty for commanding multiple animals. She can arrange the animals under her control like pieces on a chessboard, using sophisticated pack tactics against her enemies.

Primeval Marionette •••••: No longer must the Sin-Eater be content with common animals to serve as her minions. With this power, the Sin-Eater can inject plasm into the body of a single animal, greatly increasing

its physical prowess and turning it into a familiar that will instinctively obey her in all things for the duration of its enhancement. The player invests one or more plasm into the familiar's body, up to a maximum plasm equal to the animal's unmodified Stamina, and rolls Presence + Animal Ken + activation successes (- animal's Stamina). For each plasm spent, the animal gains +1 to the Physical Attribute of the player's choice, as well as a +1 dice bonus to all Wits + Composure rolls and to all Intimidation rolls. The Sin-Eater does not need to maintain concentration to ensure the familiar's loyalty, although he must concentrate to issue new orders that contradict or supersede previous commands. The Sin-Eater and his familiar are joined in a psychic connection that lasts up to six hours per point of plasm spent on the roll (this supersedes the normal duration limit for the Primeval Marionette). However, the effect ends immediately if the animal is slain, if the Sin-Eater suffers enough damage to take wound penalties, or if the Sin-Eater goes to sleep or is otherwise rendered unconscious.

In addition, when controlling plants as per the three-dot power, the Size of the plant life that can be affected is equal to 5 per plasm spent (up to a maximum plasm equal to the Sin-Eater's Psyche).

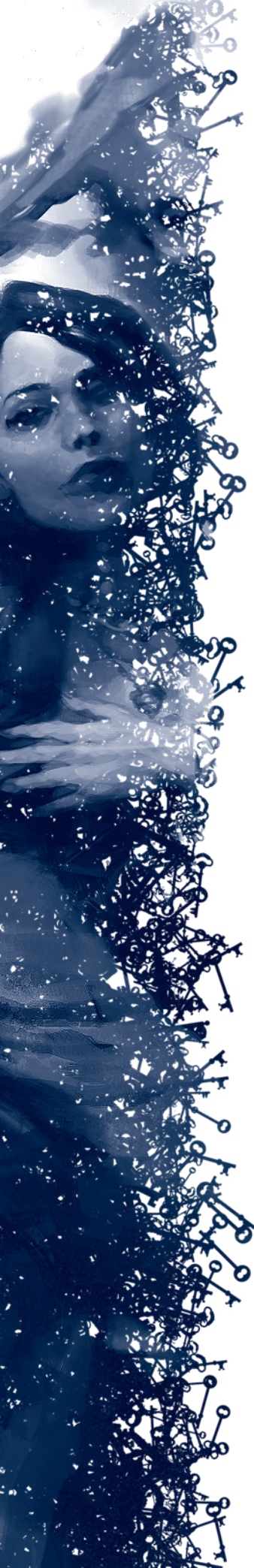
The Stigmata Marionette

Skill: Occult

Through the sanctification of blood, the Stigmata Marionette allows a Sin-Eater to exert control over ghosts. More disturbingly, at its higher levels, this power allows the Sin-Eater to compel a ghost he has enslaved to possess a living person, transforming her into a living zombie forced to obey his commands. While the Stigmata Marionette does not allow the Sin-Eater to control the mind of his living victim, it does enable him to turn her own body against

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her, leaving her aware of her enslavement but unable to fight against it.

Stigmata Marionette ••: The basic power of this Manifestation merely weakens a ghost and prevents it from harming the Sin-Eater while simultaneously making it into a more pliable servant. The activation roll forges a sympathetic link with a ghost that penalizes the ghost on actions initiated by the ghost that are contrary to the Sin-Eater's will. However, the ghost also finds it easier to perform actions undertaken in response to the Sin-Eater's directives. The ghost is not compelled to obey the Sin-Eater, but if it chooses to do so, its Numina and other powers function more effectively. The player spends 1 plasm and must offer a measure of health to the ghost (suffering his choice of 1 lethal or 3 bashing damage); in addition, the player rolls Manipulation + Occult - ghost's Resistance. If successful, for the duration of the scene, the targeted ghost suffers a dice penalty equal to the activation successes on all actions that seek to harm the Sin-Eater or that are undertaken in direct violation of his commands. On the other hand, if the ghost undertakes any actions demanded of it by the Sin-Eater, the ghost gains a dice bonus equal to the activation successes. Actions undertaken by the ghost that neither contradict the Sin-Eater's wishes nor fulfill them suffer neither a penalty nor gain a bonus.

Stigmata Marionette •••: The Sin-Eater may compel a ghost to accompany him wherever he goes. There is no roll - at this power level, the activation roll has the additional effect of temporarily making the Sin-Eater the ghost's primary Anchor, thereby compelling the ghost to remain within 10 yards of the Sin-Eater at all times. (See the *World of Darkness* corebook beginning on pg. 209 for a description of the properties of Anchors.) If the Sin-Eater wishes to use this aspect of the Marionette, he must add one Willpower point to the normal cost for Constriction of Blood, but if he does so, the connection between ghost and Sin-Eater lasts for one hour per activation success instead of just a scene.

Stigmata Marionette ••••: The Sin-Eater may actively command a ghost she has bound to do her bidding. The Sin-Eater must first forge a sympathetic link via one of the previous powers. Once the link is forged, the Sin-Eater may issue commands to the ghost bound to her will as she wishes for the duration of the binding. To do so, the player rolls Manipulation + Intimidation + activation successes, opposed by the ghost's Resistance. This Resistance roll does *not* suffer the dice penalty normally inflicted by Circumscription of Blood. If successful, the ghost is compelled to perform a single action of the Sin-Eater's choosing. Commands that are consistent or inconsistent with the ghost's nature impose bonuses or penalties of one to five dice to the roll. Commanding the ghost of a deceased arsonist

to start a fire might gain a +2 bonus, for instance, while commanding the ghost of a murder victim to protect her killer would likely incur a -5 penalty.

Stigmata Marionette •••••: The Sin-Eater can cause a ghost she has tamed with Stigmata Marionette •• to possess a human being, even if the ghost has no Possession Numen or the equivalent. A ghost is powerless to resist this merging if it has already been bound, hence the prerequisite. The player spends 2 plasm and rolls Manipulation + Occult + (activation successes). The target of the possession resists with Resolve + Psyche.

With success, the ghost immediately possesses the target for the duration of the scene. The target is normally aware of everything that happens during the possession but has no control over his own body and is merely a passive observer to the possessing ghost's activities. The ghost may generally do as it pleases while possessing the victim, but it remains subject to commands issued by the Sin-Eater with any lesser power of the Stigmata Marionette. If the Sin-Eater spends one additional plasm when triggering the possession, she may suppress the target's awareness, rendering him completely unaware of what happened during the time of possession unless he gains a number of successes on a Wits + Resolve roll equal to the activation successes. While in possession of the target's body, the ghost does not have access to any of its Numina.

Stigmata Marionette ••••••: When enabling a ghostly possession, the Sin-Eater's increased skill allows the ghost to use any of its Numina that can reasonably be employed while possessing a mortal host. Additionally, the time of possession increases to one hour per activation success.

The Stillness Marionette

Skill: Occult

When used to unlock the Marionette, the Stillness Key grants the power to summon mute servants to the Sin-Eater's will fashioned from the decayed remnants of the dead. Or to use the vulgar parlance, it allows the Sin-Eater to raise zombies. In this context, the Marionette activation roll establishes a sympathetic link to a dead body. The type of body amenable to animation as a zombie is determined by the Sin-Eater's rating in this power.

Stillness Marionette ••: The Sin-Eater can affect any sort of corpse, but can achieve little more than crude telekinetic effects, sufficient to cause a skeleton to jerk spasmodically, to make a cadaver sit up on its slab, or to cause a murder victim to open her eyes accusingly. No roll is required for any of these effects, but the corpse cannot be made to attack another or to even stand under its own power. An affected corpse has an effective Strength of 1 for purposes of any actions the Sin-Eater directs it to take.

Stillness Marionette ••: The Sin-Eater can cause a dead animal of Size 1 or smaller to arise as a zombie. The animal has the normal traits for a creature of its type, regardless of the level of its decomposition. Animating such a foul beast requires constant concentration on the part of the Sin-Eater, and if it lapses at any point, the animal collapses in dead heap and the Manifestation ends, though it can be raised again with another application of this power. While the Sin-Eater maintains concentration, however, he can see through the eyes of his animal-zombie and exercise total control over it.

Stillness Marionette •••: Control extends to any animal up to Size 10. While directing his zombie pet's actions, the Sin-Eater may take no other actions.

Stillness Marionette ••••: The Sin-Eater can raise a human corpse as a zombie. The zombie is a mindless, shambling corpse that responds only to its master's will. A fresh corpse begins with the normal Physical traits it had before death, but every six months of decay reduces each of its Physical traits by 1 to a minimum of 1 each. The zombie normally uses its master's Mental traits and Composure (since she controls it completely) but has an effective Presence and Manipulation of zero each. If the Sin-Eater spends a second plasm point during the activation roll, she may divide a number of dots equal to the activation successes among the zombie's Physical traits, but she may not raise any trait more than two above the zombie's lowest Physical trait.

Stillness Marionette •••••: The Bound can raise a more powerful zombie, whether animal or human. At this level, the zombie begins with two dots in each Physical Attribute and one dot in each Social and Mental Attribute. After awakening a zombie, the Sin-Eater can invest it with up to the activation successes in extra plasm. Each additional point of plasm grants five Attribute dots that can be allocated as the Sin-Eater wishes. However, a zombie may never have a Presence or Manipulation higher than 1 – without other magic or a really good disguise, it can never be perceived as anything other than the walking dead. However, if a zombie attempts to intimidate a living person, add the activation successes to the Intimidation roll. A zombie, whether animal or human, created with Stillness Marionette ••••• is quasi-sentient, but loyal to the Sin-Eater, who no longer needs to maintain constant concentration to direct the zombie's actions.

With Stillness Marionette •• and •••, the activation roll will maintain the zombie for one scene. With Stillness Marionette ••••, the zombie will last for one hour per activation success. With Stillness Marionette •••••, the zombie will last for one day per activation success, and if the Sin-Eater spends a permanent Willpower point, a zombie created at that level will last until destroyed.

Zombies created through the Stillness Marionette have neither health levels nor suffer wound penalties. Instead, each zombie has a Durability equal to the activation successes rolled in its creation, and a Structure equal to the sum of its Durability and its Size. Zombies take bashing damage from firearms but aggravated damage from fire.

Although a corpse of any age may be used to create a zombie with Stillness Marionette, fresher corpses work better. The activation roll for Stillness Marionette suffers the following dice modifiers:

- The corpse has been dead less than a day (+2).
- The corpse has been dead less than a week (+1).
- The corpse has been dead over one month (-1).
- The corpse has been dead over one year (-2).
- The corpse has been dead over five years (-3).
- The corpse has been reduced to a skeleton (-5).

The Oracle

Skill: Intelligence

Many legends speak of the insight possessed by the dead and of their power to warn the living of future events. Indeed, the term “necromancy” literally refers to the practice of divining the future through communication with the dead. The Oracle Manifestation draws upon this chthonic wisdom, allowing the Sin-Eater to access the special perceptive abilities of her geist. To anyone capable of detecting plasmic energies, a Sin-Eater who has unlocked the Oracle is noticeable for her eyes, which glow with a spectral force. The basic power of the Oracle is simply to augment the Sin-Eater's perception. Specific Keys refine this perception in appropriate ways.

Oracle Activation

Cost: 1 plasm

Dice Pool: Intelligence + (Key Skill) + Oracle rating

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The activation attempt fails, and the Sin-Eater may not attempt to use any Oracle-related power for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The attempt to unlock the Oracle fails.

Success: A pale mist of plasm steams from the Sin-Eater's glowing eyes, visible only to ghosts and other Sin-Eaters. For the duration of the scene, the Sin-Eater adds a number of bonus dice equal to the activation successes to all Wits-based rolls to observe and understand phenomena relevant to the Key used to unlock the Oracle.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward.

The Elemental Oracles

Skill: Occult

Drawing upon her understanding of the elements of the Underworld, the Sin-Eater can acquire a powerful clairvoyant sense. There are four Elemental Oracle powers, each of which must be mastered separately. The Elemental Oracle powers are among the most dangerous Manifestations to use, as they require the Sin-Eater to embrace death in order to transcend the limits of her own body.

In order to unlock the Cold Wind Oracle, the Sin-Eater must allow herself to be suffocated or strangled. To unlock the Grave-Dirt Oracle, the Sin-Eater must allow herself to



be buried alive. To unlock the Tear-Stained Oracle, the Sin-Eater must drown herself. In all three cases, the Sin-Eater must suffer enough bashing damage from the environment to be rendered unconscious in order to unlock the Manifestation. For the Pyre-Flame Oracle, the Sin-Eater must set herself ablaze, taking at least 2 levels of lethal fire damage and making no effort to put out the blaze herself.

If the Sin-Eater unlocks the Manifestation properly, he will take no lasting damage. Instead, he will slip into a death-like trance while his astral form slips free of his body to travel as he wishes. When the Manifestation ends, the Sin-Eater will emerge from his trance (bursting violently out of the earth in the case of the Grave-Dirt Oracle) with no visible signs of injury. If the Manifestation is *unsuccessful*, however, the Sin-Eater actually suffers the damage inflicted on himself and may well be in danger of dying if he has no one to watch over his body and see that he doesn't asphyxiate, drown, or burn to a crisp.

Oracle Activation (Elemental Version)

Cost: 1 plasm, plus 1 additional plasm per extra hour of astral projection

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Oracle rating

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The activation attempt fails. The Sin-Eater actually suffers whatever damage was inflicted on his body, and he will not be able to extricate himself from the elemental hazard in which he has placed himself without assistance. Worse, anyone who has been assigned to watch over his body will suffer a -3 penalty on any roll to realize that the attempt has failed and that the Sin-Eater is actually dying.

Failure: The activation attempt fails. The Sin-Eater suffers the damage inflicted on his body, but he will be able to extricate himself without taking any more damage. Anyone assigned to watch over him will immediately realize that the attempt has failed and that the Sin-Eater may need assistance.

Success: The Sin-Eater falls into a death-like coma. Her astral form slips free from her body and may travel wherever she wishes while in a Twilight state. The astral form is intangible and invisible save to other Twilight beings and to those capable of seeing and/or affecting Twilight beings. While the Sin-Eater's astral form roams, her body appears to be dead, save to other Sin-Eaters who will automatically realize she is astrally projecting.

While astrally projecting, the Sin-Eater can use any Manifestations or other powers that do not require her to physically touch something in the material world. Instead of her normal traits, the Sin-Eater has a Power rating equal to the highest of her

Intelligence, Presence, or Strength; a Finesse rating equal to the highest of her Wits, Manipulation, or Dexterity; and a Resistance rating equal to the highest of her Resolve, Composure, or Stamina.

With Elemental Oracle •••, the Sin-Eater can fly in her astral form at a speed equal to (Elemental Oracle rating) x 100 miles per hour. If the Sin-Eater interacts with ghosts while in this form, she gains a three-dice bonus if the ghosts' remains were interred in or disposed of within that element corresponding to her Key or Keys. That is, if the Sin-Eater interacts with a ghost whose body was buried underground, she may three dice if she possesses the Grave-Dirt Key. If the ghost's body was buried at sea, the Tear-Stained Key applies. If it was cremated or burned up in a fire, the Pyre-Flame Key applies. Finally, if interacting with someone whose body was left to the elements, she can draw on the Cold Wind Key.

The Sin-Eater can maintain her astral form for a number of hours equal to the activation successes, plus one additional hour per extra plasm spent. At the end of that period, his astral form snaps back to his body, which then awakens, free of all injury. This includes damage taken prior to the activation of this Manifestation, which means it also presents a cheap (if somewhat reckless) means of fast healing. If the Sin-Eater was bound as part of his asphyxiation or drowning, his bonds break instantly. If he was buried in the earth, he bursts free from his grave. If his body was weighted down and dropped into a lake, he effortlessly bobs up to the surface. If he was trapped in a burning building, he walks out without so much as a scorch mark on his clothing.

In addition to allowing for astral projection, this power, due to its reparative properties, is also quite useful for escaping from deadly situations. For example, if a Sin-Eater capable of unlocking the Grave-Dirt Oracle is buried alive by a cave-in, he can use this power to put his body into a protective trance and then astral project to seek help, emerging unscathed once the cave-in is cleared. However, this immunity does not extend to harm coming from some other element or from a non-elemental source. If the aforementioned Sin-Eater were dug out of the cave-in and then set on fire (or simply shot with a pistol), the resulting damage would not be healed when the Manifestation ends. With Elemental Oracle •••••, there is no time limit on how long the astral projection can last — some legends speak of a Sin-Eater who ran afoul of the Mob in the 1920s and was buried alive in the foundation of a newly constructed building. His astral form still wanders the world waiting for that building to be torn down so that his body might be freed at last.

A Sin-Eater will automatically know if someone is tampering with her comatose body with a successful Wits + Composure + Oracle rating + activation successes roll. Regardless of her normal speed, the

Sin-Eater may cause her astral form to return to her body instantly and reflexively.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater's Power, Finesse, and Resistance are each considered to be 1 higher.

The Industrial Oracle

Skill: Investigation

The Industrial Oracle grants insight into crafted objects, from hand-crafted antique furniture to state-of-the-art electronics. While this Manifestation is active, the Sin-Eater may apply the activation successes to all rolls made to understand or observe such items. When performing any Wits-related action to study or scrutinize crafted items in the area, add the Sin-Eater's activation successes as a dice bonus to any such roll. In addition to obvious uses of the Industrial Oracle, the Sin-Eater might add his activation successes to a Wits + Investigation roll to notice a hidden safe or a silent alarm system, or to a Wits + Composure roll to notice how many people in the room are carrying concealed weapons.

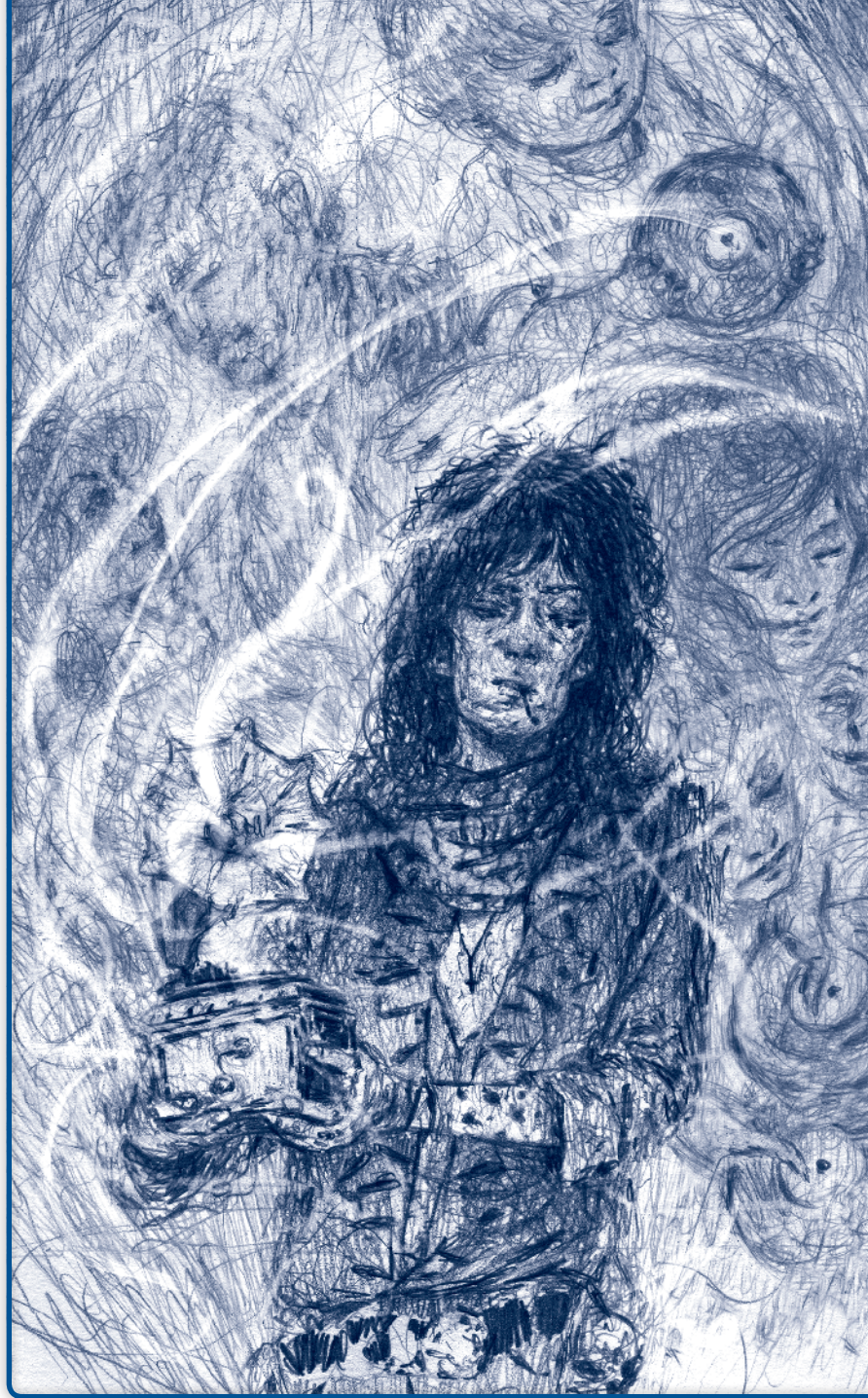
The Anachrotech Modifiers (see pg. 111) apply to all applications of the Industrial Oracle.

Industrial Oracle ••: This heightened awareness expands to grant insight into a crafted item's properties and weaknesses. Whenever a Sin-Eater who has unlocked the Industrial Oracle attempts to operate, damage, disable, or destroy a crafted item (whether kicking in a door, disarming an explosive, or hot-wiring a car), the player may add the activation successes as a dice bonus to any relevant roll. This benefit is no longer limited to Wits-related rolls but may be applied to any roll that can logically benefit from a supernatural insight into the item to be manipulated.

Industrial Oracle •••: By unlocking the Industrial Oracle and then handling the item for several seconds, plasm will flow from the Bound's hands through the device, producing a smoky mist of plasm that grants the Sin-Eater visions of the item's prior history. The player spends 1 plasm and rolls Intelligence + Investigation + (activation successes); success grants valuable insights into the object's past. Each success allows the Sin-Eater's player to ask the Storyteller one question about the object's prior history.

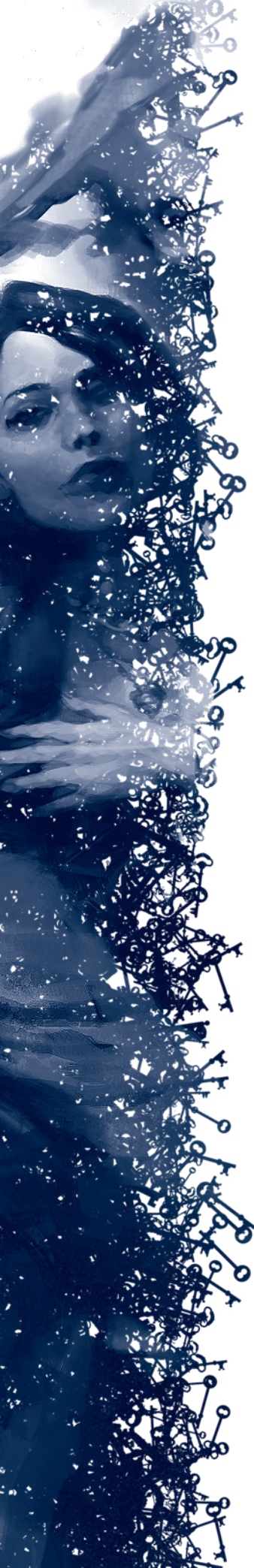
Industrial Oracle ••••: With this power, the Sin-Eater may study an object for just a few seconds and instantly notice weak spots and pressure points, making it all that much easier to tear the item apart or smash it to bits. The player spends 1 plasm and rolls Intelligence + Investigation + (activation successes). For each success rolled, the Sin-Eater can ignore one point of the item's Durability when attacking it or attempting to destroy it during the course of that scene.

Industrial Oracle •••••: By utilizing the power of technology to transcend distance, the Sin-Eater can use telecommunications equipment to project her



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senses. The Sin-Eater simply makes a phone call and, assuming someone picks up on the other end, she can project her senses to the telephone at the other end. In and of itself, this power may not seem very impressive. The Sin-Eater can perceive anything in the area she called from the vantage point of the receiving telephone, and she can reorient her senses to view anything that could be seen from that vantage point. However, if the Sin-Eater also has access to the Boneyard Manifestation, she can unlock that Manifestation with the Industrial Key, center it on the receiving telephone, and be able to use any powers associated with the Industrial Boneyard as if she were physically at that location. This Manifestation ends immediately if the phone call is disconnected.



The Sin-Eater must first unlock the Industrial Oracle through a standard activation roll, before spending one plasm and rolling Intelligence + Investigation + (activation successes). The roll to initiate this power suffers Anachrotech penalties (see pg. 111) as follows: apply no penalty if both the calling and receiving phones are landline telephones. Apply a -4 penalty if both phones are cell phones. If one is a cell phone and the other a land line, apply a -2 penalty. This power may only be used through standard telephones, although rumors among the Sin-Eaters hint that some of their number may exercise this power through fax machines and even through Internet connections, albeit with great difficulty.

If successful, for the duration of the phone connection, the Sin-Eater can perceive anything in the area where the receiving telephone sits. If the Sin-Eater attempts to unlock the Industrial Boneyard at the target location, the activation for that roll gains a number of bonus dice equal to the successes on this roll.

The Passion Oracle

Skill: Empathy

The Passion Oracle allows the Sin-Eater to gain insight into the emotional heart of anyone with whom she interacts. With the basic power of this Manifestation, the Sin-Eater becomes preternaturally skillful at understanding the emotions of others. For the duration of the scene, she can add his activation successes to any mundane roll based on Empathy or Intimidation. If the Sin-Eater targets someone for such a roll with whom she has also forged a sympathetic link through the Passion Marionette Manifestation, only the better of the two dice bonuses applies to any relevant roll.

Passion Oracle ••: The Sin-Eater also gains the 9-again quality on all mundane Empathy and Intimidation rolls made during the scene.

Passion Oracle •••: The Sin-Eater can perceive the auras of other beings, allowing great insight into their emotional states. The player spends 1 plasm and rolls Wits + Empathy + (activation successes) - target's Composure. Success grants insight into the target's emotional state. The precise nature of the insight varies from character to character. Most Sin-Eaters seem to associate emotions with colors (such as associating fear with the color orange or anger with bright red). However, many other Sin-Eaters perceive auras through other senses, such as "hearing love" or "smelling despair." Regardless of how this paranormal sense manifests itself, success on this roll allows the Sin-Eater to immediately comprehend the current emotional state of the person who is the object of her scrutiny.

Passion Oracle ••••: This power allows the Sin-Eater to divine more detailed information than merely the target's current emotional state. For each

success on the above Wits + Empathy roll, the Sin-Eater's player may learn one of the following: the target's Virtue, the target's Vice, the target's permanent or current Willpower, the target's current Synthesis (or the equivalent for other types of creatures), or what derangements the target possesses (only one derangement is revealed per success). However, exercising this enhanced power adds 1 Willpower point to the normal cost of aura perception.

Passion Oracle •••••: The Sin-Eater's awareness of her enemy's intentions allows her to anticipate his efforts to evade her attacks. In order to make an Intuitive Attack, the Sin-Eater must spend 1 plasm. Doing so allows her to add her Oracle activation successes to any Brawl, Melee, or Firearms attack roll.

The Phantasmal Oracle

Skill: Investigation

While most uses of the Phantasmal Key allow the Sin-Eater to create and manipulate illusions, the Phantasmal Oracle allows him to see through illusions instead — not just the glamours and phantasms created through magic but also the less esoteric illusions common to humanity. After unlocking the Phantasmal Oracle, the Sin-Eater may add his activation successes to all mundane Empathy rolls to detect lies. He may also add the activation successes as bonus dice to all mundane Subterfuge and Persuasion rolls, as his insights enable him to better craft his lies to fit his audience's expectations.

Phantasmal Oracle ••: The Sin-Eater's insight into these areas grows ever more acute. By spending 1 plasm, the Sin-Eater may gain the 9-again quality on a single Empathy roll to detect lies or a single Subterfuge or Persuasion roll to persuade another of some untruth.

Phantasmal Oracle •••: The Sin-Eater's gaze can cut to the heart of even supernatural deceptions. While the Phantasmal Oracle remains unlocked, the Sin-Eater may add her activation successes to any Attribute relevant to resisting or seeing through magical illusions, including effects that confer any form of invisibility. The Sin-Eater may also add the activation successes to any rolls to resist magical effects that might force him to believe something that is untrue. If the effect is one that does not normally allow for a resisted roll, allow the Sin-Eater to roll his Intelligence + Investigation (without adding activation successes) against the roll used to create the deceptive effect. The effects of this power do not stack with other bonuses granted by Manifestations.

Phantasmal Oracle ••••: Most illusions conceal the truth. To the Sin-Eater, some illusions reveal it. The Sin-Eater can trigger a powerful hallucination that can grant prophetic warnings. When the player wishes to invoke such a vision, the Storyteller should make the dice roll on his behalf so that the player

will not know whether the vision is truly accurate or not. The player spends 3 plasm and rolls Intelligence + Occult + (activation successes); the action requires at least one minute of concentration per plasm spent. If successful, the Sin-Eater has a brief hallucinatory episode that grants insights into future events. For each success, the Sin-Eater may ask one question about the future, which the Storyteller may answer in the form of a cryptic and surrealistic vision.

The farther away the event, the more difficult it is to perceive. Penalties apply as follows:

- The Sin-Eater seeks insight into events that will happen within that scene (-0).
- ... within the next hour (-1).
- ... within the next day (-3).
- ... each additional day the Sin-Eater wishes to look into the future (-1).

This power automatically fails if the dice penalty based on temporal proximity reduces the dice pool to -10.

Phantasmal Oracle •••••: The Sin-Eater's power to pierce the veil of illusion is perfected. While this Manifestation is unlocked, the Sin-Eater can see through any illusory effect automatically provided that his Psyche exceeds that of the creator of the illusion (or exceeds whatever Supernatural Attribute the creator has if she is not a Sin-Eater).

The Primeval Oracle

Skill: Survival

Through the Primeval Oracle, the Sin-Eater can attune her senses with the natural world, drawing upon her geist's latent savagery to gain insight into her surroundings. While the Primeval Oracle remains unlocked, the Sin-Eater may add her activation successes as a dice bonus to all her Wits-based perception rolls. She may also add her activation successes as a dice bonus to all mundane Animal Ken and Survival rolls.

Primeval Oracle ••: These animalistic senses give the Sin-Eater an intuitive sense of the mood of those with whom he interacts, especially the mood of those who may be hostile towards him. The Sin-Eater may also add his activation successes to all mundane Empathy rolls and to all Initiative rolls.

Primeval Oracle •••: While the Manifestation is unlocked, the Sin-Eater gains all the benefits of the Direction Sense Merit (see **World of Darkness**, page 110), but only while outdoors. This benefit cannot be used to help the Sin-Eater navigate while below ground or while inside a building.

Primeval Oracle ••••: While the basic power of this Manifestation allows for heightened sensory acuity, Beast Senses raise the Sin-Eater's awareness to truly superhuman levels. He gains the 9-again quality on all Wits-based rolls to observe his surroundings.

Primeval Oracle •••••: While the Primeval Oracle remains unlocked, the Sin-Eater gains the ability to track others merely by scent. Tracking is treated as an extended and opposed Wits + Survival + (activation successes) roll, resisted by the quarry's Wits + Stealth. Each roll represents up to one hour of pursuit.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater is led astray or follows a false trail, usually straight into danger.

Failure: The Sin-Eater fails to roll more successes than the quarry. The Sin-Eater loses the scent but can try to find it again with a subsequent roll, although each subsequent roll suffers a cumulative -1 dice penalty.

Success: The Sin-Eater rolls more successes than the quarry. The Sin-Eater can discern the path taken by his quarry and may track her for up to one hour. The Storyteller determines how many net successes the Sin-Eater needs to accumulate in order to run the quarry to ground. As a general rule of thumb, the extended roll requires 5 net successes for each mile of ground covered by the quarry.

Additionally, once the Sin-Eater has gotten the scent once, she will remember it for up to a day and can automatically recognize anyone she meets by scent during that time.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater exceeds the quarry's successes by 5 or more. The Sin-Eater has the scent and is unshakeable. Even if the Sin-Eater fails a subsequent roll, he will not lose the scent and does not suffer any penalty on subsequent tracking rolls. Additionally, the Sin-Eater will never forget the scent and will always be able to recognize the quarry by it.

Possible Modifiers: The Sin-Eater has some possession of the quarry that carries her scent (+1 to +3). The scent is very old (-1 per day, to a maximum penalty of -10). Inclement weather has washed away part of the scent (-3).

The Stigmata Oracle

Skill: Occult

With this Manifestation, the Sin-Eater gains special insight into ghosts and other Twilight beings. The basic power allows the Sin-Eater to add her activation successes to all Wits-based rolls to observe or understand anything pertaining to ghostly activity in the area.

Stigmata Oracle ••: The Sin-Eater may scrutinize a ghost to gain information about it. The player rolls Wits + Occult + (activation successes), resisted by Resistance. If the player rolls more successes than the quarry, for each net success, she may ask the Storyteller one question about the ghost. Possible questions include the following:

- Who was the ghost in life?
- What are the ghost's Anchors?
- What Numina does the ghost possess?
- What are its Virtue and Vice?
- How did the ghost die?

Stigmata Oracle •••: The Sin-Eater may detect subtle plasmic residue left behind from previous applications of either ghostly Numina or Sin-Eater Manifestations. The player must roll Wits + Composure + activation successes to notice plasmic residue left behind in the last hour. Each additional hour inflicts a cumulative -1 dice penalty. Once the Sin-Eater locates the plasmic remains, she may choose to clairvoyantly observe what occurred when the plasmic residue was left. This power has no cost to find residue.



Seeing into the past costs 1 plasm to see into the past, and requires a Wits + Occult + (activation successes) roll.

For each success, the player may ask the Storyteller one question about the events that took place when the Numina or Manifestation was used.

Stigmata Oracle •••••: While the Stigmata Oracle is unlocked, the Sin-Eater also gains the ability to locate the nearest entry point to the Underworld. The player must roll Wits + Occult + activation successes, with a dice penalty applied to the roll equal to -1 per mile away that the entry point is (assuming there is one nearby at all). The player may roll a chance die if necessary, but may not use this power to detect entry points so far away that the dice pool is reduced to -10.

Stigmata Oracle •••••: The Sin-Eater can project his soul into the Underworld. His soul appears in the Autochthonous Depths, where it is as corporeal as any other ghost to be found there. The Sin-Eater's soul-form can be damaged normally by any of the Underworld's dangers or inhabitants, and any damage inflicted upon it is also inflicted on his physical body. The Sin-Eater can return to his body automatically and reflexively, but it takes one full action of concentration to do so during which time he may be vulnerable to danger. Alternatively, he may "rip-cord." Rip-cording instantly returns the Sin-Eater to his physical body but inflicts one level of automatic lethal damage on his body.

The player spends 2 plasm and 1 Willpower, and rolls Stamina + Occult + (activation successes). If successful, her soul appears in the Underworld where it is functionally the same as a ghost. The Sin-Eater retains access to her Manifestations, and her soul-body functions in the Underworld exactly as if she had physically traveled there. The Sin-Eater may only travel instantly to the Autochthonous Depths, but from there may travel to any part of the Underworld through conventional means.

The Stillness Oracle

Skill: Investigation

With this Manifestation, the Sin-Eater gains insight into the dead. The basic power allows the Sin-Eater to add his activation successes to all Investigation or Medicine related rolls made to examine a dead body or other physical remains.

Stillness Oracle ••: The Sin-Eater also gains the 9-again quality on all such rolls.

Stillness Oracle ••••: With this power, the Sin-Eater becomes the ultimate medical examiner. By touching human remains, the Sin-Eater may relive the deceased's last minutes of life. The player spends 1 plasm and rolls Intelligence + Medicine + (activation successes). For each net success, the Sin-Eater perceives one minute of time seen through the deceased's eyes leading up to her death.

The Sin-Eater's player may ask the Storyteller one question about what the character sees per success. Alternatively, the player may choose to ask whether the deceased went on to become a ghost and, if so, may ask questions about the ghost's current status and whereabouts.

Stillness Oracle •••••: When questioning the dead, the player may ask questions concerning any aspect of the deceased's life, rather than just questions pertaining to his death.

Stillness Oracle •••••: With this rather macabre power, the Sin-Eater may appropriate the knowledge and skills of the deceased for her own use. In order to utilize this power, the Sin-Eater must have access to a quantity of human remains at least equivalent to Size 1. If the deceased possessed one or more Skills at a higher level than the Sin-Eater or possessed one or more Mental Merits that she might find useful, the Sin-Eater can temporarily claim them for herself. The Sin-Eater can only acquire one improved Skill or new Merit at a time, and the benefits only last for a scene, during which time the Sin-Eater can go no farther from the remains than (Psyche x 10) yards without ending the effect.

The player spends 2 plasm and rolls Intelligence + Occult + (activation successes). If successful, for the duration of the scene, the Sin-Eater may gain one of the following benefits:

- He may substitute one of the deceased's Skill ratings in place of his own.
- He may acquire one Mental Merit possessed by the deceased.
- He may acquire any Specialty of the deceased.

The Rage

Attribute: Strength

Some Manifestations are subtle, laying curses on a target or infusing the world around her with the energies of death. The Rage is not subtle at all. At the Sin-Eater's direction, her geist reaches out and attacks someone. The precise nature of the attack varies depending on the Key used to unlock the Rage. Further, the Sin-Eater can change the appearance of the Rage at any time, as long as it's thematic to the Key used — a blast of Bestial Rage could send carrion crows to tear his opponent apart or summon a cloud of wasps and bees that crawl all over his flesh. Unless a Key specifically manifests the attack in the physical world, the Rage is generally invisible. The target can perceive its effects, as can certain supernatural creatures using powers such as vampiric Aura Perception or a warlock's Mage Sight.

The basic power of the Rage allows a Sin-Eater to attack a target at a range of up to ten yards per dot of Psyche. The activation roll for the Rage is also

the attack roll, with each success dealing a point of bashing damage. The attack roll subtracts Defense or another Trait in the place of defense, depending on the Key (referred to as the Key Defense).

Rage ••: The damage may be bashing or lethal.

Rage •••: The Sin-Eater may ignore modifiers for concealment up to and including “substantially concealed” (World of Darkness, pg. 182).

Rage ••••: The range extends to line of sight.

Rage •••••: The Sin-Eater may inflict aggravated damage, at the cost of one Willpower per attack.

Rage Activation

Cost: 1 plasm

Dice Pool: Strength + (Key Skill) + Rage rating - (Key Defense)

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The plasm wracks the Sin-Eater’s body, dealing a point of lethal damage.

Failure: The attempt to manifest the Rage fails.

Success: The Sin-Eater manifests the Rage, directing his geist to strike at someone. The target takes one point of damage (bashing, lethal or aggravated depending on Rage rating) per success.

Exceptional Success: The terrible wounds inflicted by such potent Rage are their own reward.

The Elemental Rages

Skill: Occult

Key Defense: Stamina

The Sin-Eater infuses his attacks with the power of one of the four classical elements, altering its effects as appropriate. Note that each Elemental Key must be acquired separately.

The Cold Wind Rage

The Cold Wind Rage chills its victims to the bone, carrying a spectral chill only the target can feel. In addition to damage, the Cold Wind Rage inflicts a penalty to Defense and Speed equal to the Sin-Eater’s Rage rating for the duration of the scene (not cumulative).

As the damage rises in lethality, the effects become more pronounced. Frost may form on the victim’s skin. A person slain by the Cold Wind Rage may have her heart frozen in her chest, or even leave a frozen corpse that shatters and slowly melts away.

The Grave-Dirt Rage

Victims of the Grave-Dirt Rage feel tremendous pressure crushing them, as if they’re being buried alive. It becomes more difficult to speak, as if one’s mouth is choked with dirt. In addition to damage, the Grave-Dirt Rage inflicts a penalty to Manipulation and Speed equal to the Sin-Eater’s Rage rating for the duration of the scene (not cumulative).

As the damage rises in lethality, the earthen presence becomes increasingly physical. Grave dirt enters the blood-

stream, or a victim might develop bruises consistent with the impacts of hurled stone. A person slain by the Grave-Dirt Rage may have his lungs filled with clay, his body crumble to dust, or the very earth swallow it whole.

The Pyre-Flame Rage

The Pyre-Flame Rage wreathes its victims in ghostly flames. At lower levels, the heat is purely psychosomatic; at higher levels, the invisible flames create very real burn wounds. The target becomes feverish, as if suffering from sunstroke. In addition to damage, the Pyre-Flame Rage inflicts a penalty to Perception and Defense equal to the Sin-Eater’s Rage rating for the duration of the scene (not cumulative).

A person slain by the Pyre-Flame Rage usually burns entirely to ash, cremated by the power of the geist.

The Tear-Stained Rage

To victims of the Tear-Stained Rage, their lungs feel thick and pained, as if filled with brackish water. In addition to damage, the Tear-Stained Rage inflicts a penalty to Physical rolls equal to the Sin-Eater’s Rage rating for the duration of the scene (not cumulative).

At higher levels of this power, actual water – cold and brackish, sometimes salty, sometimes choked with weeds – coalesces in the victim’s body, pours out of his nose and mouth, or even runs from his tear ducts. The corpse of a person slain by the Tear-Stained Rage usually appears bloated and water-logged, as if it had lain at the bottom of a body of water for days.

The Industrial Rage

Skill: Crafts

Key Defense: Durability

The Industrial Rage smashes and breaks the inanimate. This power is used against material objects rather than entities. The Sin-Eater unlocks the power and rolls to attack as usual, targeting the object’s Durability. Anachrotech penalties do not apply to this use of the Industrial Rage; it is no harder to destroy a modern piece of equipment.

An alternate use of this power is to channel the Sin-Eater’s Rage through a man-made item. By spending a point of plasm, the Sin-Eater may add his Rage rating to the dice pool of any attacks made with a man-made item, although this bonus becomes subject to anachrotech penalties. (In order to gain the full bonus, for instance, the item must have been manufactured before 1960.)

The Passion Rage

Skill: Intimidation

Key Defense: Composure

The Passion Rage digs through the victim’s memories, bringing back moments of weakness and pain to cripple the Sin-Eater’s foe. When the Sin-Eater unlocks the Passion Rage, she inflicts mental trauma that deals bashing damage.

Passion Rage ••: The Sin-Eater can intimidate her foes by wrapping her image in with his victim’s fears. The victim receives a -2 penalty to any Social rolls made against the Sin-Eater for the duration of the scene.



Passion Rage •••: This emotional onslaught may make a victim freeze up in terror. The player may spend an extra point of plasm to reduce her victim's Defense to 0 until his next turn.

Passion Rage ••••: This attack focuses the victim's thoughts on his own mortality. For each point of damage dealt, the Sin-Eater can spend two points of plasm to drain one point of Willpower from the victim instead.

Passion Rage •••••: At this level, the Sin-Eater can devastate her target's mind. The player spends 2 plasm and 1 Willpower, and rolls Manipulation + Empathy + Rage rating – the lower of target's Resolve and Composure. Each success reduces one of the target's Mental Attributes by one point. This Attribute damage heals at the same rate as lethal damage.

The Phantasmal Rage

Skill: Persuasion

Key Defense: Composure

A Sin-Eater that unlocks the Phantasmal Rage can conjure realistic illusions that scour her foe's body. At early levels, the injuries inflicted by this Manifestation are illusory, even debilitating wounds fade as the victim's head clears. As the Sin-Eater unlocks new powers, she can create illusions that draw a victim into harming himself.

The damage caused by the base Phantasmal Rage is entirely illusory (though it might "count as" bashing, lethal or aggravated as usual). If the victim is outright killed by it, he dies of fright; otherwise he is left unharmed, if perhaps somewhat traumatized, at the end of the scene.

Phantasmal Rage ••: The Sin-Eater can create a spectral opponent that strikes at his opponent. The player spends 2 plasm and rolls Manipulation + Persuasion + Rage rank. Success creates a spectral combatant with a dice pool equal to this power's activation successes. This apparition deals illusory damage, and acts just before the Sin-Eater. The main use of this combatant is to stack numbers in the Sin-Eater's favor. The opponent lasts for three turns, then vanishes into mist.

Phantasmal Rage •••: When a Sin-Eater unlocks this ability, he can unleash a dream hunter, a small part of his geist that lingers in his opponent's mind and strikes when she falls asleep. The player spends 2 plasm and rolls Presence + Persuasion + Rage rank versus the target's Resolve + Psyche. If the Sin-Eater is successful, the next time the victim falls asleep, she's haunted by terrible nightmares. She suffers illusory damage equal to her Strength. This damage remains until she next sleeps for more than six hours.

Phantasmal Rage ••••: The character can create illusions so terrifying that his victim is hard-pressed to respond. This power costs an additional

point of plasm. If the character deals any damage, his target must succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll to do anything other than moving his Speed directly away from the Sin-Eater for the remainder of the scene.

Phantasmal Rage •••••: The victim's instinctive reactions to the terrors turn her own body against her. The Sin-Eater adds the victim's Strength to any damage rolls made with the Phantasmal Rage.

The Primeval Rage

Skill: Animal Ken

Key Defense: Defense

The Primeval Rage calls forth animals to strike at a Sin-Eater's enemies. Initially, those animals are spectral extensions of his geist that dissipate immediately after attacking, but at higher levels mundane creatures may join in on the attack.

Primeval Rage ••: The Sin-Eater can manifest more than one creature – a murder of crows, a pack of hell-hounds, or a wake of vultures. His attacks are thus harder to defend against. Every point of plasm spent in addition to the one necessary to activate the Primeval Rage reduces the target's Defense by one point.

Primeval Rage •••: This level of Manifestation conjures a swarm of venomous insects that crawls across the target's skin, painfully biting and stinging. The player spends 2 plasm and rolls Stamina + Animal Ken + Rage rating – target's Stamina. Success summons a swarm of insects to harass a foe. The swarm acts at the end of the Sin-Eater's turn and has an attack dice pool of four dice to which the target's Defense does not apply. The insects attack for one turn per success.

Primeval Rage ••••: The Sin-Eater can augment his attacks with animals in the nearby area by spending a point of plasm. On a city street, rats and feral dogs come to his aid, while in rural areas he can attract cougars, wolves, or even bears. Precisely which animals are in the local area is up to the Storyteller. Add a number of dice to the attack equal to the Size of the largest attacking animal.

Primeval Rage •••••: The Sin-Eater may spread his attention to more than one foe at a time by spending a point of plasm per extra target. This power doesn't allow the character to make more than one attack; instead roll once against the highest Defense of all the targets, plus one per extra victim. If the roll succeeds, allocate the successes between each target. No target can take less than one point of damage if the player rolls enough successes.

The two, four, and five-dot powers of the Primeval Rage can all apply to the same activation roll. In addition to requiring lots of plasm, the Sin-Eater must spend one point of Willpower to use two subsidiary powers, or two points of Willpower to use all three.



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This is costly, but the combination of powers is potent enough to be worth it.

The Stigmata Rage

Skill: Occult

Key Defense: Stamina

The Stigmata Rage calls to the primal energies of blood and death. The ritualistic damage inflicted to activate this key allows a Sin-Eater's geist to affect ghosts just as easily as he can affect living (or unliving) creatures, and calls on blood to inflict terrible wounds. This Manifestation requires a Sin-Eater get in closer to her foes than other uses of the Rage – the range of this power is 2 yards per dot of Psyche.

Stigmata Rage ••: The Sin-Eater can make humans bleed from their eyes and ears, while ghosts expel similarly vital fluids into the air. In addition to the damage caused by the base attack, her victim becomes woozy and distracted. Every two points of damage dealt (rounded down) also inflicts a -1 modifier (maximum -5) to Mental rolls for the duration of the scene. Successive attacks don't stack penalties; the highest penalty always applies.

Stigmata Rage •••: On a successful attack, the Sin-Eater may spend an extra point of plasm to force more of his victim's fluids from his body. At the end of the victim's turn, he takes a point of bashing damage until he receives medical attention (success on a simple Intelligence + Medicine roll suffices) or the scene ends.

Stigmata Rage ••••: The range extends to 20 yards for every dot of Psyche.

Stigmata Rage •••••: The Sin-Eater can force her victim's blood out of every pore. This is akin to Stigmata

Rage ••• but costs two points of Willpower in addition to the two-plasm cost. The damage inflicted each turn is aggravated instead of bashing.

The Stillness Rage

Skill: Stealth

Key Defense: Stamina

Far from impotent, the Stillness Rage is anger boiled into controlled malice, poison placed in the food, and a stiletto through the heart rather than a frenzied attack with a kitchen knife. The attacks made via the Stillness Rage are invisible, telekinetic attacks, like knives made of unseen ectoplasm. The attacks are completely silent, with no sound of impact or tissue damage.

Stillness Rage ••: The Sin-Eater can inflict damage that seems to leave no mark. If he kills a target with the Stillness Rage, he may choose to have the corpse appear as if it died of natural causes.

Stillness Rage •••: The Sin-Eater can ignore some measure of solid cover when attacking. When striking through cover, the player treats the cover as having 1 less Durability.

Stillness Rage ••••: The Sin-Eater can strike from any angle. He spends an additional point of plasm on the attack, and the victim's Stamina does not subtract as a defense.

Stillness Rage •••••: This gruesome power can steal a victim's breath from his mouth. Ugly purple bruises open on the victim's throat and she gasps for breath. The player spends 2 plasm and rolls Strength + Brawl + Rage rating – the target's Defense. If successful, the victim suffers two points of lethal damage per turn and cannot apply her Defense to any incoming attacks. This power lasts for one turn per success.



The Shroud

Attribute: Resolve

The Shroud is the Manifestation most commonly used for defensive purposes. When a Sin-Eater dons the Shroud, the Bound allows the raw plasm of her geist to flow over her body, congealing into a hard shell which protects her from harm. The geist's plasm flows out of the Sin-Eater's body through every pore, enveloping his body and forming a protective armor of plasm. The precise results vary according to the Key used to unlock the Manifestation. Furthermore, Sin-Eaters generally customize their Shrouds, each of which is personal to the one who dons it. A Sin-Eater who favors the Primeval Shroud will often be enveloped into the silhouette of some great menacing creature of rippling muscle and shaggy fur or bristles, while one who favors the Industrial Shroud might seem to wear armor forged from castoff car parts or rusted metal. Regardless of its appearance or effects, the Shroud is generally invisible to anyone save a Sin-Eater or a ghost, either of whom can perceive that the character is defended. Other supernatural creatures may be able to perceive the Shroud with appropriate powers, such as vampiric Aura Perception or Mage Sight.

Shroud Activation

Cost: 1 plasm

Dice Pool: Resolve + (Key Skill) + Shroud rating

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attempt to manifest the Shroud goes horribly wrong. The Sin-Eater suffers a number of levels of bashing damage equal to his Shroud rating and will be unable to unlock the Shroud for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The attempt to manifest the Shroud fails.

Success: The Sin-Eater manifests her Shroud which provides an Armor bonus equal to her Shroud rating, as well as any special effects provided by the Key used in the activation.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater's Shroud rating is considered to be one higher for purposes of determining her Armor rating.

The Elemental Shrouds

Skill: Occult

The Sin-Eater charges the plasm of her Shroud with the power of one of the four elements, altering its effects as appropriate.

The Cold Wind Shroud

In addition to providing armor equal to the activation successes, the Cold Wind Shroud also negates completely any damage resulting from extremes of cold. The Cold Wind Shroud also completely

negates any Manifestation-based attacks of any form which were unlocked by the Cold Wind Key *unless* the attacking Sin-Eater got more activation successes with that Key than the defender did in unlocking the Shroud.

Cold Wind Shroud ••: The Sin-Eater is completely immune to gas-based or suffocation attacks (but not drowning) while this Shroud is active.

Cold Wind Shroud •••: The Sin-Eater may form her Shroud from bitter icy winds, which inflict bashing damage dice equal the activation successes on anyone who touches her or whom she touches while the Shroud is active. Each time damage is inflicted, the Sin-Eater must pay 1 plasm. A Brawl roll may be required in order to inflict this damage on a resisting target, but the damage dice inflicted with this power cannot supplement a Brawl attack ~ the Sin-Eater must choose whether to strike her target or freeze him, but she cannot do both.

Cold Wind Shroud ••••: The Sin-Eater may completely ignore electricity damage from mundane sources. Against magical effects which inflict electrical damage, the Sin-Eater adds his Occult to the Armor rating of his Shroud to determine how effective it is.

Cold Wind Shroud •••••: The Sin-Eater may forge her Shroud from winds so cold that they may cause instant frostbite. This power functions exactly like the 3-dot version except that the damage inflicted is lethal and the Sin-Eater must pay 2 plasm each time the damage dice are rolled.

The Grave-Dirt Shroud

In addition to providing Armor equal to the Sin-Eater's Shroud rating, the Grave-Dirt Shroud also renders the Sin-Eater completely immune to suffocation (but not drowning or gas attacks) and to any damage inflicted by grapple attacks.

Grave-Dirt Shroud ••: The Sin-Eater may draw upon the strength of the unyielding earth. She now adds her Stamina to her Shroud rating for purposes of determining her Armor rating.

Grave-Dirt Shroud •••: The Sin-Eater may cause his Shroud to become particularly resistant to stone, earth and metal. If attacked with a metal or earthen weapon, whether a sword, bullets, or simply a hurled rock, the Sin-Eater may downgrade any damage which bypasses the Shroud from lethal to bashing at a cost of 3 plasm.

Grave-Dirt Shroud ••••: The Sin-Eater may channel plasm through her Shroud, causing it to explode outward in a cascade of dust. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Resolve + Composure + activation successes). Anyone within ten yards whose Stamina is less than the successes on this roll is overcome by a paroxysm of coughing and choking. For the next

turn, anyone within the area of effect will be reduced to a Chance Die on all rolls and will lose Defense. Then, for the next (activation successes) turns, any affected characters will suffer a -5 dice penalty on all actions. This effect costs only 2 plasm, but it immediately ends the Manifestation and potentially leaves the Sin-Eater vulnerable to harm. The Sin-Eater can protect allies from the choking dust at a cost of 2 plasm per protected ally.

Grave-Dirt Shroud •••••: The Sin-Eater is so in tune with the earth that he can shift damage from any source into it. So long as the Sin-Eater is either standing on earth or is no more than (Psyche) yards above the earth, he can negate any amount of damage at a cost of 2 plasm per health level lost. If the attack normally inflicts aggravated damage, the cost increases to 4 plasm per damage level.

The Pyre-Flame Shroud

A Pyre-Flame Shroud illuminates the area surrounding the Sin-Eater with a ghostly fire which envelops his body. In addition to the normal Armor bonus, the Sin-Eater can see in complete darkness by the unearthly light his Shroud generates. Of course, since only Sin-Eaters and ghosts can normally perceive a Shroud, only such beings can perceive the light that the Shroud generates. Thus, the Sin-Eater and his allies can move about easily while his enemies remain in the dark.

Pyre-Flame Shroud ••: The Sin-Eater may totally ignore the harmful effects of natural fire and heat. Against supernatural fire and heat, the Sin-Eater adds her Occult to the Shroud's Armor rating.

Pyre-Flame Shroud •••: The Sin-Eater may ignite any flammable material with a touch at a cost of 1 plasm.

Pyre-Flame Shroud ••••: The Sin-Eater's aura now burns those who would oppose him. If the Sin-Eater touches another person or is touched by another person, he can choose to burn her with his ghostly flames, inflicting a number of lethal damage dice equal to the activation successes. Each time damage is inflicted, the Sin-Eater must pay 2 plasm. A Brawl roll may be required in order to inflict this damage on a resisting target, but the damage dice inflicted with this power cannot supplement a Brawl attack – the Sin-Eater must choose whether to strike her target or freeze him, but she cannot do both.

Pyre-Flame Shroud •••••: As per the 4-dot power, except if the Sin-Eater pays double the normal plasm cost, the damage is aggravated.

The Tear-Stained Shroud

In addition to granting Armor equal to his Shroud rating, the Tear-Stained Shroud allows the Sin-Eater to breathe underwater for its duration. He may also add the activation successes to all rolls relating to swimming or otherwise functioning while underwater.

Tear-Stained Shroud ••: By spending 1 plasm, the Sin-Eater can douse any mundane flame whose Size is less than her activation successes. If the flame is magical in nature, the Sin-Eater's player may roll (Resolve + Composure + activation successes, resisted by whatever dice pool was used

to create the magical fire). If the roll succeeds, the magical flame is extinguished.

Tear-Stained Shroud •••: The Sin-Eater may cause brackish sea water to manifest in the lungs of anyone who touches her or who she touches. This attack inflicts bashing damage dice equal to the activation successes on anyone who touches her or whom she touches while the Shroud is active. Each time damage is inflicted, the Sin-Eater must pay 1 plasm. A Brawl roll may be required in order to inflict this damage on a resisting target, but the damage dice inflicted with this power cannot supplement a Brawl attack – the Sin-Eater must choose whether to strike her target or drown him, but she cannot do both.

Tear-Stained Shroud ••••: By spending 2 plasm, the Sin-Eater can inflict water damage on any inanimate and/or mechanical device she touches. The Sin-Eater's player must roll (Resolve + Craft + activation successes). If the device is mechanical, apply Durability as normal. If it is electronic or otherwise vulnerable to water-damage, the attack bypasses Durability.

Tear-Stained Shroud •••••: As per the 3-dot version, except that the Sin-Eater may choose to pay 3 plasm instead of 1 to inflict automatic bashing damage equal to (the activation successes minus the target's Stamina).

The Industrial Shroud

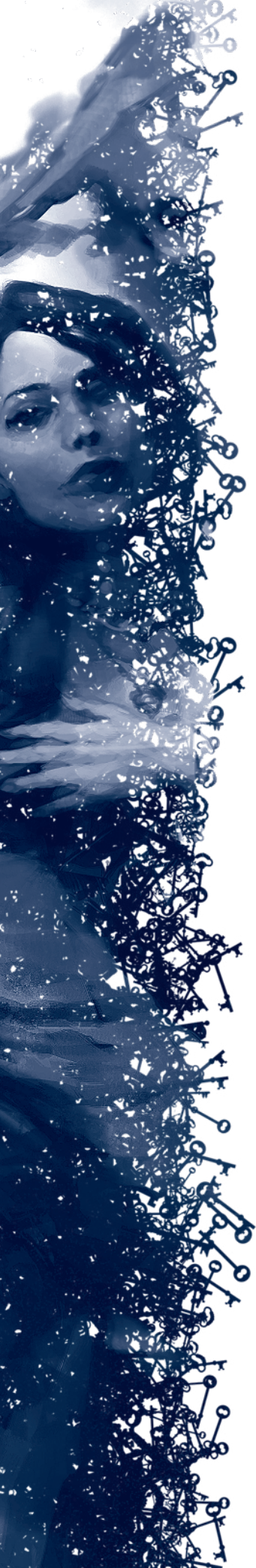
Skill: Crafts

A Industrial Shroud allows the Sin-Eater to fashion plasm into an armor which is particularly resistant to attacks of a technological nature. By reflexively spending 1 plasm, the Sin-Eater can double her Shroud's Armor rating against a single attack of which he is aware which involves a man-made device. Such devices may include a crafted melee weapon (such as a knife or sword), a firearm, or any other attack made with a crafted technological device, whether someone trying to run the character over with a car or trying to hit her over the head with a laptop computer.

Industrial Shroud ••: The Sin-Eater can open any non-magical lock with the expenditure of 1 plasm. If the lock is electronic, the Sin-Eater's player must roll Intelligence + Larceny + (activation successes), applying the anachrotech penalties found on pg. 111.

Industrial Shroud •••: The Sin-Eater can render herself completely invisible to most forms of electronic surveillance, including cameras and recording devices. She may still be detected if, for example, a security guard observes an object moving by itself or a door opening for no reason, but the Sin-Eater herself will not show up on any form of electronic security.

Industrial Shroud ••••: The Sin-Eater may cause any type of machinery (electronic or mechanical) to break down. The player rolls Intelligence + Crafts + (activation successes), applying the anachrotech penalties found on pg. 111. Durability applies to this roll, and each attempt to disable a device costs 1 plasm. This power normally requires the Sin-Eater to touch the item, but by doubling the plasm cost, he can target any device within (Shroud rating x 10) yards.



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Industrial Shroud •••••: The Sin-Eater may forge her Shroud from electricity, inflicting lethal damage equal to the successes on the activation roll on anyone with whom she comes into physical contact. Each time damage is inflicted, the Sin-Eater must pay 2 plasm. A Brawl roll may be required in order to inflict this damage on a resisting target, but the damage dice inflicted with this power cannot supplement a Brawl attack – the Sin-Eater must choose whether to strike her target or electrocute him, but she cannot do both. The Sin-Eater may also pay 2 plasm when using the 4-dot version of this power to bypass a device's Durability.

The Passion Shroud

Skill: Empathy

In addition to the normal Armor bonus, the Passion Shroud allows the Sin-Eater to add her Shroud rating to her Resolve or Composure for purposes of resisting magical attacks which might affect her mind or her emotional state.

Passion Shroud ••: The Sin-Eater can make himself more terrifying to others, adding the activation successes as a dice bonus to any Intimidation roll made during the scene.

Passion Shroud •••: The Sin-Eater may shape his aura to fit the emotional state of anyone with

whom he interacts. The Sin-Eater may spend 1 point of plasm in order to add the activation successes for the Shroud as bonus dice to any Presence or Manipulation roll made during the scene.

Passion Shroud •••••: The Sin-Eater may assault her enemies with a psychically devastating touch. Whenever the Sin-Eater touches or is touched by another person, she may roll a number of dice equal to (activation successes minus the target's Composure). If the roll is successful, the target becomes emotionally drained and loses one temporary Willpower per success. This attack costs 1 plasm. Unlike similar Shroud powers, this effect can supplement a Brawl attack. That is, the Sin-Eater can strike his target to inflict physical damage and also attempt to drain her of Willpower, although such a double-edged attack raises the plasm cost to 3.

Passion Shroud •••••: As per the 4-dot power, except that the Sin-Eater may trigger a debilitating emotional trauma. At this level, the Sin-Eater may double the normal plasm cost to negate the penalty normally inflicted on the roll by the target's Composure. Furthermore, if the Sin-Eater completely drains his enemy of Willpower, he may impose a derangement on her of his choice which lasts until she has recovered at least one Willpower point.

The Phantasmal Shroud

Skill: Persuasion

In addition to the normal Armor benefits, the Phantasmal Shroud allows the Sin-Eater to add her Manipulation to her Defense against all attacks made by thinking beings, as the Shroud distracts and disturbs those who would do her harm.

Phantasmal Shroud •••: The Sin-Eater may occlude his own features from the observation of others. Anyone attempting to remember anything about the Sin-Eater's appearance suffers a dice penalty equal to the activation successes. This effect is automatic unless the Sin-Eater chooses not to occlude his features.

Phantasmal Shroud ••••: The Sin-Eater can cause a single target to forget everything about the Sin-Eater once he leaves her presence. The Sin-Eater's player must roll Manipulation + Persuasion + (activation successes), resisted by the target's Resolve + Psyche. This power costs 1 plasm.

Phantasmal Shroud •••••: The Sin-Eater may reshape his Phantasmal Shroud so as to deceive others. With this power, the Sin-Eater may choose to wrap himself in an illusion which allows him to pose as another person. Compare the activation successes to the Composure of anyone with whom the Sin-Eater interacts. If the successes equal or exceed a given character's Composure, that character believes the Sin-Eater is who she claims to be. The effects of this illusion last for as long as the Shroud is maintained. This power costs 1 plasm per person to be deceived.

Phantasmal Shroud ••••••: Drawing upon her terrible understanding of the Underworld and the phantasms which lurk within it, the Sin Eater may cloak herself in an illusory appearance which is utterly frightening to a particular person. Only the targeted individual perceives the Sin-Eater's terrifying visage, and only that target can be the focus for such an attack. Damage from attacks made with this power often appear to be the result of sudden heart attacks or aneurysms. The Sin-Eater's player must spend plasm and roll (activation successes, minus the target's Composure). Each success on the roll inflicts one level of damage on the target. For 1 plasm per attack, this damage is bashing. For 3 plasm per attack, it is lethal. Furthermore, even if the Sin-Eater fails to inflict damage on her enemy, he will be unable to attack her due to his terror for the duration of the scene unless his Composure is higher than the activation successes.

The Primeval Shroud

Skill: Animal Ken

The Primeval Shroud is more durable than other Shrouds, but fills the Sin-Eater's mind with the bestial nature of a wild animal. While the Shroud is in place, the Sin-Eater may spend one plasm to add his Stamina to his Shroud Armor against a single attack of any sort.

Primeval Shroud •••: The Sin-Eater may temporarily boost his Physical Attributes by channeling plasm through his Shroud. While the Manifestation is active, the Sin-Eater may reflexively spend plasm to boost his Strength, Dexterity

or Stamina for a single dice roll. For each plasm spent, the Sin-Eater may increase one of his Physical Attributes by one point. The Sin-Eater may not spend more plasm than the lesser of his Animal Ken or Shroud ratings.

Primeval Shroud ••••: The Sin-Eater may reflexively spend 1 plasm to generate plasmic talons or claws which inflict +2 lethal damage. Against materialized ghosts, these claws inflict aggravated damage instead. The talons are normally only visible to Sin-Eaters and ghosts, but their effects may be felt by anyone the Sin-Eater attacks.

Primeval Shroud •••••: The Sin-Eater may boost his Physical Attributes for an extended period. While the Shroud is active, the Sin-Eater may spend up his activation successes in plasm, along with 1 Willpower point. For each plasm spent, the Sin-Eater may add one point to his Strength, Dexterity or Stamina, dividing up the points as he wishes. The effects last for the duration of the Shroud, and the Sin-Eater may only use this power once per Shroud activation.

Primeval Shroud ••••••: The Sin-Eater may manifest claws or talons which inflict aggravated damage on all targets. However, the Armor provided by any type of Shroud defends against these claws as if they only inflicted lethal damage, although any resulting damage is considered aggravated. Activating these claws costs 4 plasm.

The Stigmata Shroud

Skill: Occult

The Stigmata Shroud aids the Sin-Eater in defending against the attacks of ghosts and other Sin-Eaters. While the Stigmata Shroud is active, the Sin-Eater adds her Shroud rating to her Resistance against all Numina powers used against her by ghosts and against all Manifestation effects used against her by other Sin-Eaters which affect her body, mind or soul.

Stigmata Shroud •••: The Sin-Eater may now touch unmanifested ghosts and any other Twilight beings as if they were manifested. He can harm them with a successful Brawl attack.

Stigmata Shroud ••••: The benefits of the 2-dot power now extend to any melee weapons carried by the Sin-Eater, allowing him to make Weaponry attacks against beings in Twilight.

Stigmata Shroud •••••: Wrapping his bloody cloak tightly about himself, the Sin-Eater may use the Stigmata Shroud to enter Twilight for a limited time himself. The Sin-Eater can dematerialize at will and enter Twilight for one minute per activation success, although he can end the effect and rematerialize at will. This power costs 3 plasm and 1 Willpower, but the Sin-Eater may choose to suffer one level of lethal damage in place of either the plasm cost or the Willpower cost or two levels of lethal damage in place of them both.

Stigmata Shroud ••••••: As per the 4-dot power, except that the Sin-Eater may bring one person per success into Twilight with him. An unwilling person forcibly brought



into Twilight may resist by rolling Resolve + Psyche. The Twilight state may last for up a scene. He can end the effect and rematerialize himself and/or his companions at will and at no cost. However, once the Sin-Eater rematerializes, anyone who crossed over with him also does so — a Sin-Eater cannot use this power to strand another in a Twilight state.

The Stillness Shroud

Skill: Stealth

In addition to its Armor benefits, the Stillness Shroud also improves the Sin-Eater's stealth. While the Stillness Shroud is active, the Sin-Eater adds her Shroud rating as bonus dice to all Stealth-related rolls.

Stillness Shroud ••: The Sin-Eater can spend 1 plasm to become invisible to other people. While this effect is active, a passive observer will never notice the Sin-Eater's presence unless he draws attention to himself by touching or attacking the observer or otherwise causing some nearby commotion. Anyone actively searching for the Sin-Eater will be unable to see him unless she gets more successes on a Wits + Composure roll than the activation successes. Anyone who for whatever reason knows that an invisible person is nearby suffers a dice penalty on all attacks against her equal to the activation successes. At this level, the Sin-Eater is still visible to technology such as cameras or infrared goggles, and to the senses of animals. Attacking anyone or attempting to damage any physical object will automatically end this Shroud.

Stillness Shroud •••: The benefits of the 2-dot power are improved, as the Sin-Eater's invisibility now extends to technology and to animals. Additionally, the Sin-Eater may now attack others without sacrificing his invisibility, although each attack costs 1 plasm. As with the 2-dot power, anyone who realizes that an invisible person is nearby (such as after being punched by one) suffers a dice penalty on all attacks equal to the activation successes.

Stillness Shroud ••••: The Sin-Eater can render himself intangible long enough to pass through a wall or other solid barrier. Doing so requires one full turn of concentration and the expenditure of 1 plasm. The intangibility lasts for one full action.

Stillness Shroud •••••: The Sin-Eater can become intangible reflexively so as to evade physical attacks. When the Sin-Eater is subject to a Brawl, Firearms or Weaponry attack to which his Defense would normally apply, he may spend 3 plasm to allow the attack to pass harmlessly through his body. This defense only applies to attacks with a purely physical component — if the Sin-Eater is attacked with a flaming torch, for example, the fire may still burn him despite his intangibility. Also, if the attack is one which would normally inflict aggravated

damage, the plasm cost increases to 5. This power is an exception to the normal limits on how much plasm a Sin-Eater can spend per turn. If the Sin-Eater's Psyche is not normally high enough to allow him to spend 3 or 5 plasm, he may still do so when activating this power, but doing so will also cost him 1 Willpower point per activation.

Ceremonies

Ceremonies are rituals, generally associated with the ghosts or the dead, which Sin-Eaters can learn. These rituals do not directly use the power of the geist as much as they rely upon the Bound's deep connection to the Underworld and its denizens. Ceremonies are all exactly that: the Sin-Eater must perform a set of specific actions and must often use specific props like iron wire or mirrors. Without both these props and actions, the ceremony cannot be performed.

Although it is possible to write down the physical steps of a ceremony, there are precious few compilations of such information. By and large, Sin-Eaters learn ceremonies directly from a teacher. Many of these ceremonies are centuries old. However, characters can update older ceremonies that better fit with the realities of modern life. For example, most ceremonies that require an image of a target have been adapted so that photographs can be used.

Each ceremony is learned as a separate Merit. Sin-Eaters can learn as many or as few ceremonies as they want. The Krewe Binding ceremony is the most widely known of the ceremonies, but many experienced Sin-Eaters know half a dozen or more ceremonies.

Ceremony Mechanics

Every ceremony has a few features in common. All ceremonies are performed as extended rolls. The Sin-Eater begins performing the actions involved in the ceremony, and continues with the ritual until he has obtained the necessary number of successes. Unless specified otherwise, a ceremony has a target number of successes equal to 2+ the number of dots in the ceremony. Also, the greater the number of dots in a ceremony, the longer the time between rolls. The character's Synergy rating may affect this roll (see pg. 86). If the target number of successes is reached on a die roll with five or more successes, the ceremony may be considered an exceptional success, and bestow additional benefits. These benefits don't apply if an exceptional success was rolled earlier in the process, but the target number of successes is reached with a roll of four or fewer successes — the exceptional success must be the roll that closes the ceremony.

While most ceremonies are easy to complete, there is a consequence for failure. If a character fails the roll three times (in succession or otherwise) without successfully completing the ceremony, the ceremony fails and he must begin again. Dramatic failures are even worse, stripping away all accumulated successes and often inflicting some sort of penalty. Though a ceremony may be comparatively simple and quick, botching the observances can draw down spectral ire.

Final Vision (•)

There are legends that the last thing someone sees before they die is permanently imprinted upon their now-dead eyes. This ceremony allows the Sin-Eater to see this final vision. These images are always from the person's point of view. The Bound sees exactly what the now dead person saw, no more and no less. If someone was shot in the back, all the Sin-Eater sees is the world appearing to jerk suddenly and then the ground rising up to meet the person as she fell. This ceremony only provides visual information; the ritualist cannot hear anything that was said.

Performing the Ceremony: This ceremony requires the Sin-Eater to touch the corpse and look into its dead eyes. The corpse can be no more than three days old, but even if the eyes have dried and withered or been pecked at by crows, the Sin-Eater can still use this ceremony. Even so, it can only reveal what the victim saw: a blind victim, or one who was blindfolded or in a totally dark space when she died, will show the Bound a vision of nothing but darkness. Carving out or otherwise removing the corpse's eyes foils the Final Vision, a fact that is not lost on murderous Sin-Eaters, and a few of the cleverer ghosts.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Wits

Action: Extended (target number of 3)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every turn.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The ceremony fails, providing the Sin-Eater with no information. Also, the corpse's eyes wither and cannot be used for this ceremony again.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: The Sin-Eater sees everything the corpse did during its last turn of life. The Bound can carefully examine this image, even slow, freeze, or replay the image as desired. However, he must stare into the corpse's eyes the entire time. Also, the ritualist sees everything exactly as the corpse did; if the corpse was nearsighted and without his glasses, all images will be blurry.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater can see what the corpse did during its last three minutes of her life. The Sin-Eater can examine and replay these images.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The corpse died less than an hour ago |
| +1 | The corpse's eyes were covered or closed shortly after its death |
| -1 | This ceremony has been successfully used on the corpse previously |
| -2 | The corpse's eyes have begun to decay or have been pecked by birds or eaten by insects |

Finding (•)

This ceremony is used to divine the location of a person, living or dead. The major limitations are that the Sin-Eater must have at least a tiny piece of the target's body. A drop of blood (at least 75% free of foreign materials such as dirt), a fingernail clipping, or even a single strand of hair will suffice. Also, the ceremony allows the Sin-Eater to locate the person, but does not provide the person's location on a map — the Sin-Eater must physically track down the target.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater must tie the portion of bodily material in a small cloth bag on the end of a string. The Sin-Eater must then spin slowly in a circle while holding the string in one hand. Eventually, she feels the string begin to pull. This ceremony can be performed as often as desired, such as to triangulate the target's location. Locating a corpse, an imprisoned captive, or anyone else who is stationary is fairly easy using this ceremony. Locating a living person who is moving around can be exceedingly difficult. This ceremony cannot be used to locate a ghost, only a living or a dead physical body. The Sin-Eater need not know the target's name, wanting to find the person to which a spot of blood or a lock of hair belong works just as well.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Stamina

Action: Extended (target number of 3 for locating a corpse or 6 for locating a living target)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every half hour.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The string attracts the attention of ghosts and begins pulling in random directions. The bodily remnant loses its connection and cannot be used for this ceremony again.

UPDATING AND MODIFYING CEREMONIES

By paying one extra dot for a ceremony, a Sin-Eater can modify it. The function of the ceremony remains the same, but the method of performing it can change. Such alterations should not make performing the ceremony particularly easier or harder, merely different. For example, a ceremony that requires a bowl of blood might be changed so that it required the sacrifice of a large toad or a rooster. Similarly, a ceremony that required a photograph could be changed so that clear fingerprints and a bit of skin or hair could work instead. Most often, ceremonies are updated so they can work with the technology and practicalities of modern life. Updating a ceremony requires several days of work, where the Sin-Eater tries out minor variations of the existing ceremony until she has modified it to work how she wants it to. Storytellers are free to forbid versions of ceremonies that seem too easy or too silly.



Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the required number is reached, the Sin-Eater feels a pull on the string. The direction the string pulls provides the character with the direction of the person, or their corpse. The strength of the pull gives a rough idea of how far away the target is; the stronger the pull, the nearer the target. As long as the Sin-Eater holds onto the string, she continues to feel this pull. This pull continues for 5 minutes per success rolled.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the number of successes exceeds the needed number by five or more, the ritualist continues to feel the string pulling in the correct direction for the next hour. Also, the Sin-Eater knows more clearly if the target is a few dozen yards, a few miles or a few tens, hundreds or thousands of miles away.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +1 | The Sin-Eater has several different types of physical connections to the target, such as having both a few hairs and a fingernail clipping. |
| -1 | The pieces of the target are old, worn, or decayed. |
| -3 | The target is living or a corporeal undead (such as a vampire). |
| -3 | The Sin-Eater is attempting to use several connections to the target at once and at least one of these connections is a piece of someone else. |

Krewe Binding (•)

This ceremony sits at the heart of Sin-Eater culture. It allows a group of Bound to found a new krewe and a Sin-Eater to join an existing krewe.

Performing the Ceremony: The ritual requires a place associated with death, like a graveyard, morgue, or crematorium, for optimal success. Each founder cuts a palm, doing one point of lethal damage and spilling a quantity of blood, and lies down to enter a communal death-like trance. There they establish the channel, one part receiving revelation and one part establishing their own ethos. Only a single member need actually know this ceremony, but all founding members must perform the same actions.

To join an existing krewe, the new member must be led by an existing member, who is the only one who need know the ceremony. The new member formally accepts membership in the krewe, cuts her palm for one point of lethal damage, and enters into a vision of the krewe's channel.

Dice Pool: Psyche (or Psyche + Presence)

Action: Extended (target number of 6 to found a krewe or 3 to join an existing krewe)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes if founding a krewe or once a turn if joining a krewe.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost, and the rite is tainted. The Sin-Eater can never join the particular krewe. Sin-Eaters attempting to found a krewe must add, subtract, or replace a member before they can perform the ceremony again.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: The Sin-Eaters successfully found a krewe or the Sin-Eater successfully joins the krewe. See *Founding a Krewe* (pp. 179-184) for further information.

Exceptional Success: No additional benefit.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +1 | The Sin-Eaters ingest intoxicants or hallucinogens immediately before the ceremony. |
| -2 | One or more of the individuals joining feels coerced into joining. |
| -3 | A Sin-Eater joins or attempts to found a krewe for the express purpose of harming or betraying it. |

Pass On (•)

This is one of the most important, but least understood ceremonies used by Sin-Eaters. When they have resolved their various anchors, many ghosts naturally pass on to their "Final Reward", whatever this may mean. All that Sin-Eaters truly know is that these ghosts vanish forever. However, some ghosts remain in Twilight or the Underworld, unable to depart on their own. With this ceremony, a Sin-Eater can cause willing ghosts whose anchors have all been resolved to "pass on" peacefully to whatever destiny awaits them. Some Bound are surprised to learn how simple this ceremony is – but all of the most difficult work of helping a ghost pass on has been done beforehand.

Performing the Ceremony: This ceremony can only be performed in the Underworld, and only on a ghost that has resolved its anchors and is ready to "pass on," to a hopefully better fate than the Underworld. Sin-Eaters can threaten, bribe, coerce, or even attempt to mentally control a ghost into agreeing, but the ghost must assent. The Sin-Eater must have a piece of the ghost's body or, at minimum, a photograph of the ghost when she was alive or one of the ghost's personal possessions. The Sin-Eater talks to the ghost, telling it to prepare itself. Then, she sets fire to the lock of hair, photograph, or other physical connection to the ghost. As the item burns, the ghost gradually fades away.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Presence

Action: Extended (target number of 9)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every minute.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The ghost develops a new anchor, causing it to haunt the mortal world or a desire to cling to existence in the Underworld. Until the ghost's anchor or desires have been dealt with, it cannot be subjected to this ceremony again.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the ghost understands where and why it must go, and gradually fades away to an unknown fate.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached on this roll, the ghost fades away to its final reward with a word of thanks. The Sin-Eater who performed the ceremony regains a point of Willpower due to the spiritual power of this event.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +3 | The ghost purposely helped to resolve its anchors in order to pass on. |
| +1 | The Sin-Eater helped the ghost resolve some of its anchors. |
| -1 | The Sin-Eater does not possess either a piece of the ghost's body or a photograph of the ghost. |
| -3 | The ghost has been threatened or coerced into undergoing this ritual. |

Speaker of the Dead (•)

Many Sin-Eaters take it upon themselves to help ghosts finish things left undone. They tie up loose ends and resolve the ghost's story. But some messages cannot be passed on by a stranger. This ability allows the Sin-Eater to provide the ghost with a conduit, if only for her voice. She can speak through the Sin-Eater, and the words she utters come out in her own living voice. The Sin-Eater's appearance does not change (though they might be able to use the Caul to approximate the ghost's silhouette), but that does not matter, for the speaker may not be seen.

Like Orpheus, the mortal cannot look. It is acceptable for the Sin-Eater's silhouette or otherwise obscured form to be seen, but if the recipient looks closely enough to see the Sin-Eater's features, the ghost's voice is lost in the wind. Using a telephone to contact the recipient mitigates this risk, but they are far, far less likely to believe the voice really belongs to their lost loved one in this age of digital manipulation than they are if they hear the warm tones in person.

Some ghosts, unable to help themselves, use the opportunity to harass or frighten a target of their anger rather than contact a loved one. The Sin-Eater cannot predict what the ghost will say through him, but if the conversation takes a turn he isn't comfortable with, he may pull the plug at any time.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater simply takes the ghost's hand and concentrates on relaxing and letting go of his voice, giving it up to the ghost for one scene or until the Sin-Eater chooses to end the effect, whichever comes first.

If the recipient does look and cause the ritual to end early, the Sin-Eater is unable to act as a conduit for that ghost for 3 days.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Manipulation

Action: Extended (target number of 3)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every turn.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater loses his voice for the rest of the scene.

Failure: Nothing happens.

Success: The shade's voice emits from the Sin-Eater's mouth.

Exceptional Success: There is no additional affect for exceptional successes.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The recipient is a knowing participant in the séance. |
| +1 | The recipient is at the ghost's graveside. |
| -1 | The recipient has seen the Sin-Eater in the last hour. |
| -2 | The Sin-Eater has already had negative contact with the recipient. |

Distant Vision (••)

This ceremony allows the Sin-Eater to gain a brief vision of an individual. If the individual is a ghost, this ceremony reveals the ghost's present location in either the mortal world or the Underworld. If the person is alive, then this ceremony shows the person and his immediate surroundings in the mortal world.

Performing the Ceremony: This ceremony requires a mirror or other similarly reflective surface that once reflected the face of the intended target. If the target is a ghost, then the mirror could either have reflected the person's face in life, or some physical Manifestation created by the ghost. The Sin-Eater must also either know the individual's name or at least a unique descriptor, such as "the tall black woman who shot at me yesterday" or "the ghost who is haunting this apartment". The Sin-Eater stares into the mirror and eventually, images begin to form. This image is visible to other Sin-Eaters, but not to mortals. The image also cannot be photographed with anything except a camera that is also a memento.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Wits

Action: Extended (target number of 4)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every minute.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The mirror cracks and clouds over, rendering it useless for this ceremony.



Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the Sin-Eater sees a still image of the target and the target's immediate surroundings, much like a photograph of the target taken at the moment the ceremony was performed. The image appears as though the Bound is looking at the target from approximately 10 feet away. If desired, the Sin-Eater can cause the image to expand, so she can examine some part of the image more closely.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the image depicts motion for the next minute, much like a video image without sound.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The mirror was a personal possession of the target and reflected his image many times. |
| +1 | The Sin-Eater knows the target's full legal name. |
| -1 | The mirror or other surface that reflected the image is cracked, dull, or otherwise in poor condition. |
| -2 | The target's image was reflected only very briefly or partially in the mirror. |
| -3 | The target's image was reflected in a pane of glass, a polished metal surface, or something else reflective that is not a mirror. This penalty can be cumulative with the one above. |

Distant Voices (••)

The Sin-Eater can send a short message and receive a brief response from a target, who can either be living or dead. The target hears the question as if it was spoken to them and answers as they would if asked that question in person (there is no compulsion to tell the truth). Mortals targeted by this ceremony do not immediately notice that the question is coming from a disembodied voice and answer it casually, without considering the source. However, after the ceremony ends, the mortal is free to be puzzled and concerned as to the voice's source. This ceremony can be performed in both the mortal world and the Underworld and the location of the target doesn't matter.

Performing the Ceremony: When performing this ceremony to contact a ghost, the Sin-Eater must perform it at the site of her death, at her grave, or in a location where the ghost has appeared previously. When performing this ceremony to contact a living target, the Sin-Eater must perform this ceremony in a building the target lives or once lived in. To

contact the target, the Sin-Eater sits down and writes out a message, and then allows the pen or pencil to rest in her hand or her fingers to rest lightly on the keyboard. Any response will come as "automatic writing", where the Sin-Eater's hand moves of its own accord to write down the response.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Presence

Action: Extended (target number of 5)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every minute.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The target gets a sense that someone hostile is looking for him.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the Sin-Eater can send the target a message of up to a dozen words. The target can then send a message of up to a dozen words in response. The Sin-Eater can easily receive this message if she is holding a writing implement.

Exceptional Success: No additional effect.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +2 | The Sin-Eater has spoken to the target in person. In this case, the target clearly hears the character's voice and knows who is speaking. |
| +1 | The Sin-Eater is using a pen, pencil, or stationary that belongs to the target. This can also serve as the connection to the target. |
| -1 | The Sin-Eater does not know the target's full name |
| -2 | The dwelling, grave, or place of death has been seriously disturbed or modified since the target lived, died, or was buried there. |
| -3 | The target is living or corporeal undead (such as a vampire). |

Lifting the Scales (••)

Sin-Eaters cannot stop seeing the dead. They may suppress their ability with effort, but they see the world in a way that cannot be conveyed with mere words. No ordinary human being can truly understand the things that Sin-Eaters experience without seeing it with their own eyes.

With this ceremony, a Sin-Eater may temporarily bestow the ability to see and hear ghosts, geists, and other creatures that exist in a state of Twilight. Allowing a normal person to see the world from this perspective can have dire consequences. Bearing witness to the sheer enormity of death's inevitability can forever alter her perspective and outlook on life.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater performs this ritual by daubing the eyelids of the subject with ash taken from a cremated corpse. This may be retrieved from an urn on a mantle, a crematorium, or by more nefarious means.

When the subject next opens her eyes, she sees the world exactly as a Sin-Eater would. Ghosts may be seen and heard, but that is the extent of the interaction. Without using Numina, a ghost may not affect the subject and nor can the subject touch or otherwise physically affect a ghost. The subject may also see deathmarks, including the relative health of those around her. She may even see her own health, in a mirror, for example.

It is impossible to truly prepare an ordinary human for the experience. The first time a subject undergoes *Lifting the Scales*, she must succeed on a Wits + Composure roll or suffer a temporary derangement for a number of days equal to her Morality. Dramatic Failure on this roll inflicts a permanent derangement. This does not apply to other supernatural creatures gifted with the death-sight.

The effect lasts for one scene.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Manipulation

Action: Extended (target number of 4)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every turn.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost, and the attempt causes a kind of psychic backlash. The Subject must roll Wits + Composure to avoid a temporary derangement that lasts for a number of days equal to her Morality.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the subject gains ghost sight (p. 174) and can perceive morbid reality and death stains (p. 177).

Exceptional Success: There is no additional effect for exceptional success.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +2 | The subject already has some form of psychic or supernatural ability. |
| +1 | The subject has had the scales lifted from their eyes before. |
| -1 | The subject is actively resistant to the ceremony. |
| -2 | The subject has never known anyone who died. |

Listening to the Spectral Howl (••)

Most Sin-Eaters have more than enough ghosts to deal with. However, some foolish or dedicated Sin-Eaters go out looking for ghostly trouble. Others wish to seek particular types of ghosts or ghosts with specific desires. This ceremony allows the Sin-Eater to listen for nearby ghosts calling out their pain or their need. This ceremony can allow the Sin-Eater to either hear or learn the rough location of a nearby ghost that is filled with some desperate need or

that is simply filled with rage or hunger. Alternately, the Sin-Eater can instead listen for a ghost with a particular sort of need or hunger, like a desire for vengeance, a desire to protect a loved one, or a desire to destroy and kill.

Performing the Ceremony: This ceremony can be performed only in the mortal world. (Common wisdom holds it would be suicide to enact the ceremony in the Underworld.) Performing it requires both a radio and a local street map that includes the Sin-Eater's current location. The Sin-Eater turns the radio between stations, so that it produces either silence or random static and then runs her finger slowly over the map in a spiral starting at her current location. The Sin-Eater must then state if she wishes to find either the closest ghost in desperate need of something or only a ghost in desperate need of a particular thing like justice, aid for a mortal, or the desire to kill mortals. The Sin-Eater moves her finger in a spiral across the map, starting at her current location.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Wits

Action: Extended (4 successes)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every minute.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The Sin-Eater hears nothing, but one or more ghosts notices the Sin-Eater and any who desire to do so can seek the Sin-Eater out. Meanwhile, the Sin-Eater cannot use this ceremony until the sun next sets.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the required successes are reached, the radio begins making noise when the Sin-Eater's finger touches a location on the map with a ghost of the desired type in residence. Someone seeking angry ghosts would hear eerie screams of rage and occasional yells about what this particular ghost is angry about or perhaps its name. If no ghost of the desired type exists within the area of the map, the Sin-Eater is certain of this fact.

Exceptional Success: The particular ghost reveals more about its name and background in its cries and ramblings. Also, even after the ceremony is over, the radio continues broadcasting the particular ghost's voice for the next full scene.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +2 | The radio is more than 20 years old |
| +1 | The map is detailed enough to show individual buildings |
| -1 | Either the map or the radio is less than a year old |
| -2 | The Sin-Eater is using this ceremony in a city or other location with which she is relatively unfamiliar. |

Mortis Mask (••)

With this ceremony, the Sin-Eater may alter the apparent cause of death of a corpse. Though this ritual does not



mask the supernatural indicators of how a victim died and will not stand up to inspection from another Sin-Eater, it is enough to fool a forensic technician or medical examiner.

The Sin-Eater may make a corpse who died of a gunshot wound look as if they were strangled instead, or drowned. The charred remains of an arson victim can be made to look as if he simply died in his sleep of heart failure.

This ritual does not affect the death scene. Blood sprayed on the walls will still appear to forensics teams as consistent with the victim's original method of death. Physical evidence, fingerprints, hair, and fibers, etc., remain. The victim's deathmarks cannot be modified, and users of other ceremonies such as *Final Vision* or *Psychometry* will also see the truth.

Many Reapers use this ceremony to throw the authorities off their scent, but others find more elaborate uses for this power, such as framing rivals or enemies by planting evidence and staging the body to fit. Still others use this ceremony for more obscure purposes better left unsaid.

Performing the Ceremony: When performing this ritual, the Sin-Eater must have a suitable workspace. An examining table, such as that found in a mortuary or morgue, is ideal, but a tile floor or large dining room table will also suffice. The Sin-Eater must use plasm to reform the body. 1 point of plasm will erase a bullet hole or replace a missing arm, 2 points will recreate half the body, and 3 points are required to rebuild an entire body from ashes.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Dexterity

Action: Extended (target number of 4)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every minute.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater suffers a number of points of lethal damage equal to the amount of plasm required to repair the body, which manifests in wounds similar to those of the victim.

Failure: The body is not reshaped.

Success: The body is reshaped.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater recoups 1 point of plasm.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The desired appearance remains within the same Threshold of death. |
| +1 | The victim and the Sin-Eater share the same Threshold. |

Plasmic Manifestation (••)

Sin-Eaters who work to facilitate communication between the living and the dead are often frustrated with the difficulties of being the middleman. In

their role as medium, it is often easiest to simply let the shade speak for itself.

To that end, the Sin-Eater may shape plasm itself into a viscous Caul, giving form to a ghost in the physical world. The ghost may not do violence in this form; their touch is disgusting but harmless. The shade's voice is audible, if distorted by the mucilaginous goo.

Some Bonepickers that use their abilities as a medium to make a little money love this ritual, because the actual process by which they talk to ghosts isn't nearly flashy enough for clients to believe it. Really, who simply sits down to tea with the dead? In most cases, the plasm only takes on the approximate appearance of the ghost. There have been multiple instances of con-artist Sin-Eaters working with unethical shades to impersonate ghosts that have passed on, bilking wealthy clients with lies and false closure.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater literally excretes plasm from one of his orifices. Whether that entails hawking it up and spitting it out, letting it drain from his nostrils, exuding it from an open wound or less polite methods, 2 plasm must be dedicated to the task. This ceremony works best when enacted close to one of a ghost's anchors. It is possible to summon a shade through other methods, but its ability to communicate with the Sin-Eater is tenuous enough without trying to add another filter between the ghost and the mortals it wishes to contact.

The plasm retains its malleability and puissance for one scene or until the ghost chooses to end the communication.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Stamina

Action: Extended (target number of 4)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every turn.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The plasm does not take the form of the ghost in question, and in fact draws the attention of a malicious shade upon the proceedings.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: The plasm takes the approximate form of the ghost.

Exceptional Success: The plasm is sculpted into the exact likeness of the ghost, and there is no question to its identity.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +2 | More than one of the ghost's anchors are present. |
| +1 | One of the ghost's anchors is present. |

- 1 The ghost has no nearby anchors, but exists in Twilight.
- 2 The ghost has no anchors and has been summoned from the Underworld.

Spectral Photography (••)

The Sin-Eater can enter a room where she suspects there has been ghostly activity and can take photographs of these ghosts. These photographs reveal if there were ghosts in a location within the last few days as well as providing images of both the appearance and the activities of the ghosts.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater must use a camera that is fully functional but that also has its lens cap on, or otherwise has the lens completely covered. A piece of black tape over the lens works just as well. Both digital and film cameras work equally well, as do video cameras. The Sin-Eater then draws several complex sigils on the object covering the camera lens and takes dozens of photographs of the area where she suspects that ghostly activity took place. When she views the photographs, the ghosts will be clearly visible even if they were in Twilight when they were actually in the location.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Dexterity

Action: Extended (target number of 5)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every minute.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The camera takes only inaccurate and distorted photographs for the next day.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the developed or viewed pictures reveal any ghosts

who have been within the area within the last week. Blurred images depict the ghost or ghosts acting as they did then and may provide clues as to their identity and motives. The date and time of the haunting may be determined if the camera displays the date and time of the images it takes or if there is a clock in the room.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the images of the ghosts are especially clear and easy to recognize.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The Sin-Eater is using a camera at least 20 years old |
| +1 | The Sin-Eater spends at least half an hour taking photographs |
| -1 | The camera is of especially poor quality or its lens is only poorly covered. |
| -2 | The Sin-Eater takes less than half a dozen photographs. |

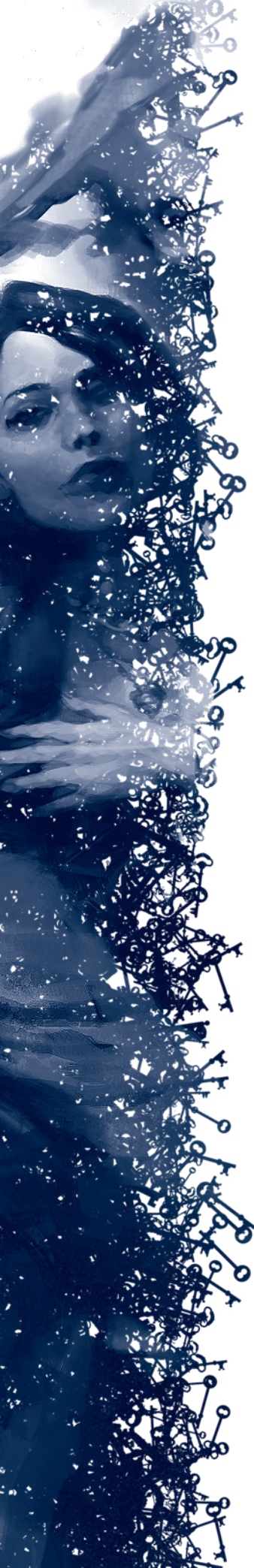
Dead Voices on Air (•••)

Paranormal investigators use a number of techniques to attempt to prove (or disprove) the existence of ghosts. One of those techniques is known as “Electronic Voice Phenomena.” Some believe that if a ghost is present, echoes of their voice and image may be captured by mundane recording equipment. Whether existing evidence supports EVP or is merely a record of ghosts who manifested by their own means is debatable.

Sin-Eaters who know this ritual can confirm that it is possible to record the image and voice of a ghost, even one in Twilight. It is hardly as easy as simply turning on a video camera in an empty room, but the results are also more interesting than the odd snippets of speech or questionable

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images the ghost hunters have produced thus far. In this way, some Sin-Eaters pass on messages from dead loved ones, ultimatums from shades bent on revenge or blackmail, or discover the culprit behind a haunting by using the recording device as a kind of spectral surveillance camera.

There is no known way to record images of the Underworld.

Performing the Ceremony: When performing this ceremony, the equipment does not need to be in working order. In fact, it doesn't even need to be plugged in. No earthly power is needed to initiate the recording. Sin-Eaters find that older technology is actually better for their purposes in this case. (See "anachrotech" on p. 111.) A Betamax camera is good; a Latham Eidoloscope would be even better. The only real limitation is that the media itself must be in usable condition, and the Sin-Eater (or the recipient) must have the means to view or develop the recording. For that reason, most ritualists use 8mm or Betamax as a compromise. The device used does not have to be a video camera. While it is possible to capture full video using this ceremony, the Sin-Eater can choose to record still images or audio only if they so desire.

Whatever the device, the Sin-Eater must prepare it by inscribing a series of insignia upon its surface. If this insignia is not wiped off or damaged, it does not have to be re-inscribed each time. Finally, the Sin-Eater must power the device by infusing it with 1 plasm for every 1 minute she wants to record. In the case of still photographs, she may take one roll of 24 exposures per plasm spent.

The images and sound recorded are generally not of the best quality. The results tend to be grainy and distorted, but definitely recognizable.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Wits

Action: Extended (target number of 6)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every turn.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The recording attempt draws the attention of something else.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, poor-quality but usable video, audio, or imagery is recorded.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, surprisingly high-quality video, audio, or imagery is recorded.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The recording device is 75+ years old. |
| +1 | The recording device is 50+ years old. |

-1 The recording device is 25 years old or newer.

-2 The recording device is 10 years old or newer.

Dedicate Charm (•••)

Any Sin-Eater may use charms. They are found things or traded artifacts, turned into necklaces or keychains, adorned and displayed as symbols of the Sin-Eater's power. Those Sin-Eaters who learn this ceremony gain the ability to dedicate certain objects already so ripe with deathly energies that they possess their own Threshold, to a specific Key. If a charm is already dedicated, they may also alter the Key associated with a pre-existing charm.

A simple, nondescript item is not a charm itself, no matter how much it resonates with death, but it can provide the blank canvas for one. The act of embellishment and presentation is necessary for the Sin-Eater to tap the latent power of a charm. The intent draws out a certain aspect of the object's Threshold, dedicating it to the desired Key. For more information on charm mementos, see p. 195.

Performing the Ceremony: The ritual props used vary according to the Key with which the item is being dedicated. The charm must be decorated in a way that symbolizes the Key desired, whether through imagery or by using materials suited to the Key.

- Cold Wind charms may use feathers, or other symbol of the air element.
- Grave-Dirt charms could be decorated with stones and gems.
- Pyre-Flame charms might be stained with ash or burnt themselves, if they can survive such treatment.
- Tear-Stained charms may be decorated with water-based paints or engraved with high-pressure water.
- Industrial charms might be machined or inlaid with metals.
- Passion charms might be adorned with a lock of a lover's hair, or the blood of an enemy.
- Phantasm charms could use iridescent inks that make their appearance change from different angles.
- Primeval charms may be decorated with animal parts (feathers, claws, teeth, etc.).
- Silent charms tend to be the subtlest of charms, incorporating dark imagery and often have animal motifs like a fox or raccoon.
- Stigmata charms use blood, of course, human or otherwise.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Manipulation

Action: Extended (target number of 5)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The charm becomes unattuned to any Key, and may not be used until the tainted charm is rededicated. The ritualist who suffered the dramatic failure may only reattempt the dedication after three days and three nights have passed.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the charm is dedicated to the desired Key, providing the Sin-Eater who possesses it with one bonus die on all rolls related to that Key.

Exceptional Success: No additional effect beyond extra successes.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +2 | The ritual decorations and the desired Key are appropriate to the item's history. |
| +1 | The desired Key is appropriate to the item and its history. |
| -1 | The item is already dedicated to another Key. |
| -2 | The item was dedicated to another Key with an exceptional success. |

Finding the Crossroads (•••)

There are many reasons a Sin-Eater might want to be present when someone dies. Some want to ease the passing, to put the ghost to rest before it falls to the torment of watching its loved ones suffer because of its death. Others attempt to cheat death and fate, preventing the death. Still others keep a watchful eye for new Sin-Eaters, standing by ready to help guide the recently merged. There are even those who simply want to scavenge the leavings of a death, those objects left behind that hold the power to become charms or other mementos.

This ceremony acts as a sort of divination, leading the Sin-eater to the general area where someone will die. It could happen within minutes of the Sin-Eater's arrival or up to 8 hours afterward, but a death *will* occur. The ceremony doesn't provide any information about the manner of death or the victim, only that death will visit this spot, and soon.

Once the Sin-Eater arrives at the location, it becomes a matter of discerning who the potential victim will be. Sometimes it is easily apparent, as the geist comes upon a car accident, a gang fight, or a bout of domestic violence seen through the window. Other times it is as easy as looking for a person tainted by death (see *Morbid Reality*, p. 177). But often, it isn't that simple, for their death relies too heavily on chance; a car wreck, a falling piano, or other unpredictable event.

Performing the Ceremony: The most common ritual used for this ceremony requires the use of a map and a finger bone tied to one end of a string. The Sin-Eater meditates over the map, suspending the finger bone over the center. The bone slowly begins to twirl in a circle before it stops, hanging over the general area where the death will occur.

The ceremony should not be enacted near a hospital, for the constant struggle of life and death within those halls will confuse the ceremony's outcome.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Wits

Action: Extended (target number of 5)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every turn.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The divination points to the wrong location, sending the character on a wild goose chase.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the divination narrows the search to a block radius, within 8 hours of the death.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the divination pinpoints the location to a specific building within 2 hours of the death.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The ceremony is enacted in a time of war, or disaster. |
| +1 | The bone used for divination comes from a victim of the same Threshold as the Sin-Eater. |
| -1 | The ceremony is enacted within 5 miles of a hospital. |
| -3 | The ceremony is enacted within 1 mile of a hospital. |

Lemure's Lure (•••)

Most of the time, Sin-Eaters wish to prevent or resolve hauntings, but there are occasions when a large number of ghosts can provide an exceedingly valuable distraction. The one limitation on this ceremony is that while the Sin-Eater can call nearby ghosts to a location and cause them to become unusually active, she has no control over their behavior. The result of such a call could be everything from a trio of troublesome ghosts showing up to break crockery and fill the locations with ghostly howls to a maggot-headed monstrosity emerging to devour everyone.

This ceremony can also be used as a trap. It attracts all nearby ghosts, and if the Sin-Eater knows that a particular ghost is nearby, this ceremony attracts this ghost without warning them that anyone is looking for them. Sin-Eaters can use this ceremony to haunt any single structure, a home, an office, or even a warehouse. However, it cannot be used to haunt large structures like shopping malls or apartment complexes, since they contain multiple shops or dwellings. Instead, the Sin-Eater would need to haunt each individual shop or home separately.

Performing the Ceremony: There are two ways to perform this ceremony, in person and at a distance. Performing it in person it relatively easy and quick. The Sin-Eater makes a small cut on his index finger and marks each window or door in his blood. Then, he starts a short



chant that ends in a loud shout. This is not a subtle ritual, but it is quite fast.

When performed at a distance, the Sin-Eater must have a map of the location, a picture of it, and a chip of paint, brick, or some other similar bit of the location. The Sin-Eater must then painstakingly draw complex symbols on the map around the location and then mark the spot on the map with his blood, burn the photograph, and eat the chip of paint or brick.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Manipulation

Action: Extended (target number of 5, or at if used at a distance)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater may roll once every turn when performing the ritual in person and once every 10 minutes when performing the ritual away from the target location.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. For the next full day, the Sin-Eater attracts ghosts to himself rather than the location.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the chosen location attracts ghosts until the next sunrise. Nearby ghosts are drawn to the location, becoming exceedingly active once there – crying for aid, acting out their urges, and otherwise following their natures with the site as their focus.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the haunting remains in effect for three full days.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +2 | At least one person has died in the location |
| +1 | The location is more than 20 years old |
| -1 | The location is new and has not yet been used for the purpose for which it was designed |
| -3 | The Sin-Eater has never visited the interior of the location |

Loosen the Coil (•••)

Mortals have taken temporary sojourns into the land of the dead throughout history. Orpheus slipped past many guardians to find his Eurydice. Through this ceremony, a Sin-Eater may allow an ordinary person to slough off the mortal coil, if only for a little while, and take on ghostly form.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater begins the ceremony by tying a string of silver thread around an item that the subject has chosen. This rope need not be attached to anything; its purpose is purely symbolic. Then the Sin-Eater draws a series

of sigils on the body of the subject in a paint mixed from the ashes of a corpse.

When the ritual is complete, the subject's consciousness separates and becomes, for all intents and purposes, a ghost. Her body is alive, but comatose. The object she chose acts as her anchor (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for information on anchors). She may touch and be touched, even engage in physical combat with ghosts, damaging her Corpus. Wrathful shades may even kill her if the Sin-Eater does not intervene. She is limited, like a ghost, to stay within range of her anchor, but the anchor need not stay with her living body.

If the subject is reduced to 0 Corpus through bashing damage, she fades, immediately returning to her body, where she remains comatose for a number of hours equal to 6 minus her Stamina. If she takes as many points of aggravated damage as she has Corpus, she dies, leaving her body in a vegetative state.

The subject may remain separated from her body for a number of hours equal to her Stamina score. After that, her body begins to suffer one point of lethal damage for each hour she remains away.

If the subject's anchor is destroyed, she immediately retreats to her body. The subject suffers a -2 penalty to all rolls involving concentration for the rest of the day.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Resolve

Action: Extended (target number of 5)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 5 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The Sin-Eater loses a point of Willpower.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the subject enters the Twilight state, effectively becoming a ghost. Each of her Power, Resistance, and Finesse traits is equal to the highest appropriate Attribute; thus, a character with Strength 2, Presence 3, and Intelligence 3 would have a Power trait of 3 as a ghost. Her Corpus is equal to her Health trait. The subject gains no Numina.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the subject may remain in ghostly form for 2 more hours before beginning to take physical damage.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The subject is already near death. |
| +1 | The ceremony is performed within sight of a gateway to the Underworld. |
| -1 | The subject ceremony is performed in a location that celebrates life. |
| -2 | The subject is unwilling. |

Plumbing the Depths (•••)

The Sin-Eater may exist in a gestalt state with her geist, but she is still a separate being. Her thoughts are her own, and the geist's knowledge must be coaxed from it in turn. All Sin-Eaters may attempt to access the skills their geist knew in life through their keystone memento, but only those who have learned this ceremony may attempt to glean memories directly from their geist.

It is not a safe process. The mind is a twisting labyrinth in the best of cases, and the geist's mind has been so warped by their evolution from simple ghost into the strange hybrid of shade and symbol that they have become, that it is almost unrecognizable as a human mind. The alien landscape of the geist's mind does not give up its secrets lightly, and some who travel those dark lands do not return. Sometimes, though, information is required but the geist is not cooperating.

The Sin-Eater who performs this ceremony risks more than just his sanity. His relationship with his geist is also at stake. It's possible to so offend the geist that it draws back, tearing down some of the Synergy that has been built.

Performing the Ceremony: The most important thing required for this ritual to succeed is an environment that soothes both Sin-Eater and geist. This may entail music the geist loved when it was alive, incense that reminds the Sin-Eater of an old lover, or the smell of cooking Sauerbraten. The exact circumstances and props needed vary from Sin-Eater to Sin-Eater, geist to geist. During the meditation, the Sin-Eater visualizes the information he seeks, and must focus only on that goal. Most Sin-Eaters recruit their krewemates to guard them while they perform this sensitive ritual, ensuring that they are not interrupted or meddled with while they are so occupied.

While the Sin-Eater meditates, navigating the winding corridors of the geist's mind, they are constantly bombarded by the single-minded mania of the geist's desire, distilled into its purest form. Wave after wave of it crashes over the Sin-Eater even as he searches through the aggregate memories of an existence that could span centuries. For every roll that must be made toward the ceremony's success, the player must also roll Composure + Resolve to resist being overwhelmed by the geist's desire. If the roll fails, the Sin-Eater falls prey to an appropriate temporary derangement for a number of days equal to their Psyche. The derangement should fall in line with the geist's desire, driving the Sin-Eater to fulfill his geist's obsession with single-minded devotion for the duration.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Intelligence

Action: Extended (target number of 5)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every hour.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater's bond with his geist is threatened. The player must roll 3 dice to resist suffering Synergy degeneration.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the Sin-Eater receives the memory he is searching for in a series of images and sensory perceptions that must be interpreted.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the Sin-Eater receives the information he is seeking in a rare burst of clarity.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The Sin-Eater's Synergy rating is 8 or above. |
| +1 | The meditation uses music or other sensory information that soothes the Sin-Eater's geist. |
| -1 | The Sin-Eater uses music, incense, etc., that rankles his geist. |
| -2 | The Sin-Eater's Synergy rating is 3 or below. |

Quicken the Dead (•••)

Sin-Eaters walk the edge between life and death, and have the ability to affect the living, the dead, and things in between. This ritual allows the Sin-Eater to bind up a ghost in the trappings of the flesh, imprisoning them in meat, bone, and plasm. The risen zombie thus created is compelled to follow its creator, locked away in the rotting corpse, doing its master's bidding.

This ritual is a blunt instrument, far coarser than the *Wings of the Moth* ritual detailed on p. 169. The bodies raised by *Quicken the Dead* are completely incapable of independent action and do not resemble living, breathing humans in any way. These are the shuffling, shambling zombies of nightmarish legend, their rotting bodies stitched together by plasm, their every action determined by the Sin-Eater that raised them.

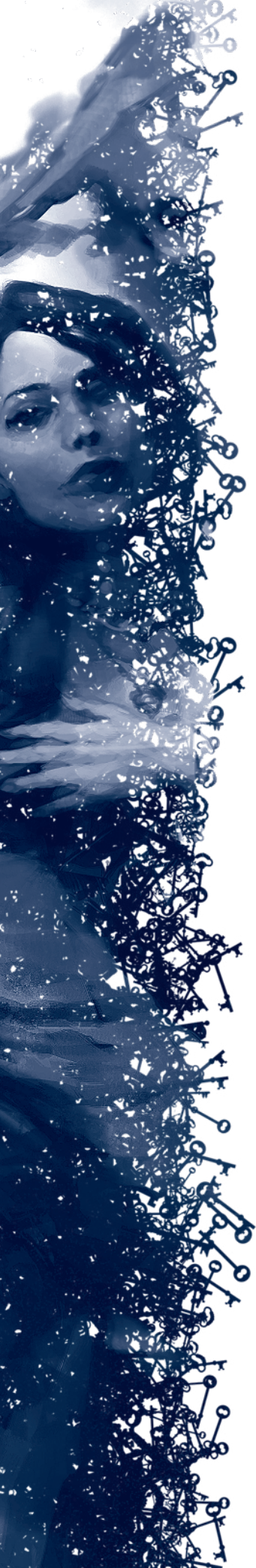
Performing the Ceremony: The most common ritual used requires the Sin-Eater to lay the body out in a circle of (animal or human) blood, anointing the corpse's forehead likewise with blood. Alternate rituals involve infusing the corpse with electricity or stuffing the body with herbs and spices. Whichever version of the ritual has been learned, the catalyzing element comes when the Sin-Eater infuses the body with 3 plasm, creating a sufficiently resilient receptacle for the ghost to inhabit.

The zombie holds together for a number of days equal to the Sin-Eater's Psyche. The ghost is freed after the body falls apart, both from the flesh prison and the Sin-Eater's domination.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Presence

Action: Extended (target number of 1 per Health dot of the corpse)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every turn.



Craig HENDERSON

ZOMBIE SERVANTS

The servants raised by the Sin-Eater are relatively weak as zombies go. If the Storyteller chooses, they can be customized using the rules from **Antagonists**, p. 26. Otherwise, they use the following rules:

Power: 3

Finesse: 1

Resilience: 4

Health: 7

Initiative: 1

Physical Integrity: 10*

Size: 5

Speed: 1

*Physical Integrity is a special trait describing the state of the zombie's undead body. A zombie created from a corpse with all of its limbs and no missing parts starts with an Integrity of 10. Missing both legs or both arms would indicate a starting trait of 5. Physical Integrity limits the maximum number of dice in the zombie's dice pool. This trait also describes the overall functionality of the zombie, meaning that the reduction of integrity is not necessarily decomposition or losing limbs. Zombies raised by the Sin-Eater simply lose their animating force after a number of days equal to the Sin-Eater's Psyche.

Every (Resilience) hours, zombies lose one point of Physical Integrity. Under most circumstances, Physical Integrity cannot be replenished once it is lost. Once all of a zombie's Health points are depleted, subtract any damage done from the remaining points of Physical Integrity. Once this trait reaches zero, the zombie is neutralized. A zombie with one point of Physical Integrity left usually represents the classic decapitated, but still dangerous, zombie head.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The zombie does not rise and the Sin-Eater loses any control he may have had on other zombies or ghosts, leaving them free to attack him or simply flee.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the zombie rises, under the Sin-Eater's control.

Exceptional Success: No additional effect.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The ghost is a willing participant. |
| +1 | The ritual is performed in a location already filled with deathly energy, such as a graveyard or a morgue. |
| -1 | For each zombie the Sin-Eater already controls. |
| -2 | For each anchor the ghost controls beyond the first. |

Reading the Echoes (•••)

The Sin-Eater can read psychic impressions of the past from places and objects. The character could pick up a knife and see images of the murder it was used to commit and possibly even experience the emotions and thoughts of the murderer, or she can stand in a house and see an image of the horrible events that occurred there 40 years before.

Performing the Ceremony: Sin-Eater must hold the object and meditate quietly or she must walk slowly around the location in a light trance. The Sin-Eater need not do anything special or unusual, but she must focus her attention on this task. Doing anything other than walking slowly or talking about what she is experiencing automatically ends this ceremony.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Resolve

Action: Extended (target number of 5)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every minute.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The Sin-Eater develops a severe headache to the tune of one point of bashing damage, and cannot use this ceremony until the sun next sets.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the Sin-Eater gets a vision of the most emotionally charged or magically powerful event that occurred in the location she is in or directly involving the object she is holding. If there are several extremely powerful incidents, the Sin-Eater receives momentary flashes of multiple visions, but must choose to focus on only one. The Sin-Eater sees and hears a series of images and fragments of conversations. The higher the Sin-Eater's Psyche, the longer and more detailed these fragments are. These fragments are always informative, but usually do not provide complete information.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the Sin-Eater receives clearer flashes of multiple events.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The object was a murder weapon or the location was the site of a murder. |
| +1 | The Sin-Eater spends up to an hour examining the object or walking around the location. |
| -1 | The object or location has been significantly damaged, remodeled, reforged, or otherwise deliberately changed since the event or events in question. |
| -2 | The object or location has been extensively used and visited since the last emotionally or supernaturally charged incident occurred. |

Warding Circle (•••)

The Sin-Eater can draw a circle that keeps out ghosts and prevents any of their powers from affecting those inside this circle. This circle can be no more than 13 feet across, but provides total, if temporary, protection against ghosts as well as also helping to protect those inside against other supernatural beings.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater must draw a circle on the ground or floor and then draw a series of more than a dozen complex symbols around the edge of this circle. The circle and symbols can be drawn in any medium, from chalk lines, to ink, to inscribing them in a stone floor with a chisel. The circle can be as small as desired, but cannot be larger than 13 feet across.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Resolve

Action: Extended (target number of 5)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes. Reduce this to one roll every minute if the Sin-Eater draws the symbols using stamps or stencils.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The ceremony cannot be successfully performed for three days.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the Sin-Eater creates a circular warding. The circle completely protects both itself and those inside from ghosts and all ghostly abilities. In addition to not being able to enter the area, either in Twilight or when materialized, ghosts also cannot use any of their Numina to affect anyone inside the circle or the circle itself.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, those within the circle gain +3 dice to resist the supernatural powers of any supernatural being, not simply ghosts, for as long as they remain inside.



Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | There is at least one ordinary mortal inside the circle |
| +1 | The Sin-Eater draws the circle in chalk sprinkled with a few drops of human blood. |
| -1 | There are supernatural beings other than Bound inside the circle |
| -2 | The Sin-Eater uses stamps or stencils to help draw this circle and symbols |

Bind Anchor (••••)

As a ghost's anchors are destroyed by hostility or simple attrition, their grip on the living world is diminished. When their last anchor is destroyed, they are swept free, drawn down into the Underworld and the tender ministrations of the Kerberoi. Using this ritual, the Sin-Eater can prolong a ghost's time in the twilight of the living world by giving them another anchor to which to cling.

With this ceremony, a Sin-Eater can even help a ghost already consigned to the Underworld find respite from that strange and nightmarish existence, allowing them to at least look upon the living. Even the voyeuristic haunting of a ghost in Twilight is preferable to the Underworld for most ghosts.

The new anchor acts like any other anchor, and any object that can be an anchor – be it a piece of jewelry, the house the ghost grew up in, or her great-granddaughter – can be bound to the ghost. See p. 209 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for full information on anchors.

If the desired anchor is a person, their presence (and knowledge) is helpful but not required. A lock of their hair or even a photograph will do.

Performing the Ceremony: The hardest part of the process is finding the right item to act as the anchor. The new anchor does not necessarily *have* to mean something to the ghost, but it helps quite a bit. The ceremony has to be enacted on ground that has a connection with the ghost in question, whether that is his grave, his old bedroom, or the place where he was killed. One anchor has even been bound in the back of a taxi where the ghost was born.

Once the new anchor is found, it must be symbolically connected to the ghost. This is most commonly accomplished by creating an altar, surrounding the object with items that help to evoke the ghost's life. A ghost that was a beat cop in life might require the new anchor to be surrounded by handcuffs and a badge, or newspaper clippings of arrests he made. Another ghost who was a doctor might want a stethoscope or other accoutrements of her profession.

Only when the ghost feels a connection to the anchor can they forge the link required to turn an object into an anchor.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Resolve
Action: Extended (target number of 6)
Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 15 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The desired anchor is destroyed, causing the Sin-Eater two points of lethal damage.

Failure: No successes are gained.
Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the desired anchor is bound. The ghost has a new lease on "life."

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the Sin-Eater gains 2 plasm.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The new anchor belonged to the ghost in life. |
| +1 | The new anchor is an exact duplicate of one of the ghost's lost anchors. |
| -1 | The ghost is unwilling to be bound to a new anchor. |
| -2 | The anchor does not resonate with the ghost in any way. |

Ghostly Guardian (••••)

This potent ceremony can forcibly bind a ghost to watch over a specific location, person, or object and guard its charge from harm to the best of its ability. If this location or item is ever destroyed or the person dies, the ghost is instantly freed. However, the ghost cannot attack, either directly or indirectly, its charge and cannot in any fashion work to free itself or harm its target. It can ask or beg for freedom, but can take no action to free itself. The ghost also cannot venture more than 21 yards from its charge. Also, both the Sin-Eater who performed this ceremony and the ghost's charge, if the charge is a person, can command the ghost not to attack anyone who is not attempting to harm the ghost's charge. However, other than protecting its charge, this is the only command the ghost must obey.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater must engrave a series of small sigils on a coin and then attach the coin to the target. Typically, Sin-Eaters nail or glue the coin to a place or object and have living targets either keep the coin in their pocket or wear it around their neck as a pendant. If the coin is ever removed, the ghost temporarily ceases to protect its target. Attaching the coin to some other person or object will not cause the ghost to protect that object or person. However, re-attaching the coin to the original target instantly causes the ghost to protect the target again.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Manipulation – Ghost’s Power

Action: Extended (target number of 5)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The ghost attacks the Sin-Eater who attempted to use this ceremony. No wards or other protections can protect the Sin-Eater from this particular ghost for the next full scene.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the ghost will protect the person, place, or object it is guarding to the very best of its ability for the next week.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the ghost protects the target for the next full month.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +3 | The target is one of the ghost’s anchors that the ghost desires to protect. |
| +2 | The target is positively connected to the ghost, a relative, or friend of the ghost in life, the ghost’s home or an object the ghost once used. |
| +1 | The coin used was once touched by the ghost. |
| -1 | The target is completely unknown to the ghost. |
| -3 | The target is a supernatural being. |
| -3 | The target is one of the ghost’s anchors that the ghost desires to harm or destroy. |

Mending the Mortal Coil (••••)

Plasm can keep a Sin-Eater alive even as his flesh is injured and torn. However, this is a temporary measure at best. Actual healing of wounds requires time, a further investiture of plasm, and a ceremony to stave off death.

Performing the Ceremony: This ceremony is usually quick and brutal, involving ritual acknowledgement of notable figures of death (such as old Underworld gods, the Horsemen, or whomever is most important to the Sin-Eater’s mythological tradition). The Sin-Eater breathes out some of his own plasm, which mingles with the blood of the target and begins to knit into flesh. If the wounds are bleeding, the Sin-Eater uses a portion of the blood to draw appropriate sigils on the flesh. A libation of alcohol, poured into the wound or given to the wounded, is an ideal part of the ceremony.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Intelligence

Action: Extended (target number of 6, +1 for every point of lethal damage on the target, +2 for every point of aggravated damage on the target)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every turn.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: No successes are gained. The Sin-Eater loses a point of plasm in the attempt.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the Sin-Eater may expend plasm to heal the target’s wounds. Healing one point of bashing damage costs 1 point of plasm; healing a point of lethal damage costs 2 plasm; healing a point of aggravated damage costs 3. The Sin-Eater may spend as much plasm as he chooses, subject to the Psyche-based limits of plasm expenditure per turn and his own reserves. He may also choose to heal aggravated or lethal damage first.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. The target heals one additional point of bashing damage at no cost of plasm.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The character has some form of alcoholic beverage to pour into the wound. |
| +1 | The character possesses the Stigmata Key. |
| -1 | The wounded individual hasn’t had anything to eat in the last 8 hours. |
| -1 | The Sin-Eater is performing the rite on himself. |
| -2 | The wounded is a living being with no access to a geist (normal human, werewolf, etc.) |
| -3 | The wounded is a corporeal undead being (vampire, etc.). |

Warding the Household (••••)

The Sin-Eater can protect a location so that ghosts or other entities in Twilight cannot enter it. Unlike the warding circle, this ceremony can protect either an entire room or an entire dwelling. Also, it lasts far longer, providing lasting protection against ghosts. Many Sin-Eaters use this ceremony to protect their houses and the houses of their loved ones.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater must mark each of the interior walls of the location with bloody handprints. Each exterior wall must be marked with one bloody handprint, while the Sin-Eater chants various phrases asking ghosts to depart. This blood can come from any source, but must be real, whole blood that is not more than a day old. This warding is instantly cancelled if any of these bloody handprints are ever washed off or otherwise removed. However, the hand prints can be concealed behind curtains, paintings, or similar coverings. This ceremony cannot affect any building larger than a large house or shop. It cannot protect an entire office building, an apartment building, or a vast mansion. Sin-Eaters can use this ceremony to protect a single room or even an entire wing of a huge mansion.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Dexterity

Action: Extended (target number of 10)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes.



Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. Until the sun next rises, ghosts are attracted to this location. This location also cannot be warded with this ceremony until that time.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the ceremony is a success. Ghosts cannot enter or use any powers to affect anyone or anything inside the warded location. Also, other beings in Twilight attempting to enter the location can only do so if their Power (for spirits) or Psyche or similar Attribute is greater than the Psyche of the Sin-Eater who created this Ward. This warding lasts for one week. At the end of this time, the bloody handprints dry and flake off the walls.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the wards last for one full month.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +3 | The location is owned and used or inhabited by mortals who know nothing about ghosts or the supernatural |
| +1 | The Sin-Eater is warding a location that he owns or rents |
| -1 | The location being warded is not a dwelling of any sort. |
| -2 | The location is currently haunted by a ghost. |

Create Deathly Passage (.....)

Some Sin-Eaters see it as their sworn duty to close off all passageways into the Underworld. They destroy gateways or find ways to decommission them, cutting off access for Sin-Eaters and shades alike. Others find access to the Underworld essential for any number of reasons. Deals with ghosts, searching for information long since erased from the living world and other, less prosaic goals require Sin-Eaters to journey into that dark and deadly labyrinth.

Whatever their reasons, it is difficult enough to find the old roads, shafts sliced into the flesh of the world that give access to the lightless, lifeless depths without Sin-Eaters dynamiting the entrances. As the ancient paths erode, disappear, or are destroyed, it is necessary to blaze new trails into darkness.

With this ceremony, a group of Sin-Eaters may dedicate a new gateway, or reopen a defunct one. The gateway cannot be just anywhere. It must be in the deep places below the earth, or those shallow places where death intrudes upon the living. A newly dedicated cemetery will not do, but one that holds legions worth of soldiers or generation upon generation of a town's inhabitants would work well. The site of a terrible tragedy, those places where

even mortals can feel the chill hand of death on their shoulder, are best suited for hosting an entry into the land of the dead.

Performing the Ceremony: This ceremony requires at least four Sin-Eaters, each of a different Threshold. While the ritualist performs the actual ceremony, the other three must stand as symbolic guardians of the new passageway. The Sin-Eater performing the ceremony begins by consecrating the area. Then, she anoints each participant with earth taken from the grave of someone of the same Threshold — one of the Torn would be anointed by dirt taken from the grave of a murder victim, or one of the Stricken would be anointed from the grave of a victim of cancer. Next, the leader of the ceremony draws (in chalk or ash) a series of sigils around the desired gateway, each symbolizing one of the Keys used to unlock the gate. Finally, each participant must slash themselves with a blade, suffering one point of lethal damage and spilling their life upon the ground. Only then will the gateway unlock and spread wide, offering admittance into the Underworld.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Resolve

Action: Extended (target number of 7)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The dedication fails spectacularly, causing the potential gateway to explode in a blast of deathly energy, inflicting 4 points of lethal damage on each participant.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the gateway opens, creating a new pathway into the Underworld.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, each Sin-Eater present for the opening receives 4 plasm.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +2 | The desired gateway has already been a passage to the Underworld. |
| +1 | For each Sin-Eater of a different Threshold present beyond the required four. |
| -1 | For each week since the participating Sin-Eaters travelled into the Underworld. |

Dumb Supper (.....)

This powerful ceremony allows the living and the dead to coexist for a short period of time. In addition to the powerful joy of being able to briefly experience the pleasures of the flesh and the company of the living, this ceremony provides a chance

for mortals and ghosts to spend a few short hours with one another.

Performing the Ceremony: The ceremony must take place around a table, with a sufficient number of chairs for everyone, living or not, who is present. In addition, there must be a sufficient quantity of place settings and food for everyone. The ceremony must take place at midnight on one of the three nights that the moon is new. To begin the ceremony, the Sin-Eater performing the ceremony must extinguish all the lights in the room and close the doors and curtains so as to make the room dark. The Sin-Eater then welcomes everyone to the supper in a long and fairly elaborate speech. She then turns on the lights and can also open any doors or curtains as desired.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Resolve

Action: Extended (target number of 7)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can make 1 roll every minute

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. All ghosts present are banished back to the Underworld and every living person present suffers one level of bashing damage from a headache.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number of successes is reached, Twilight and the mortal world become one for all ghosts in the room. All ghosts become fully physical and able to interact with both the physical world and any mortals who are present. Ghosts can also consume and enjoy food and drink and indulge any other physical pleasures they may wish to try. However, any ghosts who leave the room where the ceremony is performed become incorporeal until they re-enter the room. This ceremony ends when the sun rises.

Exceptional Success: No additional effect.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +3 | A blood relative or anchor of at least one ghost is present. |
| +1 | The <i>dumb supper</i> is held in an actual dining room with large quantities of good food. |
| -1 | The food present is meager or of poor quality. |
| -3 | The ghosts do not know any of the mortals or Sin-Eaters present. |

Fetter's Binding (•••••)

The creation of a fetter is no small affair. The Sin-Eater locks a ghost inside its anchor, obliging the ghost to use its powers in service of its jailor. In theory, this ceremony is intended to remove those shades that are too dangerous or malicious to be allowed to continue meddling in the living world, without consigning them to the purgatory of the Underworld. Whether imprisonment in an item that makes the ghost completely unable to interact with the

world around them is preferable than the Underworld is debatable, but most Sin-Eaters agree that it is after their first trip down.

The reality of things is that while many Sin-Eaters do use this ceremony to render judgment on wicked ghosts without delivering them into the Underworld, there are those who couldn't care less whether a ghost is guilty or innocent. They choose to bind ghosts into fetters purely to gain the service of their Numina.

Performing the Ceremony: All but one of the ghost's anchors must be destroyed before the ritual can be performed. The ritual space must be prepared with the anchor placed precisely in the center of a spiral some Sin-Eaters call the "funnel," and others call the "drain." The anchor itself is engraved with a series of deathly sigils, which symbolize the imprisonment of a soul. When the ghost enters the spiral, whether it is summoned, tricked, or trapped into its arms, it is inexorably drawn down into its anchor. When the shade is trapped within the anchor, the Sin-Eater must spend a point of Willpower to seal the bindings and create the fetter. For more information on fetter mementos, see p. 201.

Particularly old and powerful ghosts can be more difficult to trap in this manner. For every 50 years the ghost has been active, the roll suffers a -1 die penalty. This penalty can be canceled out by placing existing fetters around the spiral funnel, to create a sort of ghostly trap *powered* by ghosts. For each fetter so arranged, the ritualist gains a +1 die bonus.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Resolve

Action: Extended (target number of 7)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 15 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The Sin-Eater loses one Willpower point.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the ghost is bound into its anchor, and the fetter is created.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the ghost is bound into its anchor, the fetter is created, and the Sin-Eater recoups the Willpower spent.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +2 | The ghost is a willing participant. |
| +1 | The ghost and the Sin-Eater share the same Threshold. |
| +1 | For each fetter used as part of the "funnel." |
| -1 | For every 50 years the ghost has been dead. |

Sepulchral Gateway (•••••)

This powerful ceremony allows the Sin-Eater and anyone traveling with him to enter one Avernian Gate and a few minutes later exit another, without having to actually pass



through the Underworld. Using this ceremony, the Sin-Eater and her companions can rapidly traverse the mortal world.

Performing the Ceremony: This ceremony can only be performed in the mortal world, near an Avernian Gate. The Sin-Eater and everyone accompanying her must travel to put a small lump of graveyard dirt on their tongues. Then the Sin-Eater must draw various complex symbols and write the name of her destination on the gateway. The Sin-Eater can either specify a specific other gateway into the Underworld as a destination or she can simply specify a city or other location and will emerge at one of the gateways at this location.

When traveling in this fashion, the Sin-Eater can take along a number of other companions equal to her number of dots of Psyche or twice the number of individuals who belong to her krew. Everyone must walk into the gateway holding hands. However, they need not continue holding hands when walking the path to their destination. Alternately, the Sin-Eater can drive a memento vehicle into the gateway. When using a memento vehicle, the Sin-Eater can take along as many people as will fit in the vehicle.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Intelligence

Action: Extended (target number of 7)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The Sin-Eater and anyone accompanying her ends up in the Underworld, in some location they have never seen before.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the Sin-Eater and those accompanying her enter the gateway into the Underworld and walk through a strange and shifting space where a path of bones stretches before them. All manner of ghosts, including some who appear horribly inhuman look in at the travelers, but cannot approach as long as the travelers remain on the path. The journey takes approximately 20 minutes if the characters move at a brisk walk. Halve this time if the characters are traveling in a memento vehicle.

Anyone who leaves the path instantly appears at some random location in the Underworld. If they are close to one of the watching ghosts, the lost traveler appears in the Underworld next to this ghost. If this happens, the other travelers can either continue on, abandoning their comrade, or follow him off the path, at which point they will arrive at the same location in the Underworld. Sin-Eaters can take mortals along on this journey, but the sights, sounds, and smells of the journey are strange and terrifying, and unless blindfolded, mortals must make Composure + Resolve rolls to avoid panicking and fleeing off the

bone path. At the end of this pathway, the travelers emerge at their destination, walking out of the gateway to the Underworld into the mortal world.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the travel time is halved.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The Sin-Eater has traveled into the Underworld using the gateway at her destination. |
| -1 | The Sin-Eater has only heard of or seen pictures of the gateway at her destination, but has never seen it in person. |
| -2 | The Sin-Eater's destination is a general location and not a specific gateway to the Underworld. |

Spectral Captivity (•••••)

Sometimes, a ghost is so terrible and difficult to destroy that the Sin-Eater can find no answer other than imprisoning it. The Sin-Eater can order the ghost to enter a room or container and can then bind the ghost so that it must remain within for the room or container for as long as it remains closed.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater marks the interior or exterior of the room or container with a complex sigil meaning prison. The Sin-Eater can then order a single ghost that she can clearly see to enter the room or container. The Sin-Eater must then seal all exits and openings with iron wire (versions of this ceremony also exist that instead use copper wire, high test fishing line, or even human hair). The Sin-Eater can seal the space from the inside or the outside and the space can be anything from a room in a house to a closet or a packing box, to a soda bottle. Wine and soda bottles are especially popular, and some Sin-Eaters have extensive collections of ghosts on their mantle pieces or wine cellars. The ghost can attack the Sin-Eater but cannot flee while the Sin-Eater is making the rolls for this ceremony.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Presence – the ghost's Resistance

Action: Extended (target number of 7)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can make one roll every turn.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. Not only isn't the ghost bound, but the Sin-Eater cannot bind or control this ghost in any fashion for the next 24 hours.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the ghost is forced inside the room or container; once it is wired shut, the ghost cannot leave

until the room or container is opened from the outside. The container is also impervious to all attacks by the ghost.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the walls of the room or the container and the wire binding it closed all gain 2 points of Durability as long as the ghost remains inside.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +4 | The Sin-Eater tricks the ghost into willingly entering the room or container. |
| +1 | The container or room is more than a century old. |
| -1 | The room or container is not air-tight. |
| -3 | The Sin-Eater does not own the room or container. |

Wings of the Moth (•••••)

Ghosts will do almost anything to feel the warmth of the sun on their face again, or the silken brush of a lover’s lips. The existence of a ghost is defined by the absence of life. The things they regret and miss. Their entire being is a roiling core of desire for something they cannot touch or be. This ceremony then, is the most powerful chip a Sin-Eater has when negotiating with the dead.

With this ritual, the Sin-Eater can take a freshly dead corpse and return it to life, save that it is an empty vessel, devoid of soul and personality. Into this vessel, the Sin-Eater may place a ghost of his choosing. For all intents and purposes, it is a living, breathing body and the ghost becomes a normal, mortal being.

A ghost need not be placed into their own body, and in fact most often isn’t, because the body must be fresh or the ceremony won’t work. This can complicate things somewhat for the ghost: they don’t resemble themselves, and have no way of proving their identity to loved ones, and they *do* resemble another person, with loved ones of their own. But they are alive, and they can *feel*.

This is not a permanent solution, however. From the moment the ghost begins to draw breath, he has one week to live. When the time allotted runs out, the body dies again. This death will be flavored by the ghost’s Threshold:

a shade that was murdered once will have to go through it again; a ghost that died of illness will be felled by illness. Further, one of the ghost’s anchors is destroyed by the second death. If the ghost had but one, they are immediately drawn down into the Underworld. For many ghosts, this is the last hurrah, a final celebration before they give up; one last chance to put something right, or say goodbye.

Performing the Ceremony: The body must be cleansed, bathed, and prepared before the ritual even begins. While the corpse lays inert on a bed of flowers symbolizing death and life (lilies, irises, and lotus are common), the Sin-Eater draws symbols on the body in ash, culminating in a sigil meaning “life” on the corpse’s forehead, and the ghost’s name over the heart.

The effort expended helping the ghost “move in” to the body costs the Sin-Eater one Willpower *dot*. The dot is expended only if the ceremony is successful. This ceremony is not enacted lightly.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Manipulation

Action: Extended (target number of 7)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 30 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. Deathly energy erupts from the body, destroying it; the Sin-Eater suffers three points of lethal damage.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the ghost is bound into the body successfully.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the target number is reached, the ghost receives an extra three days of “life.”

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | The body belongs to the chosen ghost. |
| +1 | The body belonged to a relative of the chosen ghost. |
| -1 | For every hour the body has been dead beyond 6. |
| -2 | The ghost is unwilling to enter the body. |



They say it's a rule of living in a crowded city that you don't make eye contact if you can help it. That applies to the dead, too.

Some of them are far enough gone that it wouldn't matter. You can walk up to them, look them in whatever's left of their eyes, and even speak clearly and slowly to them, and maybe you'll get some recognition. But you can't count on that.

I nearly got arrested one time just for looking a dead man in the face. He turned toward me, his facial muscles started cracking and twitching under the blue skin, and his eyes focused on me, and he started shrieking. Just this rush of names and profanities. Death by violence hadn't left him with much but anger and fear, and he was screaming all of it at me, trying to get me to help him somehow. I freaked out a little, backed away from the noise, put my arms up — and that got people staring. I tried to say something to him, but I couldn't make him hear me over all the shouting.

So I ran. I didn't help him. I just ran. He may still be there, halfway across that bridge, never going to make it to the other side. I haven't been back yet.

It aches a bit. The shame, I mean. Every time I pass another dead man on the railway platform, every time I brush past another dead woman in the park, I feel the guilt for not helping that one ghost the first time. You can't help them all. Or at least, you can't help them all at once. You have to triage.

Until then, you avoid eye contact. Because odds are they'll still be there when it's their turn.

You hope.

CHAPTER THREE: SYSTEMS



09.09



Symbiology

The merging between a Sin-Eater and his geist is more than a spiritual bond. The presence of a geist in a human body forces changes on that body. Ectoplasm begins to flow through the bloodstream, the strength of death suffuses muscle, sinew tissue and bone, and the senses of the geist begin to overlap with that of the Sin-Eater. Geist and human become entwined during the bonding as the two come together to form one, body and soul. The Bound are unlike ordinary mortals in many ways, still alive but much changed by the presence of death.

This Mortal Coil

A Sin-Eater remains essentially human after the bonding, but the presence of the geist strengthens soft flesh, winding it with ghostly essence to make the Sin-Eater unnaturally resilient. Below are the physical effects gained as a result of the transformation.

The Agony of Life

Sin-Eaters are the absolute embodiment of Nietzsche's statement, "That which does not kill us, makes us stronger." Following the Bargain and the intrusion of the geist into their bodies, Sin-Eaters find they are much tougher than they used to be. Given the often violent circumstances surrounding the Bargain, the first change most Bound recognize is that of resilience. The moment before the bond was forged, a Sin-Eater might be in terrible agony from wounds suffered in a car crash, the pain so intense he blacked out. His geist forces the Sin-Eater back to consciousness, urging him to move and fight for life. In an odd way, the geist celebrates in the feel of pain, in any sensation that separates it from the numb chill of the grave. This focus on sensation aids the geist in keeping its host from escaping to unconsciousness to alleviate pain.

No matter how much damage a Sin-Eater takes, or from what source, as long as he continues to live his geist will force him to remain conscious. A Sin-Eater can never be incapacitated as a result of damage, though he continues to suffer wound penalties if his Health is reduced to three or fewer unchecked Health boxes. Immunity to incapacitation doesn't keep a Sin-Eater from bleeding out either, but it does give a Sin-Eater a fair chance at staunching his own wounds before succumbing to death.

Polluted Blood

A Sin-Eater's blood is filled with more than just white and red blood cells, mixed with plain old salt

He had been, he said, an unconscionable time dying; but he hoped that they would excuse it.

— Thomas Babington MacCaulay, *A History of England*

water. Floating around inside that thick, rich soup are trace amounts of plasm, courtesy of the geist. As a Sin-Eater's Psyche increases, indicating the growing tightness of the bond, so does the amount of plasm in his blood. Plasm is territorial about its place in the blood, viewing the presence of outside agents that are introduced into the body of a Sin-Eater as an enemy to be routed and quashed. Any time a Sin-Eater is required to roll to resist the effects of a disease or poison, he adds his Psyche rating to his pool. Only pathogens or substances that threaten the health of a Sin-Eater trigger this effect. Plasm is quite happy to roll along in alcohol, bask in the glory of recreational drugs, or nudge helpful medicines along to their intended destinations.

Ectoplasmic Flesh

Plasm is the fuel that keeps a Sin-Eater running. Not only does it allow a Sin-Eater to direct his deathly powers through Manifestations, it also helps to keep him safe from harm. As noted above, plasm reacts with hostility to the presence of harmful outside agents being introduced into the body of a Sin-Eater and no outside agent is more harmful than a knife to the guts or a gunshot wound to the head. In a way, plasm is the physical expression of the geist/human relationship, a substantial part of the bond that allows a geist to occupy the same space as a Sin-Eater. Plasm can be drawn upon to reinforce that bond, allowing a geist to absorb damage that might harm its host.

Any time a Sin-Eater takes damage he has two options. The character can either mark off Health boxes as normal or he can choose to absorb most of the damage by spending plasm. A character may spend a single point of plasm as a reflexive action to temporarily negate a single point of damage. The type of damage makes no difference. Plasm readily absorbs the aggravated damage caused by the claws of a rotting ghoul as it does the damage from a gunshot or a beer bottle upside the head. This ability can be used *only* to negate wounds as they happen, not to reduce injuries after the fact. Knitting flesh back together requires far more effort (see the Mending the Mortal Coil ceremony on p. 165). Each time the character chooses to spend a point of plasm to negate damage, he should mark a health box with a dot. At the end of the scene, each dot converts to bashing damage, leaving the Sin-Eater sore and bruised, but likely alive. Plasm has reduced the raw trauma of the injury, but the physical marks caused by the injury still remain.

If a character that has spent plasm to reduce damage later takes additional damage, the new wounds

overwrite the dots placed on the Health track, rather than moving them down. Dots that convert to bashing damage at the end of a scene are treated as normal injuries. A character that has filled his Health track with dots as a result of absorbing damage with plasm suffers no wound penalties until those dots convert to actual damage. The dots provide a simple method of keeping track of wounds absorbed, rather than acting as a representation of actual damage. Plasm can only do so much to sustain a body, however. If a character's Health track is filled with dots, he is unable to absorb any more damage by spending plasm, and any subsequent wounds will begin to overwrite the dots. Bashing damage taken as a result of dots converting to wounds may not be absorbed a second time by spending plasm.

Wounds that are absorbed fill with plasm and "bleed" a milky, white fog of ectoplasm until the damage converts to bashing. This is an obvious, unmistakable unnatural occurrence that can't be hidden. The bleeding plasm is untouched by physical environmental effects like wind or water, ghosts through clothing or other attempts at concealment and continues to bleed until the wound is converted. Any character with knowledge of Sin-Eaters can readily identify the phenomena, which could be a drawback in some situations.

Example: *Mark is facing a thug armed with a knife. The thug lashes out with his weapon, slashing Mark across the chest for three points of lethal damage. Mark spends three points of plasm to absorb the damage (marking his Health track with the appropriate dots) and watches the thug's eyes grow wide as the wound fills with plasm, which leaves a vapor trail as it dissipates. If the thug struck a second time for two points of lethal damage and Mark either chose not to spend plasm (or couldn't), the first two dots would be overwritten with Xs – representing lethal damage, leaving one dot.*

Last Resort

Even battered, bloody and beaten, the last drop of plasm long gone, a Sin-Eater still has an ace up his sleeve. The essence of a geist is death and the energy that flows from it to a Sin-Eater is the energy of death. Death is power, to a Sin-Eater, and the raw energy of death can revive them. Sin-Eaters can harvest that energy from one of two sources: new death or old death.

Old death is bound in solid form, in trinkets and ghostly relics called mementos. In times of desperate need, Sin-Eaters can drain mementos of the death energy they contain. The Sin-Eater reaches out and pulls death from inside the object into himself, destroying the memento in

the process. A Sin-Eater that drains a memento regains a number of Health points equal to twice the memento's Merit rating. This is an instant action and requires the character to succeed on a Resolve + Occult roll. Drained of energy, a memento is destroyed and crumbles to a fine, black dust. The sole exception to this rule is active keystone mementos (see Mementos, p. 193). Geists will not allow any Sin-Eater to destroy their keystone.

New death is murder; cold-blooded, intentional murder. The act of murder creates a temporary link between a Sin-Eater and his victim, through which he can harvest the energy of death. Deaths caused in self-defense or that happen as accidents don't create the necessary bond. Only the raw, dark emotion, born of violence and sin that accompanies murder allows a Sin-Eater to profit from the death of another. A Sin-Eater that intentionally murders someone is fully healed, *but* he automatically loses a point of Synergy as a consequence of giving himself over fully to death.

Restless Souls

Geists are understandably protective of their Sin-Eaters. Not only does a geist form a literal attachment to a human through the bond, the physical body of a Sin-Eater gives the geist a platform from which to enact its schemes that can't be easily replaced. Geists sometimes spend years searching for a suitable host and once one has been located, they are loath to give it up without a struggle. It should come as no surprise, then, that geists have contingency plans for when the worst happens. Death doesn't come easily for Sin-Eaters, even the second time.

Resurrection

The ties between a geist and a Sin-Eater are strong and deep. Bound, body and soul, the two halves of the whole aren't easily parted, even by death. Geists can reach beyond the pale to reel the departing soul of a Sin-Eater back to his body, returning him to life and ensuring the continuation of the bond. Only the souls of Sin-Eaters that die of old age travel beyond the reach of a geist. Otherwise, the soul of a Sin-Eater is returned to continue on, whether he likes it or not. There's always a catch, though, a price to be paid for cheating death.

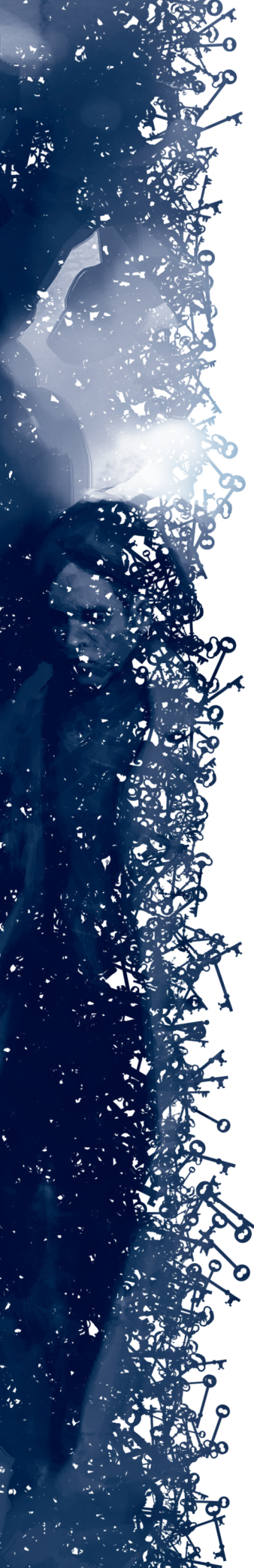
When a Sin-Eater dies, he is returned to life the next dawn or dusk, whichever comes first, with an ectoplasmic Caul over his face (see below). The character is healed of a

THE WRETCHED

The soul of a Sin-Eater is stretched and torn by the abrupt return to life forced upon him by his geist. With too many deaths and returns, the soul can be reduced to tatters. Sin-Eaters that have their maximum potential Synergy reduced to zero become nothing more than human-shaped meat-suits for the geist inside them. At this point most geists reluctantly allow the body to die, rather than share it with the sobbing remnants of the Sin-Eater's soul. Some geists hold on for too long, though, always having one more task to complete and eventually the shattered soul drives it insane. The Sin-Eaters call these unfortunates the Wretched.

The Wretched are alternately feared and loathed by other Sin-Eaters. The mad soul and geist that animate the body seem compelled to cause death. The least dangerous go on killing sprees that end in their destruction. More problematic are the Wretched that retain enough sanity to lure victims to lonely places where they can relish the kill. More than one serial killer has been a Wretched.





single wound, just enough to allow him to function upon resurrection. He recalls nothing of the time he spent dead, finding a great empty space in his memories. The passage between life and death is hard on mind and soul, and the experience tilts the balance of Synergy toward the geist. Upon return, a Sin-Eater loses a point of Synergy and his potential maximum Synergy is reduced by two. As an example, a Sin-Eater with a Synergy of 7 dies and is returned to life by his geist. His Synergy immediately drops to 6 and his maximum possible Synergy is reduced to 8. If he were to die again, his Synergy would drop to 5 and his maximum Synergy would fall to 6. If resurrection would reduce the character's Synergy to zero or his potential maximum Synergy to zero, the character is removed from player control, though not necessarily from the story (see the Wretched sidebar). Each death and subsequent return diminishes the Sin-Eater and strengthens the hold of his geist.

Worse by far, in the view of many Sin-Eaters, is the price others must pay for them. By cheating death, again, the Sin-Eater upsets the balance, and so death takes another in their place. As near as the Sin-Eaters can figure it, the person to die is selected at random. The Sin-Eater is unlikely to have previously known the person, but they always know how they died. The Caul that covers a Sin-Eater's features upon his return bears the death memory of the one taken in their place. The first thing a Sin-Eater sees upon waking from his cold sleep is the last thing his substitute saw. This unsettling experience imposes a -2 penalty on the roll to avoid gaining a derangement after the drop in Synergy that comes with death. The details of the death always have a direct relation to the Threshold of the Sin-Eater. A Sin-Eater with the Stricken Threshold watches as the woman who died in his place chokes on her own blood after a strangely accelerated cancer devours her lungs in minutes. A Sin-Eater with the Forgotten Threshold sees a stranger hit by a bus.

Given a choice, many Sin-Eaters would choose death over causing the death of another, but geists are rarely moved to comply. The Twilight Network is full of stories about Sin-Eaters that managed to secure the

promise of their geist not to resurrect them, only to find themselves returned with a Caul and the memory of a stranger's death in their mind. Rarely, a geist will actually keep its word and allow its Sin-Eater the dignity of death. Some rumors say that if a Sin-Eater can locate a potential replacement, just in case, his geist will allow him to die and take the replacement.

The Art of Necromancy

A fair number of Sin-Eaters were special in some way even before they became intertwined with a geist. Some had the occasional prophetic dream, and some could see auras or any number of other small talents. The bonding with the geist changed and magnified these talents — with a focus on death — making every Sin-Eater a practical necromancer.

Haunting Visions

Aided by their geists, Sin-Eaters can interact with Twilight and the creatures therein on a level beyond the abilities of all but the most powerful occultists. Sin-Eaters needn't strive to peer into Twilight, they needn't strain to see the ghosts that haunt the Earth. Instead, Sin-Eaters must strive to *not* see. Normal life is constantly interrupted by the presence of the death.

Ghost Sight

Sin-Eaters see ghosts as readily as they see the living, and can easily discern between the two. The ghost of a man that leapt in front of a subway train to commit suicide is easy to pick out among the throngs that rush the station after work. Every Sin-Eater shares this ability, whether they like it or not. The trick is *not* seeing the ghosts. Out of self-defense, the Bound develop a sort of filter that allows them to block out sights they'd rather not see. The closer a Sin-Eater becomes to death (metaphysically speaking) the harder he finds the trick to pull off.

One particularly useful aspect of ghost sight is that a Sin-Eater can tell, at a glance, if someone is

RUNNING WITH THE SIGHT

These various subsystems can be a lot to keep track of. A Sin-Eater can see the dead, determine the health of any living being, and sense the presence of active deathly Numina — there's a lot to pay attention to, especially in a crowded city. But this is true of every sense. Just as we take for granted that our eyes are taking in every person in a crowd without actually registering and analyzing each one, the Storyteller needn't labor to describe everything noticeable to death-sight in a given scene. Similarly, players can expect to roll dice to perceive things at about the usual rate of attempting to notice unusual events, objects, or people in other contexts. Use these subsystems to set the tone of a scene, and to reveal key points of information. But don't feel you have to consistently devote more attention to what these unusual senses discover than to what a character might experience on the more mundane plane. As with many things involving Storytelling, it's best to spend the most time on what's really interesting.

possessed by a ghost. The bodies of the possessed have a strange sort of double exposure look to them, with the spectral image of the ghost overlying the human body it's stolen.

Mechanics: A Sin-Eater can attempt to filter out his ghost sight for one scene by rolling his Synergy rating in dice. With success, the Sin-Eater has managed to block the dead from his vision. Ghosts can attempt to hide from Sin-Eaters by becoming invisible or mundanely lurking out of sight. Spotting a hidden ghost requires a successful Wits + Perception roll on part of the Sin-Eater. Assuming a Sin-Eater hasn't turned off his ghost sight, he can automatically detect ghostly possession on sight.

Ghost Speech

Sin-Eaters can communicate with the restless dead without resorting to Ouija boards, séances, or other mystical activities. The Sin-Eater simply speaks to a ghost and the ghost can reply in kind. This type of communication transcends human understandings of language or dialect. No matter what language the ghost spoke before it died, a Sin-Eater can understand it. One possible explanation for this feat is that the Sin-Eater isn't actually hearing the ghost at all. Instead he is hearing the echo of the ghost, filtered through the senses he shares with his geist. The value of this communication varies. Many ghosts are confused by their current state or too caught up in the feedback loop of emotion that created them to be lucid enough to communicate in any meaningful way.

Mechanics: No roll is necessary to understand the dead. A Sin-Eater can attempt to block out ghost speech in the same way he filters his sight.

Reverse Possession

Although a Sin-Eater can see ghosts as a matter of course, he isn't actually looking into Twilight to do so. What he is really seeing is the reflection of the ghosts in his geist's eyes. Looking into Twilight requires a bit more effort. In a sort of reverse possession, the Sin-Eater seizes the full senses of his geist, pouring his consciousness into the alien creature bound to him. This allows a Sin-Eater to see into and physically interact with Twilight at the cost of losing some sense of his physical surroundings. Of course, by opening himself up to Twilight, a Sin-Eater places himself in a position where ghosts can interact with him as well.

In this state, a Sin-Eater can combat a ghost that hasn't manifested and can manipulate Twilight objects. Only the body of a Sin-Eater makes the translation. Any physical weapons held by the Sin-Eater at the time are left behind, along with his flesh and bone. Occasionally, a Sin-Eater that has taken the fight to a ghost will find a useful Twilight object he can use as a weapon, but he can't rely on this being the case. The only weapon a Sin-Eater can rely on when he becomes one with his geist, other than his wits and his fists, is his keystone memento. As both Twilight and material objects, keystones alone make the transition from physical to ephemeral.

Mechanics: A Sin-Eater can transfer his consciousness into his geist by spending a point of plasm as an instant action. This allows the Sin-Eater to see not just ghosts, but anything in a state of Twilight, as well as physically interact with its denizens and any Twilight objects. While possessing his geist, the Sin-Eater can combat unmanifested ghosts. Any Twilight object close to hand can be picked up and used as an improvised weapon (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 136), the Sin-Eater may make unarmed attacks or he can use his keystone as a weapon. Keystones that are already weapons follow the usual rules for attack and damage. Non-weapon keystones can be wielded as improvised weapons and don't suffer from the usual penalty when used in this manner in Twilight.

Combating an unmanifested ghost is apt to draw some strange looks from bystanders. Instead of a life-or-death contest, normal humans only see some weirdo slashing and flailing around him at imaginary foes. Fortunately, attacks made in Twilight remain in Twilight, unless someone walks directly into the Sin-Eater and takes an elbow or fist to the face. A Sin-Eater that owns a keystone memento in the form of a gun needn't worry about hitting innocent bystanders. Bullets, gun and even the noise of gunfire all remain in Twilight. The same is true for other types of keystone weapons. A Sin-Eater could accidentally injure another Sin-Eater that has possessed his geist, however. A Sin-Eater can also directly target a ghost that possesses someone by attacking it in Twilight without causing damage to the host. Particularly strong or able Sin-Eaters can even wrestle a ghost out of its host by grappling it and yanking it free of its stolen body by immobilizing the ghost (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157).

The shift in focus from material to Twilight can be somewhat distracting. A Sin-Eater that has possessed his geist suffers a -3 penalty to all Perception rolls dealing with activities outside of Twilight.

TWILIGHT

Twilight is a state of being more than a physical place; a thing is said to be "in Twilight" much as it might be said to be "liquid" or "out of earshot." Unlike the otherworlds of the spirit Shadow Realm, the fae Hedge or the altered reality of the Supernal Realms, Twilight is the state of being immaterial in the material world. Twilight creatures and objects are the shadows of physical reality, but the physical still remains (or did at one time). One doesn't travel to Twilight, it's always there; you just might not be able to see it.

Twilight objects are usually the ephemeral remains of anchors that have been destroyed or just rotted away over the course of time. Such objects can also be formed by frequent interaction by a ghost with a physical object (through the Mechanical Possession Numen, for example). The repeated touch of a ghost can sometimes build a Twilight ephemeral copy of the original. There are a few Twilight objects that simply form for no apparent reason. Possibly an object that has been a witness to or the cause of enormous loss of life could absorb so much death energy that it transcends a simple memento to become Twilight.



Sixth Sense

Sin-Eaters possess something of a sixth sense when it comes to dealing with ghosts. Even when a Sin-Eater is actively filtering his ghost sight to enjoy a movie uninterrupted, he can sense the presence of a ghost using Numina to effect to living world. The exact nature of the sensation varies from one Sin-Eater to another and also by Threshold. A Sin-Eater with the Forgotten Threshold might register the use of Numina as acute hunger pangs. A Sin-Eater with the Torn Threshold might find that his scars tingle and throb. This paranormal sensation goes both ways. A Sin-Eater can never hide his presence, nor use of Manifestations from a ghost. Whether it's because ghosts notice the shadowy mien of his geist, merged with the Sin-Eater's flesh or just an instinctual reaction isn't clear and if the ghosts know the truth of the matter, they aren't talking.

Mechanics: Any time a ghost uses a Numina within 30 yards of a Sin-Eater, the Bound may roll Wits + Occult + Psyche to notice the phenomena.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater not only fails to notice the use of Numina, he also automatically fails to detect the next use of Numina by the same ghost.

Failure: The Sin-Eater doesn't notice anything unusual.

Success: The Sin-Eater notices the use of Numina.

Exceptional Success: As above and the Sin-Eater knows exactly where the sensation originated.

Unnatural Mediums

Ghosts are drawn to Sin-Eaters like a moth to a flame. Sin-Eaters represent all kinds of possibilities for ghosts as one of the few living with whom they can easily interact. The inherent ephemeral qualities of a Sin-Eater magnify the energies of death in an area, which allow ghosts to more easily manifest in the immediate vicinity of a Sin-Eater (see "Manifestations" in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 210). The presence of mementos increases this effect, each memento being, in essence, a repository of death. To ghosts, Sin-Eaters (especially those with plenty of mementos) are walking, talking graveyards and there's no better place for a ghost to manifest than among the quiet dead. Because of this unfortunate side effect, Sin-Eaters must be cautious about where and in front of whom they confront violent shades. It's no use visiting a family home to rid them of a poltergeist just to have the ghost manifest and wreck serious havoc on the people that live there.

Mechanics: Ghosts gain a +1 to manifestation rolls within 10 yards of a Sin-Eater and an additional +1 for each memento carried by that Sin-Eater. In the case of multiple Sin-Eaters being present (or just a single Sin-Eater with a lot of bling), these bonuses stack to a maximum of +5.

Plasmic Infusion

Ghosts are inherently unstable entities. Even the most lucid of specters is nothing better than a hollow replica of the person it was in life. Many ghosts have no real comprehension of their situation, endlessly repeating or reliving the same thing over and over again. Life is all about adapting to change and growth. Death, on the other hand, is unchanging and sterile. In theory, a ghost could provide Sin-Eaters with a wealth of knowledge about what it's seen, but most ghosts just aren't capable of that kind of interaction. The solution to this problem lies within the veins of a Sin-Eater. The plasm generated by a geist can reinforce the personality of a ghost, allowing it near-human cognizance for short periods of time. The reaction to this abrupt return to consciousness varies. Some ghosts are ecstatic at the ability to *think* properly again, even if that awareness is fleeting. Other ghosts are less sanguine. The brief interlude of sanity makes them bitter, knowing full well it can't last.

Mechanics: The Sin-Eater must anoint the ghost with some of his own blood to begin the plasmic infusion. This either requires that the ghost be manifested or the Sin-Eater to possess his geist. The spilling of blood causes one point of lethal damage to the character performing the infusion. As the Sin-Eater touches his blood to the ghost he also spends a point of plasm. Plasm and blood are absorbed by the ghost, infusing its corpus with the energy of both life and death. Use against an unwilling ghost requires the Sin-Eater to first touch his target (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 157).

For the remainder of the scene, the ghost is restored to an echo of its living self. It can act, think, and communicate as though it were alive (to anyone who can see and hear it, that is). Assume the ghost has an Intelligence rating equal to its Power. The ability to think and speak doesn't necessarily equate to a desire to be helpful, however. Most ghosts will take this opportunity to barter their knowledge for some deed on part of the Sin-Eater questioning it. Especially canny ghosts will even refuse to disclose information without proof the favor it's asked for has been completed.

Eaters of the Dead

Ghosts are useful to Sin-Eaters in a number of different ways. They can provide information, they can be bound into fetters, a ghostly ally might provide security services, and *they can be eaten*. Just like human sin-eaters would devour a crust of bread over the corpse of the newly dead to take the sins of the departed into them, mystical Sin-Eaters can devour the corpus of a ghost to gain plasm. This isn't a course of action taken lightly by the bound, nor is it a matter of daily bread. Aside from the

obviously repellant nature of the act (ghosts taste of rotting meat, at best) there are the philosophical ramifications to consider.

What, exactly, is the fate of a ghost that is eaten? Is it consigned to oblivion or by digesting a ghost does a Sin-Eater help move it along from the physical realm? No one knows for sure. Examination of the anchors of a devoured ghost reveals a faint trace of the energy one would associate with an active anchor. This could just be the byproduct of a sudden demise, but the anchors of permanently disincorporated ghosts revert to mundane objects. The odd behavior of anchors leads some Sin-Eaters to theorize that some small portion of that ghost remains, forever trapped, in the corpus of the geist. While Sin-Eaters don't exactly look on this practice as cannibalism, it isn't encouraged either. Sin-Eaters that are known to routinely practice the eating of dead earn the disdainful moniker of ghoul. The geists, however, don't really seem to care.

The shades of the dead don't give up their corpus without a fight. A Sin-Eater that looks at a ghost as his next meal must first defeat the ghost in combat before dinner can begin. This requires either that the ghost has manifested itself to fight or that the Sin-Eater has taken the fight to the ghost by possessing his geist. Once the ghost has been defeated, the Sin-Eater has a short window of opportunity to feast from the corpus before it fades away into nothing.

Devouring the corpus of a ghost has the potential to shift the balance of Synergy away from the Sin-Eater. A roll for degeneration should be made by characters with Synergy 6 or higher (roll four dice).

Mechanics: After a ghost has been defeated, the Sin-Eater is allowed three Resolve + Stamina rolls to devour its corpus before it fades away. A Sin-Eater may only eat the corpus of a manifested ghost or while possessing his geist.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater is overcome with disgust at his own actions. Any plasm gained to that point is lost as he vomits up the remains of the corpus and the remains of the ghost fade away by the time he recovers.

Failure: The Sin-Eater is unable to force the bits and pieces of corpus down his throat. No plasm is gained.

Success: Each success on the roll subtracts one dot from the corpus of the ghost, which the Sin-Eater converts into plasm. A Sin-Eater may not gain a total amount of plasm greater than the corpus rating of the ghost.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater manages to choke down the entirety of the corpus in record time. No further rolls are necessary.

Notably, Sin-Eaters — and loose geists — can devour other geists. The process is roughly the same, though geists are more durable and harder to digest (as well as harder to subdue). Devouring a geist imposes a -3 penalty on the Resolve + Stamina roll. However, consuming a geist can feed the power of the Sin-Eater's own powers. If a Sin-Eater is able to devour five points of plasm from a geist's Corpus, she need only pay new dots x 5 to purchase her next Manifestation (presumably one related to the devoured geist's

own powers). This particular form of cannibalism is taboo within Sin-Eater culture; not only does it place geists at risk, but the only real way to devour a geist that has bonded to a host is to slay the host. No Sin-Eater can wholly trust another who's devoured a geist: you never know if they're going to develop a taste for it.

Deathly Visions

The sort of necromancy practiced by Sin-Eaters deals with more than just ghosts; it also recognizes the hand of death in everyday life. Sin-Eaters gain the ability to see the shadow of death on the faces of those around them: a morbid reminder of their own mortality. The geist-bound also sense the aspects and weight of death, even in the midst of life.

Morbid Reality

We are all dying. Slowly, by infinitesimal degrees. Every minute, of every hour, of every day we die just a little. The hours spent at work, at play, even asleep are killing us. Death is a certainty and Sin-Eaters can see that certainty reflected on the faces the people they encounter. A Sin-Eater can tell, at a glance, exactly how old someone is, down to the day and hour. People with incurable diseases or life-threatening injuries can be picked out of a crowd by the crown of death they wear. For most people this sort of morbid reality might be depressing. For the Bound it's another reason to celebrate life while you have it. Sin-Eaters defy death even while acting as its messengers, because, in the end, it's how you lived that's important, not how you died.

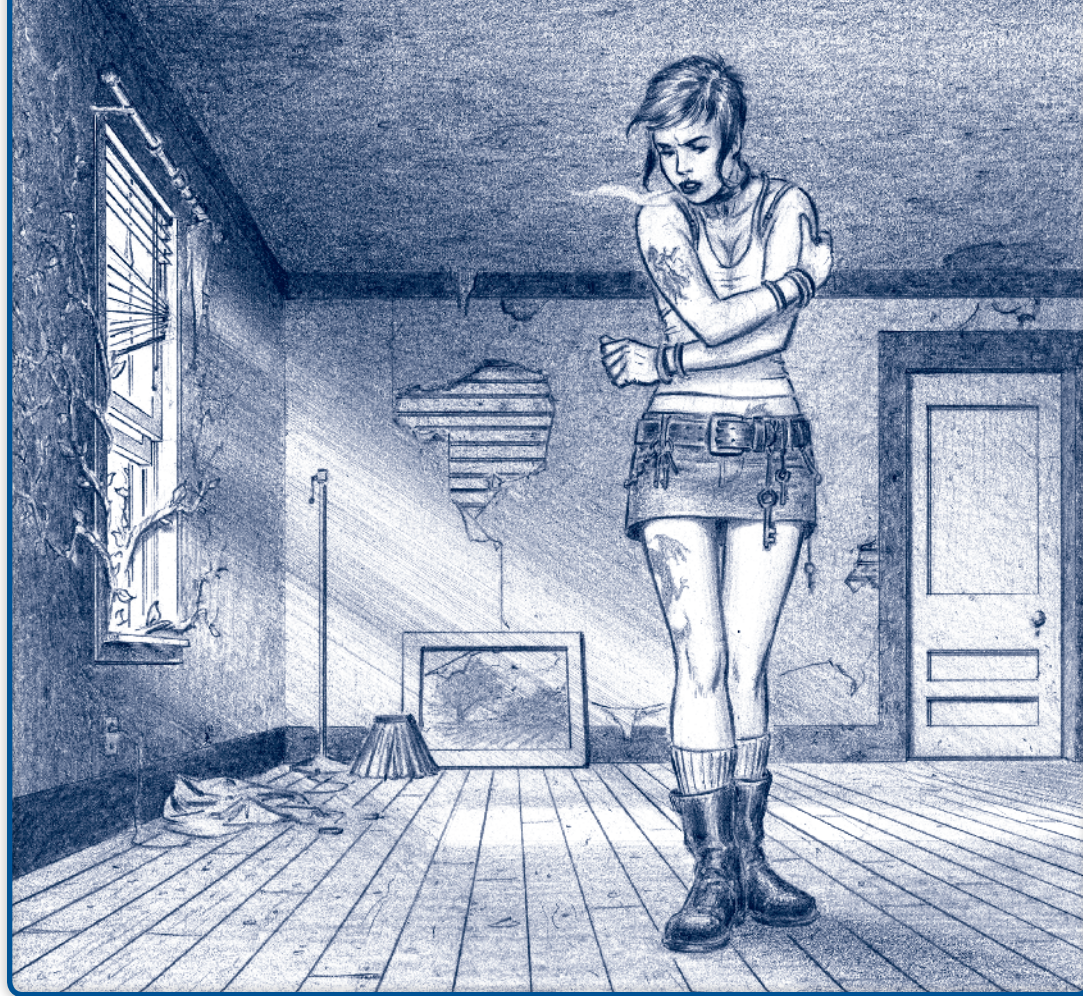
Mechanics: Sin-Eaters can determine the relative health of a human with a reflexive Wits + Composure roll. Used in combat, Storytellers should provide narrative description rather than mechanical precision. An antagonist that has been reduced to three points of Health should be described as "critically injured" rather than just relaying open boxes remaining. Creatures that mimic humans but aren't actually alive (such as vampires), register as dead. No roll is necessary for a Sin-Eater to determine age. In the case, again, of non-living human imposters, Sin-Eaters learn the apparent age of the body.

Death Stains

Death always leaves a trace behind, for those that know how to find it. In locations like the Nazi death camps or scenes of mass murder, even normal humans can feel the pall of death that still hangs over the place. Violent deaths leave a heavier stain than peaceful death and fresh death is easier to detect than a death that occurred years ago. Sin-Eaters feel death as a chill that settles over them. The colder the chill, the more recent or violent the death was. Walking through the scene of a recent murder is like plunging into a freezing lake. It raises hair on the back of the neck and goose bumps on the skin. Sin-Eaters refer to this phenomenon as death stains and actively seek out homes and meeting grounds with the fewest stains.

Mechanics: No roll is necessary to note a death stain, and Sin-Eaters automatically pick up on the residue of death left





behind. A Sin-Eater can attempt to determine the age of the death stain with a Wits + Psyche roll. With success, the Sin-Eater can determine the age of the stain to the year if the death is older than one year, the month if within the same year, the day if within the same month or the hour if within the same day. No information can be gained about the possible cause of death, however, just by probing the stain. Possible modifiers for the roll include: violent death (+3), recent death (+2), old death (-1/year).

Clinical Precision

Dead men do tell tales, to Sin-Eaters at least. Sin-Eaters with the inclination to do so would make fantastic homicide detectives and coroners. Even without a ghost to relate its story, the Bound can read the bodies of the dead like a book. The tale of the death seems to linger in the air around the corpse, waiting to reveal itself. By touching a corpse, a Sin-Eater summons up the sensations associated with its death. The ghostly impact of bullet wounds shudder through his body, the ache of a bursting heart causes his left arm to go numb, or the acidic aftertaste of poison lingers in the back of his throat. The Bound translate these phantom sensations into real-world causes, relating a story of death.

Mechanics: A Sin-Eater can attempt to discern the cause of death by touching the corpse and

rolling Wits + Medicine. Not every cause of death is easy to discern with this method. Since the Sin-Eater is *feeling* the death, rather than witnessing it, deaths without much in the way of physical sensations (such as a poison designed to be painless or the peaceful death of old age) impose a -3 penalty on the roll. For the purposes of this particular bit of necromancy, the age of the corpse doesn't matter. The sensations of death remain even if the Sin-Eater has nothing more to work with than a splinter of bone.

Interestingly, this power also works on other Bound (though it still requires bodily contact). Success allows the character to feel the moment of death, or near-death, immediately before the Bargain. This allows him to determine the Threshold of another Sin-Eater, though it reveals no more information about the target's geist.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater completely misinterprets the cause of death.

Failure: The Sin-Eater fails to determine the cause of death.

Success: The Sin-Eater correctly determines the cause of death.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater correctly determines the cause and time of death.

Founding a Krewe

Krewes range from small cells of Sin-Eaters to legendary global conspiracies. Word on the Twilight Network is that the grand cults are gone, though there are always rumors to the contrary. If there will ever be great conspiracies again it's up to the current generation of Sin-Eaters to build them. The largest known krewes envelop entire cities but even then, smaller gangs and independents live outside their rules. A krewe runs on a mix of convenience, superstition, and occult power. It represents the world of the living: growing, changing and, in time, dying.

This makes **Geist** different from many other **World of Darkness** games. Even though a ceremonially bonded krewe is connected to the deep mysteries of death, it's a mortal organization at heart. No supernatural laws compel Sin-Eaters to join krewes. They're all built on the blood, sweat, and necromancy of founding Sin-Eaters. That's why this section exists: it contains rules for building your own krewes.

These systems are designed to bring players and Storytellers together in the spirit of cooperation. In the story, Sin-Eaters ritually discover an occult *channel* for the krewe; their geists commune with secret powers in the Underworld, reconcile them with founding Sin-Eaters' desires, and create a mythology and ethos for the organization. The founders share the revelation and if they choose, spread it.

Out of the story, the situation is a bit different. Even though the geists create the channel, the players (though not their characters) design the channel according to the type of krewe they want to play in. One or more of their characters may come into conflict with the channel, but only because their players want to play through stories about this troubled relationship.

The Storyteller is there to moderate the design process in three ways. First of all, she helps build consensus between players who have divergent ideas about the krewe-to-be. She finds common interests, resolves disagreements and, naturally, observes the proceedings to mine for story ideas. Since krewe design is a situation where players speak frankly about what kind of game they want to play, this is a fantastic opportunity to draw inspiration from the group. Second,

she minds the krewe design rules and exercises a veto on decisions that could create problems. The krewe system is designed to favor story opportunities over play balance, and every group has a slightly different definition of balance anyway. Third, the Storyteller injects her own ideas for group consideration. Theoretically, she can mandate certain things about the krewe, but we recommend that you exercise a light touch. Suggest elements to foreshadow upcoming storylines and the desired mood, but remember that the players' characters are the center of your story, and that the chronicle's mood is ultimately a balance between player and Storyteller interests.

As the Storyteller, it's your job to keep the chronicle interesting without letting it descend to collective narcissism. With krewes and everything else, plug player desires into inspirations above and beyond what they can predict. You know what's happening in the secret world, beyond what the players know. Use that advantage to help them.

From Convenience to Commitment

Danger, need, and raw fate drive Sin-Eaters together. If they hang out for long enough, word spreads across the Twilight Network that they're a krewe, but there's a difference between these alliances and a true, ceremonially consecrated krewe. A "proper krewe" changes its members psychologically and mystically. Emotional changes are often difficult to pin down and don't necessarily interfere with free will, but combined with the occult aspects of the krewe they tend to make members better at acquiring everyday influence and supernatural power. Where does the social effect end and mystical power begin? Sin-Eaters aren't sure. They just know that a consecrated krewe is a powerful tool.

Beyond the story, the exact nature of the krewe bond is up to the group. Some effects are obviously supernatural but we're not going to come up with a rationale for every factor. That's up to you when you design the krewe. You don't need to settle on detailed explanations at all; the system works just as well without them.

NAMES AND STYLE

Long standing tradition demands that every krewe distinguish itself with a name and a signature sign or style. These are practical customs. Without them, how can Sin-Eaters identify members, or figure out who owns the turf they're on? Some regions take it further. They want chanted lineages, formal heraldry, and carved stele. That's more common in the Old World. In the Americas it's enough to have a color, a tag, and maybe a few secret handshakes and hand signs to get by.

The cultural demand for a krewe to share a common style sometimes butts heads with a player's natural inclination to have as distinctive a character as possible, so you may wish to talk about style before anything else, just so that everyone has a choice they can live with. Names are often harder than you'd think, too, so set aside some time for brainstorming. Above all, unless you're going for comedy, don't choose anything that seems funny or stupid from the get start. Dumb names and customs lose their novelty pretty damn fast. Then again, silliness is in the eye of the beholder. Styles and ideas you enjoy will probably look stupid in about 10 years, so don't worry about making choices that will be immune to mockery for all time. That's an impossible task.





Prerequisites

To found a krewe you need at least three Bound, a Haunt and the Krewe Binding ceremony. Furthermore, no Sin-Eater can be supernaturally compelled to found a krewe. You can threaten, torture, or seduce prospective founders, but supernatural mind control disqualifies a Sin-Eater from participating.

Joining an established krewe is a little different. Anyone can become an associate of the krewe with its members' permission (or without, if she wants to fraudulently claim membership). She can even claim the krewe's Temporal Benefits (see below). To really become a part of the krewe, however, she needs to claim its channel. The initiate participates in the Krewe Binding. From that point, she can use the krewe's Supernatural benefits according to their respective systems.

Many Souls, One Channel

The Krewe Binding establishes a *channel*: a supernatural revelation delivered by the founders' geists. The channel has two parts: a mythology and an ethos. These are tailored to the founders' natures, including their interests, values, belief systems, special talents, Manifestations, Keys, and associated geists. Nevertheless, Sin-Eaters don't choose the channel's revelation. It's given to them. A krewe of devout Christians might get a channel based on prayer, charity, and spiritual warfare — but they might get one with Satanic associations instead. Sin-Eaters don't always like their channels, but no channel is ever created without their influence.

Geists have contributed various explanations for how the channel manifests. Some of them say that they've communed with the deathlords, but in the modern age quite a few say it's a put-on: a psychodrama designed to bind the krewe into a cohesive unit. Then again, even the most benevolent geists have been known to lie when they felt it justified, and as experienced Sin-Eaters know, founding a krewe changes the contributing geists. They assume roles consistent with the channel's mythos: mother goddess, scholar-ancestor, angel of death. Some say that just as Sin-Eaters are mediums between the living and dead, geists are a bridge between the death-touched Sin-Eaters and the deep, secret powers of the Underworld. Geists are sorcerers and priests of the dead who keep their ultimate mysteries to themselves.

Mythology

A channel's mythology can be thought of as the secret language of death, the programming code of the afterlife, the will of the gods, or secret meditations that connect a Sin-Eater to the deeper powers of the Underworld. The mythology is revealed during the ceremony as a flash of insight that transforms every-

thing the Sin-Eater knows, though a full understanding of the experience may be days, weeks, or months in coming. Over time she sees signs of the krewe's lore everywhere. Mythic symbols crackle with secrets beneath their mundane forms. Mementos tuned to it positively glow with hints of their potential.

The mythology is a special system of symbols that the ceremony draws from all participating Sin-Eaters, transforms into a cohesive whole, and then forces into the minds of all who attend. Many experience it as spiritual inspiration, but a few are horrified — often, by signs and ideas they have trouble admitting they believe. The priest is initiated into a world ruled by the Devil, because he always secretly believed that Satan was the strong king of mortal nations. A Satanist's devotion to dark symbols and self-will crumble beneath the realization that he really believes in nothing but empirical reasoning. Elegant mathematics and sketches of experiments invade his mind.

Furthermore, the mythology is one entity, created from the combined beliefs of the krewe's first initiates. Higher mathematics, the Devil, reincarnation, rogue Loa — they all spiral out of the Sin-Eaters' minds to transform and return as the krewe's central mystery. The geists in each ceremony add their own obsessions to the mix, and elements of their inscrutable death-sorcery. The resulting system includes the following concepts:

Creation Myth: First, the mythology begins with the creation of life...and death. It explains the dawn of the world, the rise of death, and the creation of the Underworld. Most krewes draw the creation myth from their members' cultural traditions, though they rarely conform closely to the legends outsiders know. Some systems leave the living world to science or popular faith, but tell a special story about the origins of ghosts and the Great Below. The ceremony merges stories from several belief systems and adds legends known only to the dead. If the krewe expands, it often presents a more conventional front of well-known creation stories, reserving the true heart of the mythology for its inner circle.

Metaphysics: The creation myth leads to assertions about the nature of life and death. What is a soul? What is a ghost, really? Who are the deathlords? What are geists? The conclusions never contradict what most Sin-Eaters know about the supernatural world, particularly geists, the Underworld, and the secrets of the afterlife (or in other words, everything in this core book). This mandates some deviations from classic myths, though in some cases, surprising things can still be true from a more "creative" point of view.

Aspects: Who are the mythology's personalities? The ceremony exalts the founders' geists, giving them mystic Aspects: elaborations of the archetypes

they uphold. In many cases, the names and natures of the powers develop from the creation myth, but the geists are not literal gods – or *probably* aren't. Rather, the geist is an aspect of a god, archangel, or culture hero.

Players must choose one Aspect identity for each geist possessed by one of the krewe's founding Sin-Eaters, but remember: their characters *aren't* making this choice. It's part of the revelation.

Symbols: At each stage of the mythology's design, note symbols associated with its tenets. There should be at least one representing the entire mythology and one for each founding Aspect.

Example of Mythology Creation

Steve, Kearsley, and Tara have decided that their Sin-Eaters John, Leon, and Mara will sanctify their krewe. Out of character, the players discuss their characters' beliefs.

Steve sees his character John as a "postmodern Puritan." He's a Christian who believes in a minimalist approach to life and the value of hard work – and that our ultimate fates are a result of predestination, because God knows if people will live their lives in virtue or sin. Nevertheless, he's seen enough of death's mysteries to believe that the Bible doesn't have all the answers, and that all cultures who've brushed against the Underworld have secret knowledge to share.

Kearsley's Leon is an almost stereotypical French intellectual, who believes that death is a *stance* on existence. Leon chooses a life of material pleasure because he thinks that since ghosts are bereft of true freedom and joy, these experiences define life itself.

Tara's character Mara was a heterodox *Aghori*: a member of an Indian sect that engages in extreme asceticism and the violation of typical taboos against everything from drinking alcohol to eating human flesh. (And as a woman, she was considered even further from convention – the sect is usually exclusively male). She believes her example not only brings virtue to the living, but breaks the dead out of almost robotic routines, helping them break the mold and move on to better, future births.

The players want to explore conflict with other krewes and help the dead – even if the dead don't want their help. The Storyteller keeps this in mind and helps them construct the mythology. They decide on basic cultural details pulled from Protestant Christianity, Hinduism, and pop culture.

Creation Myth: The world was created in a state of grace. God exists, but is distant; He works through intermediaries with many faces, and through them, created every element and emotion, leaving humans to combine them in new and wondrous forms. The Underworld came into existence when people used their creative power to sin. Eventually, the weight of sin was so severe that its works fell away from the rest of the universe, to a dark place where people would be tormented by their own creations (the Kerberoi) but most of all, their own obsessions.

Metaphysics: Reincarnation exists – in fact, the dead *are* incarnations of people filled with obsessions or a certain inner darkness. Sin-Eaters live to remove this stain, and

their geists are dead souls who have somehow redeemed themselves in part, due to mystical communion with God and His original aspects. A skilled Sin-Eater can bypass his geist and apprehend the divine truth himself, but every member of the krewe admits they're not there yet.

Aspects: The krewe's three geists reveal their occult Aspects:

- John's geist becomes the Unknown Martyr. It shifts appearance between historical, martyred saints who display signs of their torments, but the Martyr says that he/she was killed for his/her faith in secret, and no record exists. The Martyr disdains veneration; Sin-Eaters should appeal to God alone for help. Instead, he/she is a worldly, callous taskmaster. The damned are damned and the saved are saved, and there's nothing anyone can do about it, unless God Himself has fated an intervention.
- Leon's geist becomes the ghost of the Marquis de Sade – and claims he was *always* de Sade, but heretofore had no desire to reveal himself to the Sin-Eater, who was "boring" before the ceremony. He drives Leon to free himself and realize his true desires, even as he frees others to do the same.
- Mara's geist becomes a future incarnation: a man who calls himself the Chakravartin. He is destined to rule the world by liberating the Underworld, and using its denizens to bring about an apocalyptic disaster, followed by an age of universal peace. She is to prepare the way for her future self by intervening in key lives and situations.

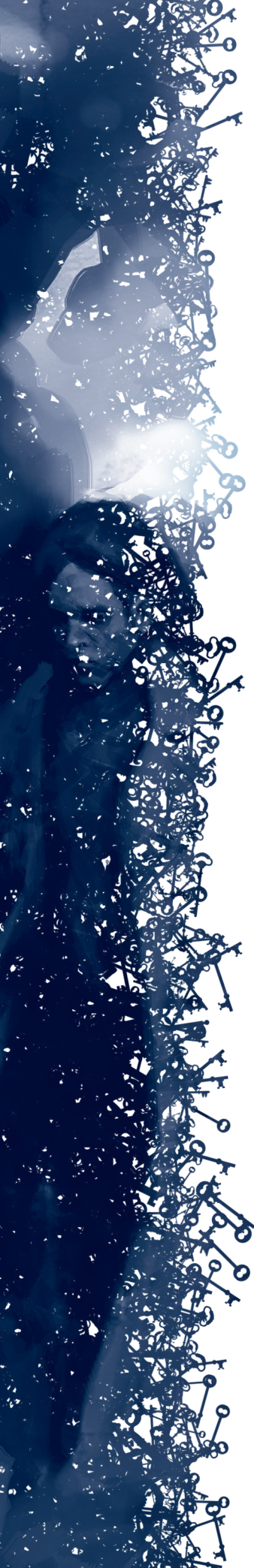
The geists all claim to be people from various ages, not gods or angels, but say they have been tasked by God (whether this is the Christian God, Shiva, or some other interpretation is left unsaid) to drive them on a mission to liberate themselves and others from spiritual falsehoods: acts that will doubtless set them against other krewes.

Ethos

Every krewe has an ethos: a set of beliefs that guide its actions. Not every member follows them closely, but those that do reap Supernatural Benefits from the commitment. The Aspects within their geists smile upon them, or perhaps they attune to a mysterious purpose set in motion by a deathlord, or by the esoteric laws of the Underworld. The mythology often provides a framework for the ethos, as a "just so" story that shows why one thing must be done and another avoided at all costs. There was an original sin, a covenant, a payment in blood, or a dharma discovered by the most enlightened ones. Pick one justification, or several.

Like all aspects of the channel, the ethos develops from the founders' attitudes and beliefs (including their most private beliefs) as well as something drawn from their geists. Given the diverse personalities in almost any krewe, a single ethos can generate tension, as some members aren't ready for the rules that have been handed down to them. Thus, ethoi are usually subject to interpretation, especially when it comes to how to translate their dictates into action.

Beyond what's happening in the game setting, however, the ethos is a tool for the play group to focus its goals.



What kind of stories do you want to explore? What moral issues do you want to face? Don't think in terms of your character's interests but about what kind of ethos would be the most interesting to play with. Sketch out a general philosophy first. Describe it using the following structure. These elements have attached game systems, so consider each of them carefully.

Ban: What is forbidden? Select one broad category of acts. There should be a core to it that consists of clearly unacceptable behaviors, so design at least three examples. However, the ban should go beyond this. Its edges should not be defined in ironclad terms. In other words, you're *aiming* for controversy to open the door to more interesting stories.

Duty: Next, what *must* be done? Is your krewe bound to kill those who cause excessive suffering in the world? To defend the virtuous from death until they help the world? Are you supposed to help martyrs? Discourage martyrs? Create involuntary martyrs? Like the ban, create at least three examples of the duty being discharged successfully, but play loose with the full range of the duty so that controversy can serve a dramatic purpose.

Destiny: The ethos is more than a philosophy. It's a supernatural bond with the Underworld; a component of that channel. Fate answers these connections, and it's up to you to decide what the long-term implications of this might be. All founders have a sense of this destiny but usually keep it a secret from outsiders and new members. The destiny is a prophecy that hints at what following the ethos will eventually lead to, provided the krewe's members overcome several obstacles.

Like all prophecies, the destiny should be vague and subject to interpretation, but should above all predict a theme in the krewe's stories. The truth behind it is for the Storyteller to determine, based on the Sin-Eaters' actions throughout the chronicle. The destiny is usually expressed as a poem or piece of inspired writing but it can take other forms, such as paintings, statistical forecasts, or recurring coincidences.

One thing is certain, however: the destiny has a set *bane*: a circumstance that may destroy the krewe. This could be a single, critical event or recurring taboo, but when it comes into force, the prophecy holds that the krewe is due for hardship, if not doom.

Example of Ethos Creation

The mythology of our example krewe and the kind of stories the players want center on truth, lies, freedom, and bondage. The ethos spells out the details:

Ban: The krewe cannot enslave anyone living or dead, or coerce them against their better interests. Other krewes may raise zombies or send ghosts to do their bidding, but the players' krewe cannot. In fact, if they have a chance, they'll free others from these bonds.

Duty: The krewe's duty is to destroy self-delusion and harmful entrenched habits. They want ghosts to move on to their meeting with God (and from Mara's point of view, a better incarnation). They try to free ghosts from obsessions. When it comes to other Sin-Eaters they're iconoclasts, questioning local traditions.

Destiny: The Aspect within Mara's geist hints that a great upheaval is coming: one that could cause suffering and then, universal liberation. The krewe's actions will frequently destroy traditions and institutions around them. Their bane combines moral authority and traditions — it's mainstream religious institutions. When Catholic exorcists, Muslim community leaders, and other deeply-invested adherents (not just the regular faithful) cross paths with the krewe, fate tends to turn against them.

Benefits

Founding a consecrated krewe has a number of benefits. The rationales for these advantages vary from krewe to krewe. Maybe the ceremony strengthens the founders' sense of commitment, allowing them to accomplish tasks that would never be possible without that rite of passage. Many believe in mystical reasons for their newfound abilities, and it must be admitted that some advantages would be difficult to justify in any other way. The whole truth is left to the Storyteller, but she should use the krewe's channel, its members' attitudes, and the players' preferences as guides.

Krewe benefits belong to three categories:

Founding Benefits: Some krewe advantages belong solely to Sin-Eaters who participated in the Krewe Binding or their designated successors (see p. 191). This is a strong motive for Sin-Eaters to found small krewes, since all members are founders who can partake of these benefits. No Sin-Eater can learn Founding Benefits from more than one krewe.

BENEFIT CATEGORIES

In addition to the types above, benefits belong to one of the following categories, listed in the text with each benefit.

Automatic: The benefit is an automatic aspect of membership in a krewe of this size. In **Geist's** core rules, this only applies to Krewe Status (see p. 188) and Temporal Benefits.

Merit: The benefit is a Merit with the listed cost.

Opt-In: The benefit has no cost, but Sin-Eaters must choose to take advantage of it. Opt-In benefits usually come with specific drawbacks and other conditions.



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Supernatural Benefits: All krewe members who undergo the Krewe Binding and subsequently learn from a Mentor or study a Codex (see p. 191) can acquire Supernatural Benefits. These affect Keys, Manifestations, ceremonies, and other occult powers, including the ability to perform a supplication to a geist with an Aspect.

Temporal Benefits: Temporal Benefits relate to the mundane, living world. These are organized economic, political, and criminal power blocs. A Sin-Eater doesn't need to undergo a ceremony to earn these benefits. He just needs to be trusted by the right people.

Scale

A few krewes have grown into global conspiracies but most of them are local affairs, about as big as a small business, street gang, or fringe cult. If the founders are charismatic, politically adept, or lucky, the krewe can grow to encompass most of a city. In modern times, no krewe has turned into a world-spanning organization, but that doesn't mean it's impossible. In fact, the players' krewe may grow into one and significantly change **Geist's** default setting.

For simplicity's sake, we divide krewe sizes into three tiers. Players of **Hunter: The Vigil** may be familiar with this scheme, but watch closely for differences. The dividing line between supernatural and ordinary effects on a krewe's evolution is hazy at best. Sin-Eaters know that the initial ceremony is a seed that contains some mix of collective will and a twisted destiny that encourages growth, but imposes responsibilities and dangers. As a krewe progresses through the tiers, the range of benefits changes. Larger krewes earn more temporal

influence; they discover the ability to unlock new abilities, and the Aspects within the founders' geists get stronger.

Krewe tiers and their requirements are as follows:

Tier One — Cult: The krewe is a mix of street gang, secret society, and fringe faith. It contains a minimum of three members, but the total shouldn't usually exceed 10 ceremonially inducted members, or more than twice the number of founding members. Beyond that, the krewe grows into a Tier Two faction. (This is not an exact limit, and should be adjusted by the Storyteller to suit the particulars of the chronicle.) All new krewes begin at this rank.

Tier Two — Faction: The krewe has grown significantly beyond its founders to the point where it becomes a significant Sin-Eater faction in one or more cities. To unlock the benefits of a faction the krewe must allow internal divisions. Without some autonomy, these subgroups can't support the krewe's effectiveness as efficiently. There should be at least one clique for every 10 ceremonially inducted members. (Again, the precise limits should be left to the Storyteller, but the *intention* of this guideline is to give each group of player-controlled characters or Storyteller-run equivalents their own clique). Each krewe has its own names for these smaller groups. Knowing the right slang differentiates insiders from outsiders.

Tier Three — Conspiracy: Once a faction grows beyond 100 or so consecrated members across two or more continents it becomes a Tier Three conspiracy. There is no hard limit to how many members a conspiracy can possess. Sheer size (and perhaps, a collective mystic devotion to the krewe's channel) unlocks new benefits, but like factions, conspiracies must delegate duties to fully harness their abilities.

A conspiracy possesses at least two factions, and each faction has its own cult-sized cliques.

Krewe Experience

Krewe members build their power base with *krewe experience points*. This award should be tracked separately from standard experience points. Players can use a mix of standard experience points and krewe experience to acquire benefits, but can only use krewe experience to purchase krewe benefits. Only ceremonially-inducted members earn krewe experience, by acting in accord with the ethos and mythology of the krewe's channel along with the krewe's general interests.

Like many other aspects of krewe development, the exact rationale for krewe experience points varies from krewe to krewe. It may be the deathlords' influence seeping into the living world, or a mere abstraction of a krewe member's "off-camera" work to parley game events into lasting advantages. Some of these benefits are individual; if you buy them, your Sin-Eater gets them. Others require collective investment and benefit multiple krewe members.

Krewe Experience Awards

Give out krewe experience at the end of each story – not each chapter (or game session). Use the following guidelines:

1 point – Ethos: The character adhered to the krewe's ban or duty despite it being a significant disadvantage for her to do so.

1 point – Lore: The character learned something about the supernatural nature of death and the Underworld. This can be a broad bit of metaphysics, or a local mystery.

1 point – Loyalty: The character was generally loyal to her krewe in the face of adversity.

1 point – Mythic Bonds: The character's actions made significant use of the krewe channel's symbols, paralleled a story in the krewe's mythology, or used the krewe's metaphysics to a useful end.

1 point – Zeal: The character accomplished a positive action for the sake of her krewe – something she didn't *have* to do for the sake of survival or personal advancement alone. She recruited a new Sin-Eater into its ranks, for example, or uncovered traitors or political rivals that weren't originally on her agenda.

If one of these actions was especially significant, (or at the very least, came out of a memorable scene) the Storyteller should award 2 points, instead of 1. If one of these actions transformed the face of the chronicle, award 3 points. Don't give this extra award for more than one category.

If the Sin-Eater learns the secrets of multiple krewes by using a Codex or Mentor (see p 191), he suffers a 2-point penalty to krewe experience point earnings, reflecting his divided focus.

Tier One Benefits

All ceremonially consecrated krewes can partake of cult-level benefits, even if they grow beyond the tier. Some of these benefits are automatic. Others require Sin-Eaters to opt in, either by spending a mix of standard and krewe experience points, or by choosing to accept them. The specifics are listed with each benefit.

Founding Benefits

Only participants in the Krewe Binding can employ the following benefits.

Krewe Fate (Merit: • to •••••)

The founders of a krewe exercise subtle influence over its fate. They are closest to the krewe's channel, where it meets the powers of the Underworld. If a founder invests in this ability she can adjust the success or failure of others' actions in accord with the channel's mythology and ethos. Doing so is simple. The founder creates or brandishes a mythic symbol and spends a reflexive action concentrating. After that, events fall into place to assist or block the object of her attention.

Prerequisite: Krewe founder

Benefit: Founders may spend standard or krewe experience points (but not initial Merit dots) to build Krewe Fate collectively. Each dot in this merit provides a pool of "krewe destiny dice" at the rate of 2 dice per dot.

Founders who buy into the Merit can use dice to raise or lower the standard dice pools (that is, those with Attribute + Attribute or Attribute + Skill factors, including bonuses for Equipment or Psyche, if applicable) of any ceremonially-inducted member for the duration of one roll. The founder's player can make this conditional ("Apply the following 2 dice penalty if Vince attacks a member of the Devil-Eaten Krewe") and need not be anywhere near the target, but the player must spend dice for conditional expenditures ahead of time. If the target Sin-Eater never takes the action, the dice are wasted.

The founder can apply dice modifiers to other founders and any other ceremonially-inducted krewe member except for herself. Each founder's player can spend no more dice to modify a single roll than that Sin-Eater's Psyche. The entire pool is open to any founder who invests in it, however.

Drawback: If the founder spends dice to knowingly or unwittingly avoid the krewe's mythic destiny or violate its ethos (by spending dice to succeed in the face of the mythology's bane, or to act against its ban, for instance), the founder who provided the dice suffers a penalty to her actions equal to the entire Merit's *dots* (not the dice). This applies to the same dice pools the Merit can normally enhance, for

twice as many significant dice rolls (not casual rolls to sense trivia, or dice rolls that don't involve risks or story importance of any sort) as she modified during that chapter.

Mythic Aspect (Merit: ••••)

The founder taps into the Aspect behind his geist: the god in the ghost, the legendary ancestor within, or perhaps, the emissary of the deathlords.

Prerequisite: Krewe founder

Benefit: The geist transmits its Aspect's mythic abilities to the Sin-Eater. Pick one of the following benefits. This is a permanent choice, and you may not take this Merit twice for both benefits (or multiple times for any other reason).

Haunted Skill: Choose one Skill associated with the geist's Aspect. This is a permanent choice. Once per scene, you may spend one point of plasm instead of Willpower to add three dice to that skill. In Twilight, flows of ectoplasm shape themselves to assist the Sin-Eater; they become weird organic goggles to enhance Investigation for example, or ropes of external muscle to aid Athletics. In the visible world, minor, subtle signs of haunting help him in the same way.

Possessed by Excellence: Choose one Attribute associated with the geist's Aspect. This is a permanent choice. You may call on your geist to enhance it. You may spend one point of plasm to increase this Attribute by two dots for one turn. Alternately, you may spend three points of plasm instead to maintain the two-dot increase for a scene, or increase the Attribute by three dots for a single turn. You may not stack either option's benefits with multiple expenditures.

Invoking either version of this benefit is a reflexive action.

Drawback: By using the geist's Aspect, the Sin-Eater acknowledges that the geist isn't just a spiritual companion, but an authority – perhaps even a god. In any scene where the Sin-Eater exercises a Mythic Aspect, the player suffers a -2 penalty to Synergy rolls.

Flesh Fair (Merit: • to ••••)

When the founder calls other Sin-Eaters to his Haunt for a ritual gathering, it flares with power born of an enhanced connection to the Underworld. The classic Flesh Fair is a frenetic celebration of life surrounded by constant reminders of mortality.

Prerequisite: Krewe founder

Benefit: Add this Merit's dot rating to the Haunt's Fluidity rating when it hosts additional Sin-Eaters. The maximum benefit (and dot level the Sin-Eater can harness) is based on the number of Sin-Eaters in attendance:

| Additional Haunt Fluidity Dots | Minimum Number of Sin-Eaters |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • | 5 |
| •• | 10 |
| ••• | 20 |

The Flesh Fair can be a solemn ritual of remembrance or a raucous wake, but it must be a structured event that incorporates the krewe's values and symbolism that takes at least three hours to complete.

Supernatural Benefits

All members who have undergone the Krewe Binding can use the following benefits.

Deathsoul Initiation (Merit: •••• to ••••••)

The Sin-Eater binds an aspect of the Underworld to his soul. After this, he can unleash these energies, which duplicate the effects of a specific Manifestation and Key combination with a set number of dots. The Sin-Eater need not know the Manifestation or Key. Rather, he learns it from the presence of a krewe founder and the Aspect dwelling within her geist.

Prerequisite: See below

Benefits: The Deathsoul Initiation contains three ranks:

First Rank (•••; minimum Psyche •••): Choose one two-dot Manifestation from a krewe founder, and one •• dot Key from any other founder. The character can exercise one function of this Manifestation/Key combination at the two-dot rank – no higher and no lower, and not in conjunction with any other Manifestation or Key.

Second Rank (••••; minimum Psyche •••••): As above, but choose the same Manifestation and Key at three dots each.

Third Rank (•••••; minimum Psyche ••••••): As above, but choose the same Manifestation and Key at four dots each.

You must purchase Deathsoul Initiation ranks in order, for the same Manifestation and Key combination.

Drawbacks: In addition to standard costs, you must expend an additional point of plasm to use the Deathsoul's power. Sin-Eaters can only possess one Key Initiation at a time (see p. 188 for rules on abandoning this benefit).

Ethos Commitment (Opt-In Benefit)

The Sin-Eater commits to the krewe channel's ethos. This protects her from the moral and psychological consequences of her actions, but punishes her for straying from the krewe's doctrine.

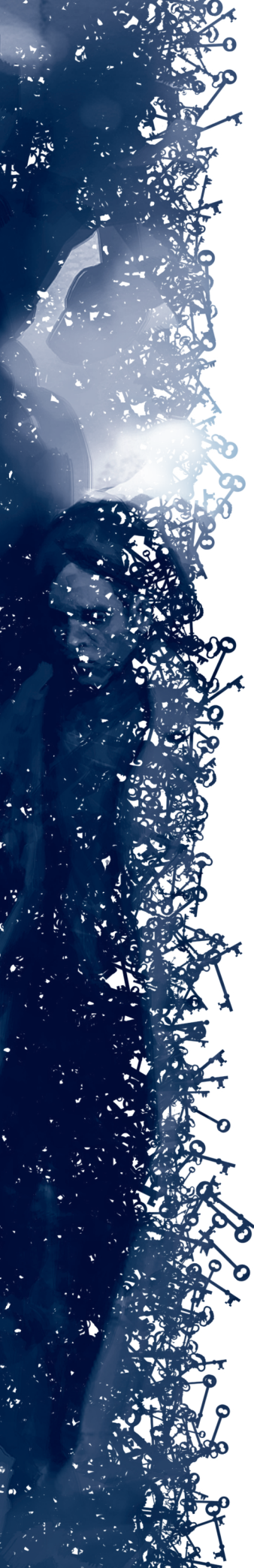
Benefit: The Sin-Eater's commitment overrides moral concerns and even if it's out of tune with her geist, it adheres to the supernatural structure of her channel. If she hits a discord trigger in the course of adhering to her ethos' duty, the player may reroll failed dice (as per the rote action benefit in the *World of Darkness* core rulebook) for her Synergy check.

Drawback: Violating the krewe ethos' ban brings harsh penalties. It always represents a Synergy 3 discord trigger, and might be worse if it would already be a trigger of 1 or 2. If it is, the Sin-Eater suffers a -2 penalty to rolls to avoid degeneration. Opting out of an Ethos Commitment is difficult as well. It costs 1 Willpower dot. This can be regained by spending 8 experience points.

No Sin-Eater can opt into more than one Ethos Commitment at a time.

Temporal Benefits

Anyone in good standing with the krewe can use these benefits and if necessary, purchases the prerequisite Merits.



Pooled Merits (Automatic)

As krew members learn to work together, they share personal connections, resources, and methods. This allows them to pool Merit dots.

Benefit: Krew member players may cooperatively spend Merit dots and experience points on the Allies, Contacts, and Resources Merits. The Merit dots can be used by the entire krew. You may purchase any of these Merits separately for a single Sin-Eater; in these cases, other krew members can't use the Merit.

Drawbacks: When a krew member uses one of the Merits, track how many dots it would take to accomplish the task. These Merit dots are "occupied" until the task is finished. Until then, the maximum number of dots other krew members can use is lessened by the number of dots that are occupied. For example, if Mara needs to buy something using Resources •• out of the krew's Resources ••••, any other krew member can only use Resources •• until the Merit's income refreshes.

If a krew member leaves, reduce all Merits by the dots she contributed. If it's possible to take some of the invested dots with her she does so. Otherwise, she loses those dots, but might replace them with other Merit dots at the Storyteller's discretion.

Finally, no more than 10 Sin-Eaters can make use of this benefit together. Beyond that point, faction-level temporal benefits apply instead.

Tier Two Benefits

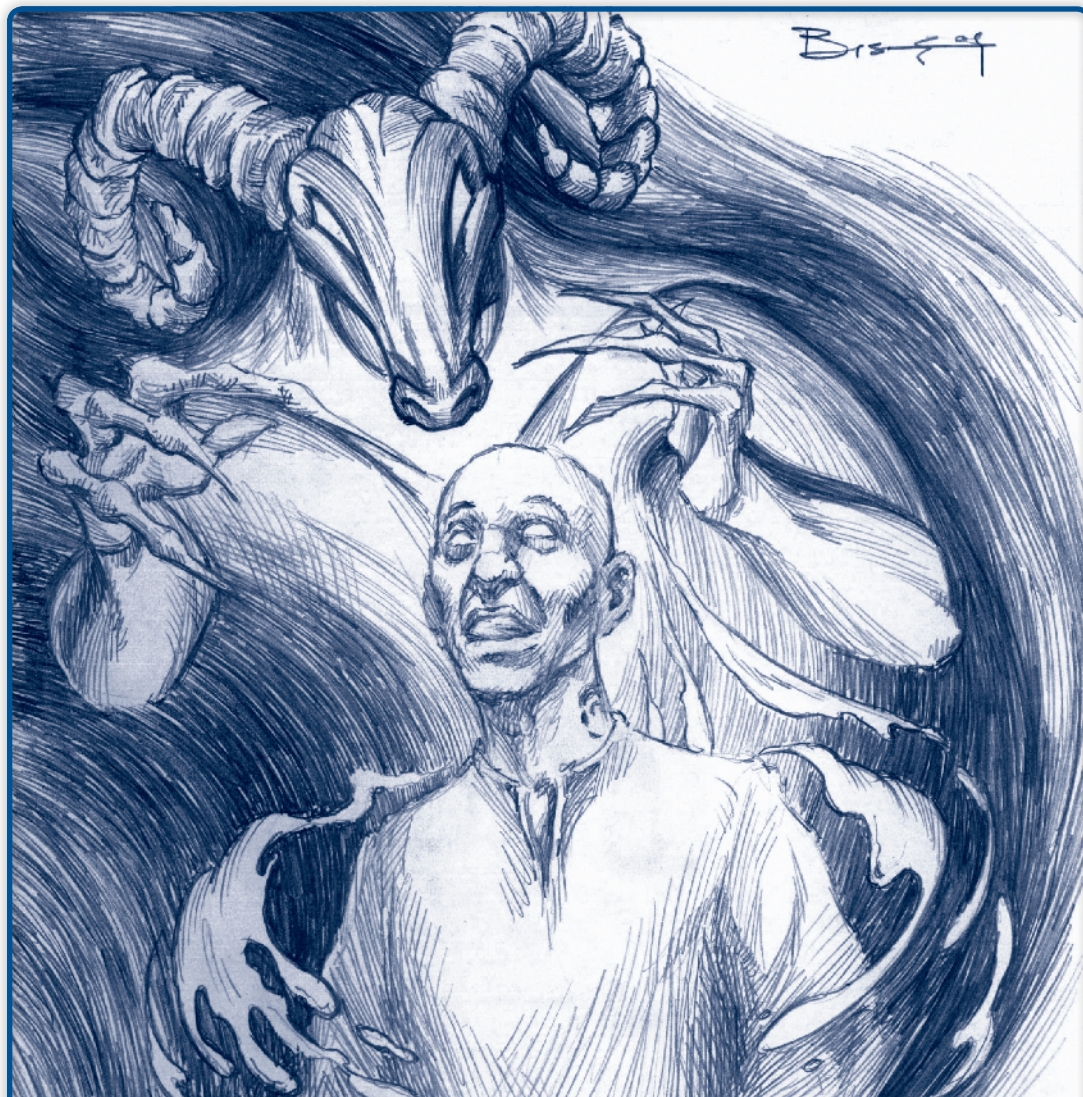
When a krew grows into a faction capable of dominating a large region, its impact is felt by almost every other local Sin-Eater and ghost, along with almost everyone who comes into contact with the Sin-Eater subculture. Size is more than a social or material advantage, however. The krew founders' geists develop stronger Aspects. As its Sin-Eaters work under a common purpose, they unlock supernatural secrets that small cults lack the personnel and combined will to discover.

Founding Benefits

As for cults, only participants in the Krew Binding can employ the following benefits. In Tier Two krews, founders transform from the face of collective decision making to formal representatives, bosses, or senior priests, holding sway over entire cities of ghosts and Sin-Eaters.

Mythic Avatar (Merit: •••••)

The Sin-Eater acquires the power to physically merge with his geist's Aspect, becoming a half-divine being from one perspective, or a half dead monster, from another.



Prerequisites: Founder of a Tier Two Krewe, Mythic Aspect, Psyche 5

Benefits: Plasm erupts from your Sin-Eater. It envelops and merges with him, transforming him into a being with the following characteristics:

- +2 to Stamina and Presence and +4 to one Attribute associated with the Aspect's nature. An Aspect of love might lend the bonus to Manipulation, while an Aspect of war could add it to Strength. If the favored Attribute is Stamina or Presence, he gains a + 5 bonus to that Attribute instead of a stacked +2 and + 4.
- The Sin-Eater's unarmed attacks inflict lethal damage. The method varies by Aspect. His hands could be wreathed in flame, or possess wickedly sharp talons.
- The Sin-Eater doesn't suffer from wound penalties.
- The Sin-Eater can freely interact with anything in Twilight.

Your character activates this power by spending 3 plasm and 1 Willpower. He can hold this Avatar form for a number of turns equal to his Psyche + Composure.

Drawback: Like Mythic Aspect, using this ability involves giving oneself up to a geist. The Sin-Eater suffers a penalty of -2 to Synergy rolls while channeling the Avatar.

Sending Forth the Aspect (Merit: •••••)

The Sin-Eater can send her geist's Aspect to inhabit the geist of any ceremonially inducted member of the krewe whose geist does not possess a native Aspect itself. The target's geist takes on the Aspect, and that geist's Sin-Eater acquires a mix of advantages and disadvantages. The target's geist becomes a version of the Aspect, colored by its own nature. It may interpret the Aspect in strange ways and afterward, may become disturbed or even enraged at the imposition.

Prerequisite: Founder of a Tier Two Krewe

Benefits: The target must be within the Sin-Eater's line of sight, and the Sin-Eater must spend 1 Willpower point and score five successes at an extended Resolve + Composure + Psyche roll, making rolls at intervals of one turn. The target Sin-Eater can resist with his own Resolve + Composure + Psyche roll. If he scores five successes before the founder loses all of her accumulated successes vanish and must spend another Willpower point and start from scratch. The transfer lasts for one hour per success.

If the founder scores the necessary successes, the transferred Aspect has the following effects:

- The target can use the founder's Keys at a cost of 1 more plasm point than usual. The founder senses when this occurs and can deny the use of this ability as a reflexive action.
- The founder can use his Keys *through* the target Sin-Eater. She can only employ Manifestations that both Sin-Eaters have in common, though at the founder's level of ability – but she can attack or manipulate the target with these powers, if she desires, or use them in ways the target disapproves of. This is an instant action for the founder, but is not an action for the target.

- The target and founder can communicate through the Aspect. It relays messages in the mind's eye. These can include speech and sensory information, but not information that any party wants to keep hidden, or information held in the subconscious. This is a reflexive action.

Drawback: The founder must concentrate to maintain the transferred Aspect. If he is injured, forced to engage in combat, or uses a Manifestation or ceremony, or suffers some other serious distraction, the transfer ends.

Death Rite (Merit: • to •••••)

The Sin-Eater knows how to set himself up as a priest, guru, or spiritual artist who transforms the worship of the living into raw plasm.

Prerequisites: Founder of a Tier Two krewe, Flesh Fair Merit.

Benefit: If the Sin-Eater gathers people to perform or devote attention to a ceremony, he turns the place in which it happens into a temporary Haunt. Like the Flesh Fair, the Death Rite draws on the krewe's channel, including its mythology and ethos, and like it, it can be a serious religious ritual or a frenetic, death-themed rave. The key is sincerity. The participants must be there of their own free will and be open to the idea that something meaningful is happening. They don't need to know an occult rite is going on.

The Death Rite takes at least three hours to perform. The character's Merit dots govern the greatest Haunt (specifically, in terms of Haunt fluidity; see p. 88) he can create. So do the number of attendees, according to the following table:

| Maximum Haunt | Minimum Number of People |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| • | 10 |
| •• | 50 |
| ••• | 100 |
| •••• | 500 |
| ••••• | 1000 |

After the Death Rite, the temporary Haunt gradually fades, losing one dot of Haunt fluidity per hour.

Drawback: A Death Rite's benefits don't stack with a normal Haunt, but do stack with the Flesh Fair Merit.

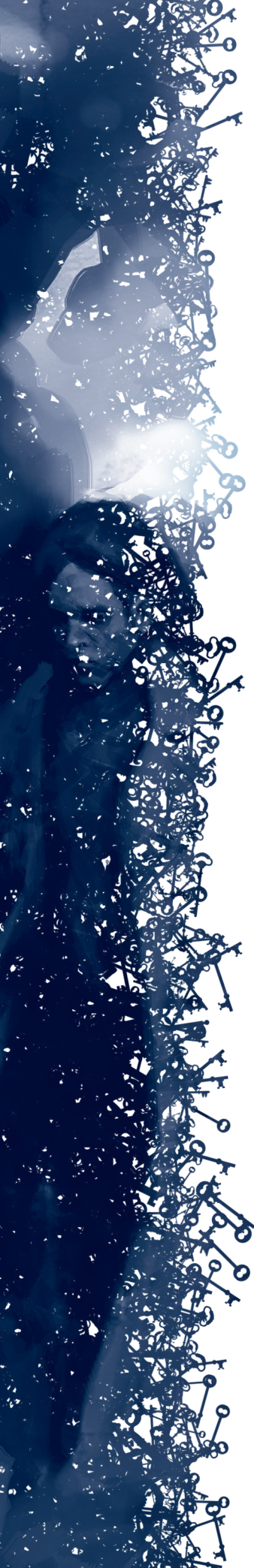
Supernatural Benefits

With more eyes and ears looking out for the unknown, more Sin-Eaters entrusting secrets to each other in the krewe, and the persistent, eldritch influence of many souls tuned to the same channel of power, a faction discovers new supernatural gifts.

Key Initiation (Opt-In)

The krewe understands one Key as deeply as individual Sin-Eaters understand the Keys of their Thresholds. By contemplating the krewe's channel and the efforts of his allies, the Sin-Eater can adopt this Key as his own.

Unfortunately, the process of learning the Key leaves a mark on the Sin-Eater's personality and soul. Sometimes, it even has physical effects. The exact reasons for this vary from krewe to



krewe. One krewe has a rite that horribly scars every member. Another krewe's geists assail them with deeply symbolic nightmares every night, until the truth of the Key erupts within them. This causes a curse or flaw of some kind – it varies from krewe to krewe. Fortunately, Key Initiation is optional; not every Sin-Eater delves into their krewe's esoterica. No Sin-Eater can learn this benefit multiple times for multiple Keys.

Prerequisite: Ceremonially-invested member of a Tier Two krewe

Benefit: Select one Key per krewe. This Key must belong to one of the krewe's founders, and is chosen according to how well it would suit the krewe's channel. The Sin-Eater can learn this Key without a teacher, and pays the same experience point costs to learn it as a character who gains the Key as part of his Threshold.

Drawback: Sin-Eaters can only possess one Key Initiation at a time. Initiation produces a Flaw unique to every member of the krewe who has this benefit. Players and Storytellers should work together to create a suitable Flaw. We recommend the following:

Derangement: Initiated Sin-Eaters gain a signature major derangement. This is permanent, and can't be suppressed with a Synergy increase or ordinary psychotherapy.

Empowered Bane: Choose one relatively rare item or substance that symbolizes the bane in the krewe's destiny (including something made of common substances that is difficult to prepare). If the item is worked into a weapon, it causes aggravated damage to initiated krewe members. Its presence on the Sin-Eater's person or his target's person imposes a -2 penalty to Manifestation dice pools. The bane can mutate over time – especially if it gets too common or rare.

Weakened Attribute: Choose one Attribute. When initiated Sin-Eaters uses dice pools that involve the Attribute, they do not gain the 10-again benefit. In addition, 1s rolled on these dice pools subtract successes from each roll.

Temporal Benefits

When a krewe reaches the next tier, the power of its social network increases exponentially. Sin-Eaters don't have to manage every living contact, every bank account number, or every neighborhood rival who steps up for a piece of the action. There are enough krewe members to maintain constant contact with everyone and supervise more ambitious projects. The downside to this is the krewe is no longer an intimate group of companions. It's a mix of mob, cult, business, and political lobbies. Members aren't necessarily close associates any more. A more formal pecking order evolves. For this reason, the Krewe Status Merit below becomes a mandatory fact of krewe politics.

Krewe Status (Automatic Merit: • to •••••)

A krewe's hierarchy starts with friendships, intimate alliances, and a shared history, but when it grows into a faction, things get less personal. Reputation grows from a means to an end in of itself. Some krewes develop higher mysteries and rites of ascension, but more just use rumors to determine who their most respected members are.

Prerequisite: Krewe member or ally

Benefit: This is a version of the Status Merit in the *World of Darkness* core book, and has the same effects as the Merit in that book when applied to the krewe.

Every member of the krewe in good standing automatically earns one dot of this Merit when the krewe reaches Tier Two size. Krewe founders gain an additional free dot. After that, events during the chronicle will cause Status to rise and fall due to the decisions of high Status members and the general sentiments of all krewe members. New members might not start with Krewe Status, indicating that they're probationary members, but ceremonial membership automatically confers one dot for free.

Drawback: Like other Status Merits, you can lose dots for failing to do your duty or falling out of favor with a krewe member of a higher Status.

Enhanced Merit (Automatic)

In a faction-level krewe, every loyal member regularly cooperates on common interests – or at least, the objectives laid down by the krewe's leaders. This makes certain Merits more potent, because a member seeking them out doesn't need to rely solely on her own efforts, or on those of her immediate clique. Instead, people help her because of her krewe's reputation, or the krewe sets aside a surplus of its money or connections for any member to use.

Prerequisite: Status (Krewe) ••

Benefit: Pick one Merit from the following: Allies, Contacts, Mentor, Resources, and Status (in a normal, human organizations) only. The choice applies to the entire krewe. If you purchase at least one dot on this Merit, the Sin-Eater earns a number of bonus dots equal to half of her Krewe Status, rounded up: one bonus dot at Krewe Status •, two at Krewe Status •• and three bonus dots at Krewe Status •••••.

Drawbacks: This Merit does not stack with Pooled Merits. If there's any overlap the player must choose one benefit or the other.

This benefit cannot raise a character's total dots in a Merit beyond five.

Tier Three Benefits

A conspiracy-level krewe has members throughout a substantial part of the world. Component cliques

and fellowships all respect a common channel, including its ethics, mythology, and founders. The krewe is large enough to entertain distinct schools of thought within its ranks: interpretations of the core channel. These krewes were probably hotbeds of internal politicking, which might be why none are known to still exist. There are always rumors, however, of lone Sin-Eaters with secret initiations, or agents scattered throughout lesser krewes, operating on behalf of a distant leadership. Even if none of these theories are true, the players' krewe might attain this kind of power, and change the core setting of **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**.

Founding Benefits

When the krewe blossoms into a Tier Three conspiracy, its founders tap into members' collective commitment to the channel. Their geists Aspects grow even more prominent; some say they become new deathlords, and that the will of the Underworld, and not Sin-Eaters, truly rule the krewe. The following benefits are available:

Forge Key (Opt-In)

A Tier Three krewe founder can create new Keys by delving deep into his krewe's channel, searching for the correct insights and experimenting with them through his own Manifestations.

Prerequisites: Psyche 6, two Manifestations at ••••• dots, founder of a Tier Three krewe

Benefit: To create a new Key, you must purchase each dot as if buying a Key that's foreign to your character's Threshold, but with two restrictions. First, you can only buy these dots with krewe experience points – not standard experience. Second, to purchase the first dot, you must acquire some of the necessary krewe experience points by journeying to the Underworld. This journey is usually for the express purpose of learning how to craft the Key, but the Storyteller may allow exceptions if it suits unfolding events.

Once the Sin-Eater masters the fifth dot of the Key, other Sin-Eaters in the krewe may use the Key Initiation benefit to learn it, or your Sin-Eater may teach it normally. Most krewe founders prefer to keep their unique Keys inside the krewe, however, and rarely teach them to outsiders.

The Storyteller and player work together to design the systems for each Key, using existing Keys and their play experiences to guide them. The Key should represent a type of ability implicit in the krewe's channel. A krewe concerned with morality might inspire a Key linked to ethical conduct, while one devoted to cosmic secrets may use darkness and light, or astrology to guide its development.

Revenance (Merit: •••••)

Through its Aspect, the founder's geist is capable of resurrecting its host, and constantly animates it to a degree. The Aspect serves as a medium by which the geist channels powers it normally cannot access. Of course, it infuses a part of its mythic form into the founder; the Sin-Eaters independence erodes every time he comes back.

Prerequisites: Psyche 6, founder of a Tier Three krewe
Benefits: This Merit brings a founder back to life as though his geist resurrected him, but with one important exception. The founder's maximum Psyche does not decrease (though he does lose a Psyche dot as usual). It takes just one scene (or about an hour) for the founder to return to life. In the interim, he appears truly dead. His body must be somewhat intact. Missing limbs and organs may return, but if the body is reduced to ash or otherwise bereft of most of its human form, the power doesn't work. The founder also stops aging, though this presents its own complications.

Drawbacks: The founder loses a point of Synergy when he comes back to life and his maximum Synergy decreases by a point. Someone else dies in the founder's place, as with the usual self-resurrection.

The founder also no longer ages, but physical wear and tear affects his body. Every decade past the age of 100 reduces the character's *permanent* health points by one. The founder can get around this by voluntarily "resurrecting" himself, at which point his current and maximum Synergy depletes as usual.

Lastly, this Merit does not function against the event that caused the Sin-Eater's original Threshold, as long as it somewhat resembles the specific circumstances of his brush with death. A founder with Revenance who almost died of a stabbing can't return to life after another fatal stab wound, for example.

Supernatural Benefits

A Tier Three krewe's substantial resources include raw psychic power. So many Sin-Eaters focus on a common channel that Death itself seems to take notice. Events warp to seemingly confirm the krewe's mythology – or perhaps Sin-Eaters are so thoroughly immersed in the ways of their cult that everything only seems that way. Whatever the truth, the krewe's unique brand of necromantic power is a powerful influence, leading to the following possible benefits:

Mythic Aspect (Merit: •••••)

Any Tier Three Sin-Eater can take on a Mythic Aspect, just as if he was a krewe founder, with one exception: the Aspect must belong to one of the founders. It can't be a unique Aspect. In this way, the character's geist becomes bound to the founder's – in a sense, it is an incarnation of the founder's geist.

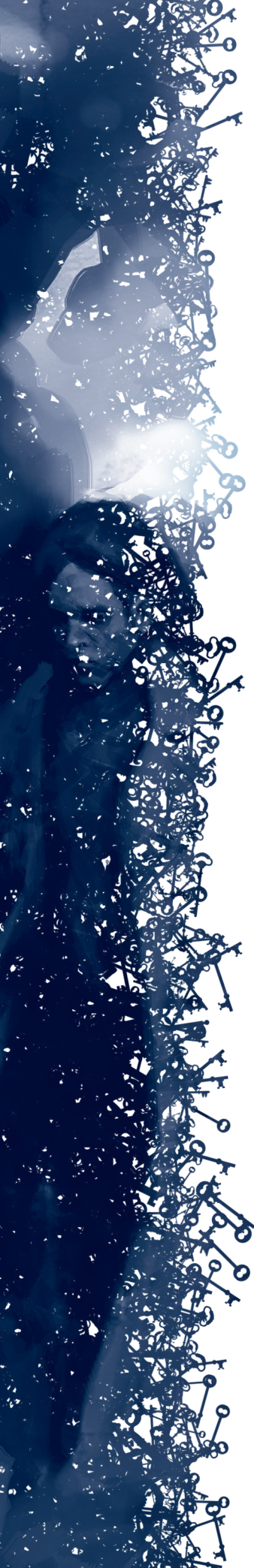
Prerequisite: Ceremonially-inducted member of a Tier Three krewe

Benefit: As listed for the Mythic aspect Merit on p 185.

Drawback: As listed for the Mythic aspect Merit on p 185. In addition, the founder who shares the Sin-Eater's Aspect can share his sensory perceptions if he has met the Sin-Eater before. If they should come into conflict, the Sin-Eater with the higher Resolve + Psyche enjoys a +2 dice bonus to Manifestations directed at the Sin-Eater with the lower total.

Mythic Factors (Merit: • to •••••)

After ceremonial induction, the Sin-Eater can channel his krewe's channel into exceptionally potent Manifestations. She



learns the correct symbols, meditations, and ritual acts to perfect her connection to the Underworld.

Prerequisite: Ceremonially inducted member of a Tier Three krew

Benefits: The Sin-Eater can exercise a number of benefits by acting in ritual accord with his krew's channel. These benefits are called *factors*, and have a one to five dot rating. The character accumulates a factor rating based on actions and symbols consistent with her krew's channel. The more effort that's required, the better the factor is rated.

The following table outlines the prerequisites for a factor of a particular rating. The listed examples are not the only ones available; the player and Storyteller should use them as benchmarks. The Sin-Eater can't use a factor rated higher than his dots in this Merit.

| Factor Rating | Difficulty Required |
|---------------|---|
| • | <i>Trivial Effort:</i> The Sin-Eater gestures with a portable, general symbol of the krew's mythology, or sacrifices something minor like whisky or Chinese "hell money" by spoiling or burning it. |
| •• | <i>Minor Effort:</i> The Sin-Eater invokes a mythic Aspect with an incantation, delaying the Manifestation by a turn, or uses a mythic symbol that was prepared for this Manifestation alone. |
| ••• | <i>Significant Effort:</i> The Sin-Eater destroys a ritually prepared object or an enemy's shed blood, sprinkled in a particular way. |
| •••• | <i>Major Effort:</i> The Sin-Eater ritually wounds himself, suffering a point of lethal damage, or uses up or otherwise spoils an elaborate, cumbersome symbol, such as a design in salt or sand. |
| ••••• | <i>Extreme Effort:</i> The Sin-Eater destroys a •• dot Memento Mori or better, cuts off one of his own digits or performs some other exceptional act. |

If the Sin-Eater successfully uses a factor, he enjoys a number of dots in benefits equal to the factor's rating. These can be either one or multiple benefits whose total equals the factor rating. Each benefit listed under a given rating has an independent cost. The benefits are:

| Factor Rating | Benefits |
|---------------|---|
| • | +1 die; 9-again benefit |
| •• | +2 dice; 8-again benefit; recover 1 plasm |
| ••• | +3 dice; +1 automatic success if the Manifestation succeeds at all; recover 2 plasm |
| •••• | Rote benefit (re-roll failed dice); recover 1 Willpower |

point; +2 automatic successes if the Manifestation succeeds at all; recover 3 plasm
•••••
+3 automatic successes if the Manifestation succeeds at all; regain 1 Willpower

Drawback: If the Sin-Eater breaks his channel's Ban, he cannot use Mythic Factors in that scene or the next scene in which he uses a Manifestation for any meaningful purpose.

Temporal Benefits

Legions of Sin-Eaters working together allow the krew to accumulate incredible wealth, political connections, and numerous other perks. Every krew member still has to put some effort towards their common influence but when they do, the benefits can be considerable.

Merit Mastery (Automatic)

Thanks to the efforts of your character's fellow krew members, she can easily build mundane ties or make use of special resources. These benefits are hers alone, but the krew's groundwork makes it possible for her to earn them much faster than normal.

Prerequisite: Krew Status • in a Tier Three krew

Benefit: Choose three Merits from the following: Allies, Contacts, Mentor, Resources, Retainer, and Status (in mundane organizations). All members of the krew may purchase these Merits at half the standard experience point cost. This benefit does not apply to Merit dots used in character creation.

Drawback: This Merit does not stack with Pooled Merits. If there's any overlap the player must choose one benefit or the other.

Krew Evolution

Krewes are not static institutions. They grow, shrink, and divide over time. Founders die; successors take their place. Sin-Eaters develop their own ideas in isolation, or in conflicts ranging from polite arguments to brutal street battles. Furthermore, the division between tiers isn't absolute. The Storyteller shouldn't just look for a magic number to hit before allowing next-tier benefits. Look at the krew's actions and influence on their territory first.

Shifting Alliances and Changing Fortunes

Once a Sin-Eater's been ceremonially inducted into a krew, nobody else can deprive her of its Supernatural Benefits, even if she's expelled later on. It's

easier to cut off Temporal Benefits; just spread the word around and she loses access to extra Merit dots. Adjust them to fit the experience points the player actually spent.

Nobody can take her powers away — but she can choose to give some of them up by ceremonially joining or founding another krewe. If she does so, she loses access to Supernatural Benefits that explicitly rely on the krewe’s mythology or ethos to function. In this book, that includes the Ethos Commitment, Mythic Aspect, and Mythic Factors benefits. In addition, as the Sin-Eater may want to renew her study of the Underworld, she may choose to abandon Supernatural Benefits like the Deathsoul Initiation and Key Initiation, as they each can only be acquired. This is an optional, voluntary act, usually marked by a private ritual where she symbolically casts off her old associations. In that case, the player gets back half the invested experience points to put toward Supernatural Benefits for her new krewe — they can’t be used for any other reason.

Note that a krewe founder *can’t* leave her krewe — she is the krewe. If she abandons her krewe and starts another, it’s technically a branch of her old krewe, except that its access to Temporal Benefits is based on the size of the faction.

Once any other Sin-Eater abandons her old krewe for a new one, use the standard systems for the new krewe, keeping in mind that some of the Supernatural Benefits she’s retained make her ineligible for equivalents found in the new krewe. She has full access to the new krewe’s slate of Temporal Benefits, and if she founded the krewe, can acquire new Founding Benefits as well.

One last area for concern is what happens when a krewe shrinks down a tier. Members lose the old tier’s Temporal Benefits, and recalculate their Merits and other traits for the new tier. With the exception of founders, members who joined at the old tier retain and can even improve Supernatural and Benefits from that tier, but cannot learn new Supernatural Benefits. Newcomers who join the krewe can’t acquire benefits from the lost tier at all. Founders lose nothing, and have full access to every Founding or Supernatural Benefit possible from the height of the krewe’s power. A fallen founder is still dangerous, and can induct successors that are just as potent.

Beyond the Tier

The systems for benefits by tier aren’t just designed to encourage krewes to grow, but to maintain an aura of ever-deeper mystery. Larger krewes join forces to unlock Death’s greater secrets. Members drink from a common well of knowledge and use it to build power among the living and the dead. Founders suck in everything their network unveils and get a clearer picture of their geists’ Aspects and the Underworld’s secrets — but sometimes, they seem to act less human as they earn this wisdom.

On the other hand, raw numbers don’t count for everything. A small krewe can make up for a lack of numbers with dedication and wisdom, surpassing the normal limits of their tier. Optionally, Storytellers may let Sin-Eaters earn Founding and Supernatural Benefits (but not Temporal Benefits — you do need raw numbers for those) beyond the tier restrictions using one of the methods described below.

Mentor

Any Sin-Eater can learn Supernatural Benefits from any krewe founder (but not a krewe member of any other sort) who knows them. If the founder also makes her student a successor to the krewe’s channel, she can pass on Founding Benefits as well. In this fashion, a fallen Tier Three Krewe can continue as a mentor/student lineage, as long as at some point in the past, it all came from a grand conspiracy.

In game terms, this kind of Mentor should be a three-dot Merit to teach Tier Two Benefits, or a four-dot Merit to teach Tier Three Benefits.

Codex (Merit: ••• or •••••)

The Sin-Eater uncovers a cache of secret lore left by a surviving or extinct krewe from a higher tier. For just over 200 years, krewes have commonly called these caches Codices, after the traditional, Western scholarly name for books from native Mesoamerican cultures. (Modern Sin-Eaters in the Americas often borrow from these traditional cultures, so their historical codices have been important inspirations for krewes with an academic bent.) Not every Codex is a book; some are collections of grave goods, sculptures, or even special corpses.

A Codex can also be a memento (see p. 192). If this is the case, add the dots of both Merits to come up with a combined total.

Prerequisite: Ceremonially-inducted krewe member.

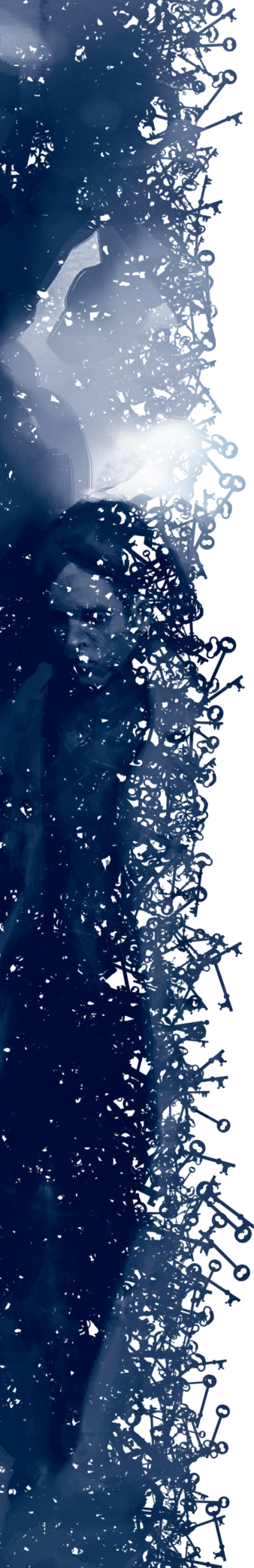
Benefit: The ••• dot version of this Merit teaches Tier Two Supernatural Benefits, while the ••••• dot version teaches Tier Two and Three Supernatural Benefits. The specifics of these benefits are selected from a current or extinct krewe that recorded its knowledge.

Drawback: A Codex’s benefits do not progress from the Sin-Eater’s existing krewe benefits unless they come from some larger ancestral version of his own krewe. Merits and other benefits must be acquired separately from duplicates the Sin-Eater has already mastered. They do not count as prerequisites for higher-tier benefits.

The Line of Succession

Krewe founders can never relieve themselves of their status, but they can choose successors — or would-be successors can choose them. To voluntarily select a successor, the founder sacrifices a *dot* of Psyche.

This missing Psyche dot can’t be recovered unless the chosen successor dies, so it also reduces the founder’s maximum Psyche by one dot. If a successor has a serious falling out with the founder, his days may be numbered; the founder will probably want that bit of power back, and won’t want his position transferring to someone he hates. A founder can choose multiple successors by spending one dot of Psyche on each of them, but this is a sufficiently serious sacrifice that it’s rarely done. In these situations, the founder selects a line of succession. The first living character in the line gains the benefits of succession when the founder dies.



This shard of power represents the unique bond between the founder and his geist. Upon the founder's death, a Sin-Eater successor inherits his geist's Aspect. This doesn't provide an immediate boost in power, but does give the successor access to Founding Benefits and the krewe's Supernatural Benefits, whether or not the character is a recognized member of the krewe.

Innocent Successors

The founder can also choose normal humans as successors. There are even legends of founders selecting the unborn as successors, including future incarnations. The truth of this is left to the Storyteller. If the chosen successor is a normal human being, she will become a Sin-Eater. Destiny will make it so. Once the new Sin-Eater has a brush with death, she bonds with the founder's geist, and accrues all the benefits any other Sin-Eater successor would. She is not necessarily aware of her position, but in many cases, the geist will guide her to her new duties.

Furthermore, if the founder dies without marking a successor, his geist can select one by bonding to a new Sin-Eater. This is rarely done. Some geists abandon the idea of bonding with a Sin-Eater after their experience with the founder, and it's said that some grow powerful enough to become deathlords. They graduate from the avatars of death gods to the gods themselves.

Hostile Successors

There's another way to become a founder's successor. If a founder has no supernaturally designated successors, the Sin-Eater can *devour* that power. A founder's body is suffused with the power of his krewe. Some Sin-Eaters advocate eating the brain and others the heart, but all that seems to be required is a substantial amount of soft tissue — enough for the belly to feel heavy with human meat. Until a successor takes up the mantle the founder's body has this property for as long as a significant amount of soft tissue survives. Theoretically, a prehistoric Sin-Eater preserved in ice could carry the secrets of some ancient death tradition.

Sin-Eaters do not know exactly why a founder's flesh has this characteristic. Experienced necromancers speculate that the soft parts mystically represent life itself, and remain saturated with a connection to the founder's krewe channel in the way that

certain objects hold a powerful pull over ghosts. In this conception, the krewe, as an abstract entity, is a ghost of a sort: a mythology of the dead, giving life by an essential mortal connection.

Mementos

A plain, brown leather jacket with an old stain on one sleeve pulses with dark energy to those that can see it, a straight razor winks into existence long enough to cut soft flesh, a water-stained transistor taken from a radio hangs from a keychain and still smells faintly of bathwater and ozone. All of these items, these memento mori, shine with an aura of death: witness to accident, to violence, to despair.

Every Sin-Eater is a collector, of sorts, and the items that form their collections come with a history of death. They call these items mementos, something of a reference to the phrase *memento mori* — literally, "Remember your death." To Sin-Eaters, these objects function as more than a reminder of death; they serve as ceremonial tool and badge of office, and are a physical link between the dead and the living. Most mementos are created as an accidental byproduct of proximity to death and some are more intimately involved. A spent bullet casing from the gun of a gangbanger that sprays lead into a crowd, killing an innocent bystander and enemy alike can become a memento. An axe used by a madman to slaughter his family is forged by rage and pain into a memento. A wooden bar from a cradle where a baby quietly turned blue from suffocation absorbs the passing of innocent life and the sharp edge of grief from the horrified parents. Other mementos are intentionally created from the animate dead. Restless ghosts are pressed into service by Sin-Eaters that have captured their anchors and performed mystic Ceremonies binding that ghost to service.

Mementos come in different shapes and forms. Keystone mementos are a physical representation of the bond between geist and Sin-Eater. Deathmasks are the solid remains of a geist that has been destroyed, while fetter mementos are created from the anchors of ghosts. Vanitas are *memento mori* that a Sin-Eater creates himself as a rumination on the very nature of his own inevitable demise. Charms are lesser mementos that contain the unformed energy of death, and memorabilia are near-

KREWES WITHOUT FOUNDERS

What happens to a krewe that loses all of its founders? Very little. Supernatural Benefits accrue as usual. Abilities that require founders do not function, but the krewe's Aspects still have power, even if they aren't embodied by a geist. Supernatural Benefits that pick and choose from the founder's Manifestations and Keys still work, but use powers that former founders possessed.

Some krewes stage revolutions in their ranks and execute their founders — and those founders' successors, if they dare to reveal themselves. There's no taboo against this in the broader Sin-Eater culture, as long as the victims deserved to die — and Sin-Eaters have no trouble imagining situations where people need killing.

legendary objects with the essence of a Charm, but with a tie to a famous (or infamous) person, place, or event.

All mementos share a few general rules. A memento must be actively wielded to be used or, in the case of large mementos, at least touched. Contact with the memento establishes the necessary conduit through which a Sin-Eater can benefit from the use of the object. Any single action can only benefit from the use of a single memento. A character can't attempt to stack bonuses from multiple mementos.

Infused with death, mementos are stronger than the materials they are composed of. *Memento mori* add their Merit rating to their Durability (which in turn increases Structure). A destroyed memento loses all the dark energies it once contained and becomes just another piece of broken junk. See the Memento Merit (p. 89) for dot rating information.

Keystones

Every Sin-Eater has visited that gray boundary that exists between life and death. It's in that timeless place that he was visited by a geist and his weak flesh was propped up with spiritual strength. As part of the bonding process between geist and human, the Sin-Eater is given a gift to symbolize the bond. This gift is a keystone memento — nothing less than the unbeating heart of the geist. It is a physical manifestation of the geist's past and the key to its power. The act of offering this precious object to a Sin-Eater is a declaration of empowerment, the handshake of a partnership and, in part, a demonstration of submission. Without a body to walk and talk, and provide a physical anchor for them, a geist is little more than an exceptionally powerful ghost. By offering up its keystone, the geist acknowledges the value of the human with whom it has bonded.

Each keystone is different and the form it takes bears direct significance to the history of the geist, even if the geist can't remember exactly why that might be. The waterlogged specter of a geist, dripping with seaweed, its face a craggy mass of scars, might not remember why its keystone is a polished, ivory tusk, but that in no way diminishes the power of the memento. More often than not, though, the connection between a geist and its keystone at least seems obvious. The keystone of the Burning Woman — a geist that appears only as a mass of twisting flame and the scent of burnt flesh — is an ever-burning torch that can't be extinguished by any known means. The keystone of a geist with the sunken features of a starvation victim is a wooden plate, upon which any food placed instantly rots and decays.

Keystones have a Threshold and two Keys that relate to the geist of which they are a part. These signifiers present an opportunity to more fully flesh out how the keystone relates to the geist and to the Sin-Eater to which it now belongs. The ever-burning torch of the Burning Woman has the Threshold of Death by Violence along with the Elemental and Passion Keys. What this indicates about the Burning Woman is that she was the victim (or perhaps the perpetrator) of violence (the Torn), relating to the use of fire (Pyre-Flame) and was either possessed of, or the target of, strong emotions (Passion). Likely, the Sin-Eater that has bonded with the Burn-

ing Woman shares one or more of these signifiers, even if she didn't before. The Threshold and Keys needn't exactly match those of the geist or the Sin-Eater, but like attracts like. Sin-Eaters that enact Manifestations that share a Key with the keystone gain a +3 bonus to the roll.

Ephemeral Objects

Although technically given over to their Sin-Eater during the bonding process, keystones are generally kept safely in Twilight as part of the geist. Sin-Eaters can retrieve a keystone from Twilight with a thought (reflexive action) and returning a keystone to the geist is nearly as easy (instant action). A Sin-Eater isn't under any compulsion to return a keystone to her geist and may keep it as long as she likes. While in the flesh, so to speak, keystone mementos are easily recognizable by other Sin-Eaters, geists, and even ghosts for what they are. The almost palpable aura of death that surrounds a keystone is unmistakable as anything else. In this way, keystones act as something of an identifier among Sin-Eaters. Anyone could potentially own a deathmask (see below), but only Sin-Eaters become resonate with an active keystone, which signifies the presence of a geist.

As has been stated, keystones generally exist in a state of Twilight, part and parcel of the geist of which it is a part. When a Sin-Eater retrieves a keystone, he forces it to manifest in a physical form. The transformation from intangible to physical is instantaneous, but does come with some drawbacks. Most keystone mementos are small objects (Size 1 or 2) that have no difficulty making the transition. Larger keystones lack the ability to become completely solid for anyone except the Sin-Eater to which it belongs. Keystones of Size 3 or larger (maximum of Size 12) are completely ephemeral to anyone other than their Sin-Eater owner. The keystone can be seen, heard, and even smelled by anyone that could normally interact with it, but remains as solid as smoke. Only the owning Sin-Eater can interact with the keystone as though it were a physical object.

This obstacle can be temporarily overcome by reinforcing the structure of the keystone with plasm. A Sin-Eater can force a complete manifestation of a large keystone for one scene as an instant action by spending a point of plasm. Keystones that are made to manifest in this way may not exist in the same place as another physical object until they are fully formed (i.e. a Sin-Eater couldn't solidify the keystone through another person or object). Manifested keystones come to rest in a natural position that obeys the laws of physics, so while it is possible to manifest a large keystone in such a way so that it will become unbalanced and fall on an enemy, Storytellers should require an opposed Intelligence + Science versus Wits + Composure roll to do so. Fully solid keystones have the same Structure and Durability as other, similar objects and if they are destroyed will return to Twilight. Keystones that are violently returned to Twilight may not be retrieved again until the end of the current scene.

It should be noted that keystones are bound to a Sin-Eater and her geist by more than just physical proximity. It is impossible to steal a keystone or for a Sin-Eater to misplace or lose a keystone as long as she retains her bond with her geist. Manifested

keystones can be destroyed (as described above), but that only denies the use of the keystone to the Sin-Eater for a single scene. Keystones that are somehow misplaced by their owner can be recalled to hand as a reflexive action, similar to the manner in which a Sin-Eater retrieves a keystone from Twilight. Only the keystone mementos of geists that have been defeated and destroyed (see deathmasks below) can be stolen, traded, or lost.

Ritual Tools and Shared Intelligence

The presence of a keystone memento acts as a powerful tool for ceremonies (see p. 150). The memento helps a Sin-Eater to channel and direct the energies necessary for performing a ceremony, partially by subconsciously drawing on the knowledge of her geist. This is a much more subtle display of power by the geist than shown during Manifestations and relies more on the abilities of the Sin-Eater than those of the geist. Ceremonies are tactile experiences that draw on physical sensations to charge the ritual, and geists have, at best, a tenuous grip on physicality, thanks only to their bond with their Sin-Eater. Any ceremony that contains elements related to the keystone's Threshold performed while using that keystone as a ritual tool

(similar to the manner in which a Specialty adds to a Skill roll) gains a +3 bonus.

Example: A Sin-Eater with a keystone that has the *Torn Threshold* could legitimately claim the +3 bonus from using that keystone as a ritual tool when performing the *Final Vision Ceremony* on a corpse that has obviously died by violence.

As a direct link to the geist, keystones offer the possibility of tapping into the accumulated knowledge of the geist to benefit the activities of a Sin-Eater. Most geists have lived far, far longer than their human hosts and so have witnessed and experienced more than the Sin-Eater. Some geists remember skills they possessed in the past and some can recall the abilities of Sin-Eaters with whom they have previously bonded. Each keystone has an associated Skill that can be tapped into by a Sin-Eater. This allows a Sin-Eater to boost her use of the same Skill by spending plasm to exploit her bond with the geist through the keystone. For each point of plasm spent, a Sin-Eater artificially increases her personal ability in that Skill by one dot (up to the usual maximum of five) for a number of rolls equal to her Psyche. If the Sin-Eater previously had no dots in the Skill, this use of the keystone temporarily negates the unskilled penalty.

HEART OF THE BURNING WOMAN

Below is a sample keystone memento (belonging to the Burning Woman) meant to give players and Storytellers an idea of what a fully-fleshed keystone might look like. Full details on the creation of keystones and other mementos can be found on p. 212.

Ever-Burning Torch

Keystone, the Torn (death by violence)

Keys: Passion, Pyre-Flame

Skill: Persuasion

In life, the Burning Woman was a young widow, having lost her husband during an outbreak of cholera. With few resources or marketable skills of her own, she turned her mind to snaring a new — and preferably rich — husband. She flirted outrageously with the well-to-do men of her town, relying on her natural charm and ample curves to attract suitors.

After an affair with an already married man ended badly, the other women of the town got together to discuss the problem of this young minx in their midst. Soon enough, the widow was accused of witchery, the wife of her ex-lover acting as primary accuser. The situation quickly deteriorated as more and more women came forward to accuse the widow of casting hexes and curses on them. Her ex-lover was the first man to cast a torch on her pyre, the flames of which still burn in her memento mori. The Ever-Burning Torch cannot be snuffed, except, perhaps, by the destruction of the Burning Woman.



Keystones Summary

- Keystones have a Threshold and two Keys that relate to the Geist of which they are a part.
- Sin-Eaters that enact Manifestations that share a Key with the keystone gain a +3 bonus to the roll.
- Sin-Eaters can retrieve a keystone from the Geist (or if lost) as a reflexive action and may return the keystone as an instant action.
- Any ceremony that contains elements related to the keystone's Threshold that is performed while using that keystone as a ritual tool gains a +3 bonus.
- Each keystone has an associated Skill that can be boosted by spending plasm at a 1:1 ratio, up to normal maximums.

Charms (•)

Death has a presence and energy all its own that even the most mundane of norms can feel. It can be felt in the oppressive silence of a graveyard, it speaks in the shriek of a flatline, and leaves a chilling stain in the places it touches, raising goose bumps and the hairs on the back of your neck. This energy is formless and shapeless, but Sin-Eaters recognize it immediately. Ordinary objects can become impregnated with death, giving them a sort of morbid solidity. For Sin-Eaters, visiting a museum can often be like a visit to a tomb. The collected energy of death all in one place overlays the otherwise normal setting with a patina of gloom and decay. The sword of a conquistador still carries the memories of the blood it shed. A painting on the wall bears the spectral energy of past owners that have died while gazing upon it. Modern devices absorb the potency of death in the same way. The cell phone of an executive that died suddenly of a heart attack still carries a pulse, even if its battery is dead. The digital camera of a war correspondent retains more than just pictures of innocent victims. Sin-Eaters refer to these everyday objects that contain the unfocused essence of death as Charms.

Not every object that is a witness to death becomes a Charm. Generally, only particularly emotional, abrupt, or significant deaths create the amount of energy required to imbue an object with death, and even then not every object present is affected. Only objects that were intimately connected with the dead or with the cause of death are likely to become Charms. A street sign that witnesses a fatal accident is unlikely to become a Charm, though the gearshift that came loose and rocketed through a passenger's brain is. The favored pair of shoes of a model that ODed on meth is more likely to become a Charm than the chair on which she thrashed out her last moments of life. Charms can be any size, but larger Charms aren't as easy to work with or carry. Most Charms carried by Sin-Eaters are Size 1 or 2, though larger mementos that are easily carried or worn (like the helmet of a World War I infantryman that still sports a bullet hole) are also common.

Unlike other mementos, Charms have a Threshold, but no specific Key. Charms contain the unformed energies of

death, a factor that makes them useful. A Sin-Eater with the Dedicate Charm Ceremony (see p. 158) can mold these energies into any Key that fits within the Threshold of the Charm. In the case of Charms, the Threshold of the object should be seen as the background story of the object, which will indicate what Keys are able to be formed. A teddy bear that belonged to a child that died of cancer would have the Stricken Threshold (death by disease) and the energy it contains could be shaped into the Phantasmal Key (expressing the child's unfulfilled dreams of health and happiness), the Passion Key (expressing the anger of the child or his parents over his untimely death), or even the Silent Key (expressing the silent despair of both parents and child) depending on the circumstances of life and death that went into the creation of the Charm. Once a Key is set, it cannot be changed. By giving the latent energies present in the Charm a direction, a Sin-Eater has defined its new purpose. Sin-Eaters gain a +1 bonus to Manifestation rolls with a Key that coincides with that of a Charm.

Even more than fetters, Charms are freely traded among Sin-Eaters. Charms impose no limits on their owners and come with no drawbacks, which prompt many Sin-Eaters to collect and display especially interesting Charms as a kind of status symbol. A common nickname among urban krewes for Charms is "death bling." Display of particularly impressive or large numbers of Charms can give a Sin-Eater a bonus to Social rolls when dealing with other Sin-Eaters (maximum of +3).

Charms Summary

- Charms have a Threshold and contain the unformed energy of death.
- By using the Dedicate Charm ceremony, the energy can be shaped into a single Key. Once a Charm has been given a Key, it may not be changed.
- Once set, Sin-Eaters gain a +1 bonus to Manifestation rolls with a Key that coincides with that of the Charm.
- Sin-Eaters that display a large number of Charms or a singularly impressive Charm can gain up to a +3 bonus on Social rolls when dealing with other Sin-Eaters.

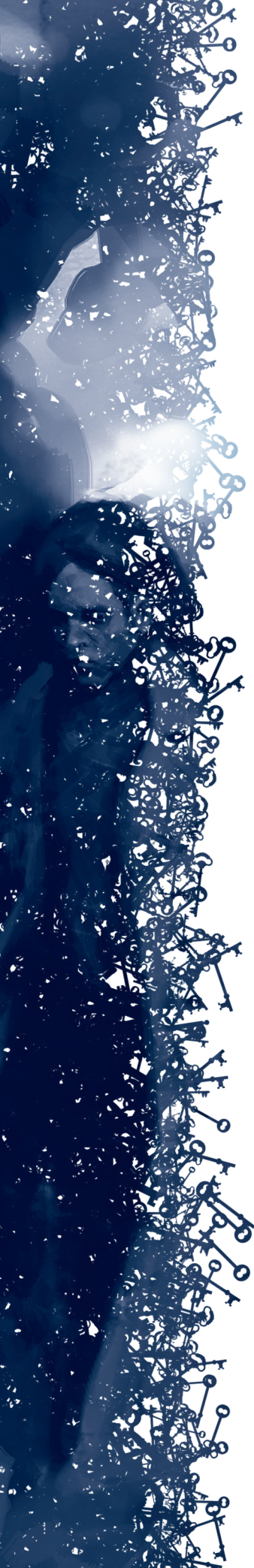
Sample Charms

Below you'll find a handful of sample Charms. Some of these Charms are specific (i.e. a Charm that has a somewhat unique story attached to it, like the Dead Man's Wallet), while others are a more general category of Charm adopted by Sin-Eaters (like Charm Tats or Corpse Teeth Curios).

Casket Jacket

Charm, Various Thresholds

It's an odd thing that coffins are often made comfortable for the corpse. Many caskets are lined with pillows, brocade, or even nice fabric such as velvet or silk. Of course, it doesn't make the corpse – or the ghost of said corpse – any more comfortable, but don't tell the mourners that. A Sin-Eater can take the fabric from within such a coffin and use it to make some form of clothing – jackets are popular (the velvet lining



from within a casket can be used to make a gaudy and certainly morbid tuxedo jacket), but it'd be possible to make a necktie, a skirt, a handkerchief, anything. The key, however, is that this can't come from a casket featured in just any funeral. It has to come from a big funeral — death energies born of one's demise can be amplified by the presence of many mourners. A large funeral with an outpouring of grief must contribute to the creation of such a Charm; otherwise, it's just an inert swatch of stolen fabric.

Sample Keys: Generally, Casket Jackets are given over to the Passion Key, as the outpouring of emotion is truly intense.

Cat's Eye Marble

Charm, the Forgotten (Death by Chance)

Marbles aren't as popular a children's toy as they used to be. These days most children would rather play a video game than spend time squirting marbles in-and-out of chalk circles with their buddies. The Cat's Eye Marble likely became a Charm during the 1950s. Story goes that a couple of children were shooting marbles behind a courthouse and, as sometimes happened, one of the marbles skipped and bounced away. Before the children could reclaim their lost treasure, a man dressed in jailhouse grays burst out of the courthouse, still wearing solid steel bracelets, and made a break for the alley. He never noticed the marble glinting innocently underfoot until he stepped on it and lost his balance. His hands bound by handcuffs, the would-be escapee had no chance to recover and slammed hard to the ground, cracking his head against the concrete. By the time the police officers emerged from the courthouse, the convict was dead, a slow trickle of blood pooling around the Cat's Eye Marble.

The Cat's Eye Marble is an opaque black piece of round glass with just the barest hint of red at its center. When placed on the floor, the marble always rolls to the nearest exit from a building.

Sample Keys: The Passion Key (from the inmate's desire for freedom); the Phantasmal Key (from the abruptly shattered illusion of escape); and the Stigmata Key (from the blood that bathed the marble).

Charm Tats

Charm, Various Thresholds

Some Sin-Eaters like to show off ink: tattoos on exposed skin can allow one to claim a little cred amongst his peers in and outside the krewes. Sometimes, these tats are just tats, but other times, Sin-Eaters turn them into Charms.

A Sin-Eater has a number of ways of getting inked with a Charm Tat:

- In Middle Egypt, tattoos were reminders of those who had died, which is certainly appropriate here. An individual would cut open a pattern on his skin and into it would rub the ash from a funeral pyre. It would heal with a crude tattoo

formed on the skin. Some Sin-Eaters still engage in this practice, while others actually distill the gray ash and mix it with ink, using an actual tattoo needle to decorate the flesh.

- As with the above, a Sin-Eater might use the blood of the deceased instead of ash (or a combination thereof) to create the tattoo. (Even mixing in the embalming fluid used on the corpse can work.)
- A razor blade can do wonders on the skin of a dead man. Some Sin-Eaters will literally sliver off the tattoo from a freshly-dead body and then stitch the dead skin to their own (this likely necessitates a Medicine roll, and definitely requires one point of Plasm be spent to allow the dead flesh and living flesh to merge, courtesy of the geist within).

Note that the Threshold suited to the Charm is whatever Threshold is most appropriate to the victim from which the Charm Tat is created.

Sample Keys: Any Key can work if the image is appropriate — the tattoo of a wolf skull could invoke the Primeval Key while ink of bloody tear drops could conjure the Stigmata Key.

Corpse Teeth Curios

Charm, Various Thresholds

Old Victoriana offers the teeth of corpses as various cure-alls — ironically, they were said to cure tooth decay, “tooth worms” (which don't actually exist, but Victorian quackery was abundant), and bad breath. People would take the teeth and wear them around their neck, serving as a morbid amulet against disease.

It didn't work, but it was a cool look, and some Sin-Eaters have taken up this practice by turning corpse teeth into Charms. Some wear them around their neck; others on rings. But really, with teeth, anything is possible. A black velvet shirt could have the teeth sewn into the fabric. A pair of eyeglasses might have the frames ringed with human chompers. One could even make dentures out of somebody else's yellowed, gnarly incisors.

The Threshold of the Charm is bound up with how the corpse died. Someone who died from a long-dead strain of influenza would have the Stricken Threshold, while a set of teeth taken from a body struck by a drunken driver might have the Forgotten Threshold.

Sample Keys: Animal teeth could invoke the Primeval Key; and the “corpse tooth eyeglasses” mentioned above might intimate the dispelling of illusions, thus binding to the Phantasmal Key.

Dead Man's Wallet

Charm, the Torn (Death by Violence)

A man wins the lottery. Not the big lottery, but a nice little payout right from the register. A hundred bucks, maybe more. It means a lot to this man, because he's going through a bad divorce, and he just lost his job, and this is a bright and shining light through a

seemingly impenetrable cloud cover. Then? Bang. Just as he's walking blind by an open alley counting his money and thinking about all the great ways he could spend it (because his wife can't get her greasy mitts on it), some thug cracks him over the head with a hunk of rebar. The man is alive for a few seconds longer, just long enough for the thug to kick him in the temple a half-dozen times. The man froths and bleeds: flecks of saliva and blood dot the wallet still clutched in his hand.

The wallet — a black leather affair that dangles from a silver chain — is now a Charm, containing the energies of the man's demise. Any money put in the wallet comes out dotted with dried blood. Similarly, any time the wallet is opened, it *sighs* — a contented sound, the sound of a man who just won a hundred bucks.

Sample Keys: Passion (from the feeling of good luck and joy that was so brutally cut short); Stillness (from the way the thug came out of nowhere, unseen); and Stigmata (from the blood that decorated the wallet).

One-Way Ticket

Charm, the Forgotten (Death by Chance)

One cold January afternoon, a Greyhound bus was steaming along on its usual route between Pittsburgh and Cleveland. The roads were clear and the bus was making good time. Just ahead of the bus, a truck driver was still driving after 24 hours without sleep, desperate to make his destination on time. A car swerved past the trucker pushing 100 mph and, in his fatigue, the normally steady truck driver flinched, pulling his steering wheel a hair too far to the right, just enough to lose control. The truck jackknifed and the bus slammed into it. Nearly everyone on board was killed in the crash and those that weren't died in the fire that swept through the bus. A single ticket to Cleveland floated away from the accident — tossed free by freak chance — and was collected by the first state highway patrolman on the scene.

The one-way ticket looks like a standard bus boarding pass, though it carries with it the faint smell of burning metal, oil, rubber, and bodies. It still works as a ticket, too. Any bus driver, anyplace, will accept it as proper fare and absentmindedly return it to its owner, wiping his hands on his pants as though he was happy to be rid of it.

Sample Keys: The Industrial Key (from the bus it originated with); the Pyre-Flame Key (from the heat-winds that lofted it away from the accident); and the Silent Key (from the sleeping passengers that never awoke).

Sugar Skulls

Charm, the Torn (Death by Violence) or the Forgotten (Death by Chance)

Violent and surprising death sometimes leads to a very bizarre side-effect, one so strange and so minor that people rarely notice it, and if they do, they think it nothing more than one of life's little coincidences. When one dies, so too does an animal — a crow drops from the sky, a cat tumbles from a tree and *doesn't* land on its feet, a mouse is trampled under the foot of a surprised onlooker. It always happens near to the scene and moment of death, usually within 50 yards or so. A Sin-Eater might be able to take the skull of that animal and create a Charm from it.

They call them "sugar skulls" because of the process, and because of a rough similarity to the *actual* sugar skulls used as *ofrendas* or offerings in Day of the Dead celebrations. Here, the Sin-Eater takes the skull and often lacquers it with burnt sugar — the sugar caramelizes on the bone and forms a hard coating. Usually, the Sin-Eater then paints the sugar skull in much the same way one might decorate the *ofrendas* — whorls of color that work with the contours of the animal skull. After that, the Sin-Eater must find some way of displaying the Charm — on a gold chain around the neck, perhaps, or dangling from a car's rearview mirror.



LEHOUT

BLINGING OUT: ADORNMENT

Since Charms serve as bling-style ornamentation amongst Sin-Eaters, many choose to modify these mementos in an effort to make them more visible, more "front-and-center" on the character's person.

A spent bullet casing isn't much to look at, and isn't something meant for display. But, drill a hole through the primer pocket and run a gold chain through it, and suddenly it becomes a necklace. A white doctor's coat once worn by a doctor who died in quarantine from catching the diseases he was trying to treat isn't that exceptional in its appearance. Different Sin-Eaters might adorn the coat in different ways: one Sin-Eater would choose to splash it with blood or bile, even drawing whorls and symbols into the fabric in streaks of red. Another might go purely ornamental, pinning silver skulls to the lapels, stitching an hourglass or scythe across the back, and attaching a bleached reaper's cowl so as to cover the face.

Not every Sin-Eater adorns her Charms in such a way, but if nobody can see the Charms, then where's the fun in that?



Vanity's Vanity

Charm, the Silent (Death by Deprivation)

Heartbreak destroyed this Broadway actress. She didn't have enough time for her lover of many years, consumed as she was by her work, and so he betrayed her, cheated on her, and lashed out in anger. His worst words, the words that stung the deepest? "You are an ugly creature, inside and out." Her heart cracked, though she did not know it. She spent hours in front of a small hand-held pewter mirror, an heirloom passed from her mother (an actress, too), and her grandmother (also an actress). So obsessed was she that she forgot to eat for days. Sleep failed to find her. One night, about to go on stage, darkness ringed the edges of her vision, and she passed out — down a flight of steps. Her tender neck snapped like the delicate stem of a wine glass. Her mirror, now, could serve as a Charm. A Sin-Eater might simply hold it up and gaze into her own reflection, or she might shatter the glass and wear the many reflective bits as jewelry or other adornment. Of course, this reflection is never sane. The Sin-Eater's reflection in the mirror is always pale, sallow, and jaundiced. As if she is forever on the cusp of death.

Sample Keys: Passion (this Charm is about passion interrupted, or turned bleak and black); Phantasmal (mirrors represent the illusions one believes about themselves, like the actress using it to make herself feel either more attractive or less); and Stillness (the actress died quietly, a slow deprivation due to heartbreak).

Vanquished Timepiece

Charm, Various Thresholds

Here's something. A lot of people wear watches. And everybody dies. What's that tell you? That a lot of people die when they're wearing some manner of timepiece. Some Sin-Eaters collect the timepieces of the deceased (in fact, some Sin-Eaters collect lots of death memorabilia, snatching them like tricky magpies), and further turn them into Charms. The flashier the timepiece, the more highly sought-after the watch happens to be. A dinged-up Casio digital? Eh. A gold 1920s Vacheron & Constantin pocketwatch with blued steel hands and wolf's tooth winding? Much better. It's all the more fantastic if the watch features some morbid imagery already: given that watches demarcate time, and inevitably everybody's time runs out, there exists a select run of pocketwatches over the last two centuries that are purposefully shaped into ornate skulls. (Flip the skull's "lid," read the time.)

A timepiece Charm usually exhibits a handful of odd traits. Some never again tell the time properly, always frozen at the exact time its former owner perished. Others work, but act strangely during the minute of the owner's death (vibrating, whispering, and giving off an alarm, the digital readout sending incomprehensible messages from beyond).

Sample Keys: The Key is often bound to how the watch's former owner died. If the watch took a bath with its owner when he drove his car off an icy road and into a lake, the Elemental Key (for water) wouldn't be inappropriate. Alternately, because many watches are obviously mechanical (with fine-tuned tiny gears ever-turning), the Industrial Key is not uncommon.

Vanitas (..)

Throughout the ages, the term *memento mori* has often indicated something one creates by hand — a lamentation for a string quartet to perform, a poem written in elegiac couplets, or an ornate tomb-affixed sculpture. Sin-Eaters have their own spin on such funerary creations known as *vanitas*. The term once indicated the still-life paintings of the 16th and 17th centuries. Those paintings — featuring the common death-related symbolism of skulls, bones, rotting fruit, and hourglasses — were meant to portray the idea that earthly life was fleeting and that all the petty vanities associated with our mundane existences were wholly transient.

Sin-Eaters have stolen the name, but don't necessarily adhere to the idea behind them. Yes, some Sin-Eaters create funerary art for the purposes of focusing on some kind of afterlife or post-earthly reward, but just as many create *vanitas* to remind them that *now* is the time to partake in worldly pleasures: eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you might get shot in the face or hit by a car. Again.

This particular type of memento created by a Sin-Eater is intensely personal. Bound to her Threshold but to no Key, the creation is meant to inspire thought and meditation on death. The Sin-Eater ruminates on life, death, and all the stuff in-between, focused in some way on how that character actually died — or, how others might die under the same conditions (so, if the character nearly kicked the bucket from a deeply invasive cancer, she might think of her time in the hospital, or she might actually mentally visit all of those who are dying alone in sterile hospital rooms).

The genesis of a character's *vanitas* is a personal affair; her krewe cannot help her in its creation. No roll is necessary to create a *vanitas*, though the Storyteller may ask for a proper roll (Dexterity + Crafts for a sculpture, Wits + Expression for a poem, or even an Intelligence + Computer roll if it's a programming or Photoshop-based affair) to determine its artistic or functional quality. Even a failure on that roll doesn't obviate the memento's actual metaphysical *effect*, however (though a dramatic failure might). As long as the player spends the character's experience points on the Merit, the *vanitas* works as created.

The nature of the *vanitas* is determined by the character — whether it's a photo spread of cadavers, a

home-crafted stained glass window depicting a person dying, or a memoir of the character's near-death experience written on an old typewriter, anything works as long as it's crafted by the character alone. The memento *must* have present elements of death in general (skulls, carrion birds, *ofrendas*, a reaper's scythe, an hourglass) but also have elements that specifically represent the character's own Threshold (a Sin-Eater whose Threshold is the Prey might paint in a pack of hungry dogs or wolves tearing at a body, while a Sin-Eater whose Threshold is the Stricken might compose a piece of music whose sheet music is inked in diseased blood).

A character can ruminate on his vanitas to gain back spent Willpower points. (See Summary, below.) Many Sin-Eaters choose to keep their vanitas mementos a secret, however, hidden from others of their kind. The reason for this is that another Sin-Eater can destroy the character's vanitas — doing so allows that Sin-Eater to reclaim all lost Willpower, filling up her pool.

Vanitas Summary

- A Sin-Eater can, once per game session, ruminate on the nature of her Threshold and her own near-death experience. Doing so necessitates she be in the presence of her vanitas. Roll the character's Wits + Resolve score. For every success on this roll, the character regains one lost Willpower point. She must spend a full scene on this meditation; she cannot simply do it on the fly.
- Each vanitas must have the character's own Threshold and depict that Threshold in some manner. Vanitas mementos do not have Keys associated with them.
- A character may not have more than one vanitas memento. She is certainly able to create other art pieces or items that reflect her Threshold, but only one actually counts as the memento for the purposes of regaining Willpower.
- Another Sin-Eater can destroy the vanitas. Doing so allows that Sin-Eater to fill up his Willpower pool to its maximum with no roll (outside any rolls necessary to destroy the memento).

Sample Vanitas

Below you'll find a handful of example vanitas mementos — one for each Threshold. It's important to note, however, that a vanitas is something that the Sin-Eater must create for

himself. Because of this, even the below examples will need to be manipulated in some fashion to suit the specifics of the character, but they should represent a good starting point.

Battlefield Diorama

Vanitas, the Torn (Death by Violence)

Model tanks, planes, and other weapons of war are often thought of as toys. More realistically, these miniaturized purveyors of violence are symbols of death. A bomber exists only to destroy life from 50,000 feet. An artillery piece serves no other purpose than to fling death from beyond the horizon. Sin-Eaters with a military bent or a fascination with the grandest stage of all for Death by Violence construct dioramas depicting military battles. Some choose to recreate historic battles using Napoleonic cannons and bayonets, some prefer more modern battlefields like those found in the Middle East. Sin-Eaters make their dioramas as realistic as possible, adding pools of blood, scattered body parts, and burning buildings to the scene. The final product transcends painted plastic and metal to reveal a scene of true horror and violence.

The very act of creating the diorama acts as meditation for the Sin-Eater, so long as he isn't disturbed. Each tank completed and placed, and each severed arm glued down is done so with the utmost precision. Sin-Eaters that take to this type of display frequently spend nearly as much time researching the diorama as they do constructing it. Some Sin-Eaters dispose of a diorama when it's completed, while others meditate on the scene they've created, the sounds and smells of the battlefield almost tangible in their devotions.

Crime Scene Collage

The Torn (Death by Violence)

Violent crime is up. A teenage girl is stabbed on her front stoop as the first snow of the season starts to fall. A pair of young boys catches a handful of bullets coming in through the front window, bullets meant for their thug father. Someone beats an old woman to death for her wallet. A wife smothers her husband for his infidelity. Violence begets violence, and all of it leaves a record — in particular, each demarcation of violence creates a crime scene, and crime scenes create photos.

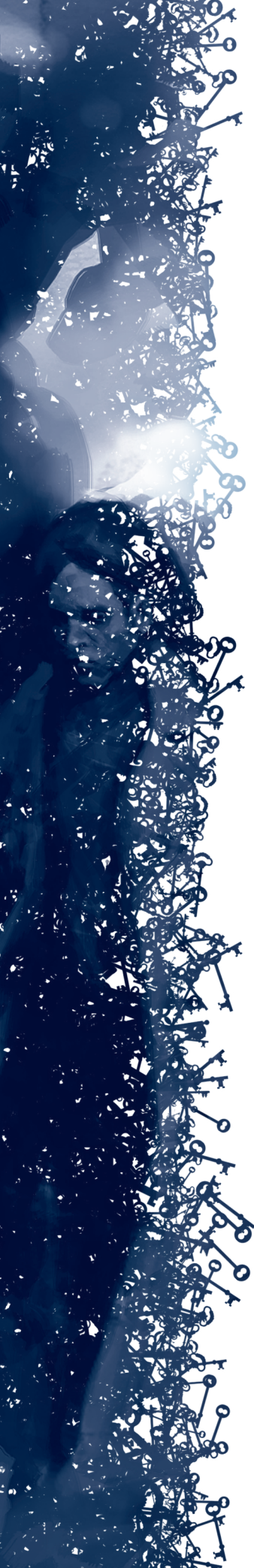
A Sin-Eater whose Threshold is that of such violence may work very hard to collect crime scene photos, pinning them all to a corkboard that he keeps locked away in his apartment.

MEMENTO MORI AND THE GREAT BELOW

As you'll note on p. 264 ("Opening an Avernian Gate"), mementos can help a Sin-Eater enter the Underworld at an Avernian Gate. Each memento held grants the character a +1 on the roll to open such a gate. (In fact, a character who brings *no* mementos to the low places will find that his entry is all the more difficult.)

A Sin-Eater's mementos do not count toward the limit of physical items one can bring into the Underworld; a Sin-Eater can bring any memento freely into and out of the Great Below (see the "Laws of Ingress," p. 265).

Also, during one's descent, a Sin-Eater may find that she comes across or is specifically seeking mementos down in the dark passages. Ghosts may actually still cling to mementos, or the Sin-Eater may find ghosts with potent Numina she hopes to bind to a fetter memento. Similarly, some particularly powerful memorabilia may lurk down in the depths — some treasures are destroyed and end up in the Underworld. This is true for memorabilia: if an infamous object-of-death is destroyed, it may end up in the Great Below for a Sin-Eater to find and claim for herself.



Sometimes, he brings it out, and he looks at all the lives lost, all the blood spilled, and he can't help but think of how a bullet in his spine almost ended his own life, or how someone tried to give him a second smile across his throat with a sharp hunting knife. Such ruminations rejuvenate him, for better or for worse. His purpose is renewed. Maybe he feels better, sharper, and happier that he's still around and experiencing life. Maybe he feels bitter, vengeful, a grim reaper with cowl pulled low. Either way, the reinvigoration of his mission translates to a gain of fresh Willpower.

Dead Jazz

The Forgotten (Death by Chance)

Jazz has rules, but those rules are the rules of chaos. The rhythm can be arrhythmic. It runs in ragged time. Syncopation is the musical measure of surprise, of erratic disorder given order. Life is that way, too. Life is surprise. One tries to arrange its dissembled pieces in some semblance of order. One makes music from the madness. Or, at least, a Sin-Eater whose Threshold is *The Forgotten* certainly might.

He might write a piece of jazz music, and he might keep that music hanging on the wall, framed behind glass. And he might sometimes get out whatever instrument it is that he plays, and he'll play what he sees on the wall. Except, that's a lie. He *starts* playing it, but he always ends somewhere different. It's just a jumping off point. The music always strays. The journey is forever different. Random chance makes sweet sound.

The Germ Closet

The Stricken (Death by Sickness)

Ah, infectious diseases. A hoary host of maladies, all with different roads leading to the same destination. One guy vomits blood. Another suffers numbness and then paralysis. A heart dies. A lung collapses. Pus and tumors and clog bile ducts, oh my. And then they die, they all die.

What they leave behind, though, a Stricken Sin-Eater might claim for himself. Every diseased patient has his blood drawn at some point. Urine, too. Every fluid is up for grabs, all tested mercilessly until truth is discovered. The Sin-Eater might have a mole inside the hospital, and any time a new and interesting case comes into town, someone sneaks away a tiny phial of blood or piss or discharge, and they give it to the Sin-Eater, and the Sin-Eater keeps it stored away in a closet. Neat little bottles, lined up like a spice rack. All clean. All labeled. An interesting creation, a place to muse on the fragility of the human form.

The Lament

Various Thresholds

It's not unusual for the newly bereaved to express their grief and bitter anger over the death of a loved one in written word. Many people find solace in

expressing their feelings by writing them down, the act of putting ink to paper acts as a lance, puncturing their sorrow, draining it to leave peace behind. According to their talents, some people write songs, some poems, and some just fill page after page with a train of thought ramblings. All serve the same purpose. Sin-Eaters will often collect the writings of the bereaved, binding them in eclectic notebooks of anguish, used to contemplate how death affects the living. These collections always have a theme to which the Sin-Eater can relate: namely, that of his Threshold.

Sin-Eaters with the Torn Threshold gather angry tales of violent deaths, the author expressing her pain and outrage. The Silent read words that drip with remorse and feelings of guilt for the perceived failure of the writer to help a loved one in need. The Prey scans lines filled with horror at the thought of falling lower on the food chain or of a slow death at the mercy of the elements. The writings collected by the Stricken are frequently the most coherent, as disease often gives plenty of warning before the final act. Stunned disbelief fills the disjointed compositions of the *Forgotten*; it's one thing to laugh at a report of a bizarre death in the newspaper, but another thing altogether when that death becomes personal.

The Offering Table

The Silent (Death by Deprivation)

Someone who perishes from thirst and hunger knows the value of food and water as they black out and fade away. And so, a Sin-Eater who *almost* dies in this way may return to the world and know that he must create his own Day of the Dead-style of altar.

The table is filled with food: corn, dried bread, gourds and other fruit, hard and colorful candies. Candles flicker, each decorated with the face of a saint, or of Mary, or of Jesus. Sugar skulls line the edges. Pans of water sit out, ready to quench the thirst of the deprived dead. Other, more personal reminders exist: photos of the Sin-Eater and his family, a love letter from a dead girlfriend, a piece of jewelry. The whole table and its *ofrendas* are bright, potent, and vibrant. It is a reminder of life and what one can lose. It is a reminder of what one needs to stay alive. One needs to eat, to drink, to remember. One must find the light in a dark room, the color against a backdrop of gray. On this, the Sin-Eater meditates to regain his spirits.

Roadkill Taxidermy

The Prey (Death by Nature)

Here's something true: sometimes, a deer leaps out in front of a car. Everybody knows that. The car hits the deer, the driver suffers minor injuries, and the deer dies on the side of the road — or bolts away, seemingly healthy, only to perish later. Sometimes, though, on very unusual occasions, the deer comes up over the hood and smashes through the

windshield. The deer's surprisingly heavy body — a whitetail buck can get to 300 pounds — hits the driver, and breaks his neck or decapitates him outright. The deer dies in the backseat. The driver dies in the front. End of story, right?

This *vanitas* comes from one such occasion: except here, the driver survives having his neck broken (or, more specifically, he dies, but by the mercy of a merging geist returns to the world as a Sin-Eater), and he manages to get hold of that broken deer and, with the help of a friend, performs some gutter taxidermy. It isn't a perfect mount, but the deer's whole body — awkward and broken — stands not proud in the center of the room. The animal looks sick and defeated. The Sin-Eater may meditate upon the preserved carcass to regain lost will.



Jeff Holt

Fetters (•••)

Is it cruel for a Sin-Eater to fetter a ghost to its own anchor? Or are consigning the specter to the Underworld or leaving it to roam restless in the living world greater acts of cruelty? Whatever the case, the result of binding an unquiet shade to its own anchor results in a very special sort of memento, a “fetter.”

Their unique insights and abilities make Sin-Eaters exceptionally able in their dealings with ghosts. The near-death episode every Sin-Eater has experienced gives them a close connection to death and their bonding with what amounts to a hybrid ghost gives Sin-Eaters an intimate feel for Twilight apparitions. This rapport between Sin-Eater and ghost builds a certain amount of empathy on the part of the Sin-Eater for the unfortunate dead that still wander the Earth. Given the amount of information floating along on the Twilight Network, most Sin-Eaters realize that by

destroying a ghost's anchor they are basically consigning that ghost to a hellish existence in the Underworld. Still, some ghosts are too big a problem to be allowed to run free in the material realm. Poltergeists, possessing specters, and avenging wraiths represent dangers that can't be overlooked. This is a philosophical quandary with no good answers and few potential solutions. The creation of a fetter memento is just one such solution.

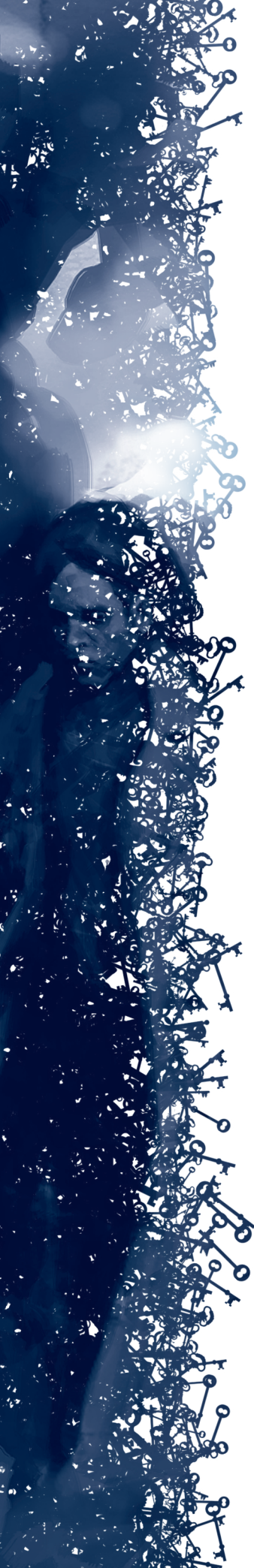
Sin-Eaters that don't want to send a ghost on a one-way ticket to the Underworld can instead bind them to their anchors with the appropriate ceremony (see p. 164). This solution has two distinct advantages over simply banishing a ghost and moving on. The first is that the Sin-Eater isn't relegating another poor, benighted soul to the Underworld and the tender mercies of the Kerberoi. Second, the ghost is compelled to help the Sin-Eater by making itself useful in the form of a memento. Ordinarily, Sin-Eaters reserve the binding of a ghost to a memento for ghosts that are just too dangerous to be allowed to exist unchecked. Ghosts that harm no one by wailing inconsolably into the night, caught in their own emotion feedback loop, are left alone.

Even though the Sin-Eaters might feel they are doing ghosts a favor by binding them to a memento, rather than booting them to the Underworld, not all ghosts agree. Some are instinctively angered by this practice (even if they aren't cognizant enough to recognize exactly what's going on) and react unfavorably toward Sin-Eaters that carry fetters. Storytellers should feel free to impose a penalty on Social rolls for Sin-Eaters that are carrying a fetter when dealing with a ghost. Multiple fetters should increase the severity of the penalty. This shouldn't be a de-facto penalty, but should take into account the character and nature of a ghost the Sin-Eater is dealing with. Ghosts that are the ephemeral remains of people who were trapped or imprisoned before their deaths, for example, are more likely to be instinctively angered by a fetter than other apparitions. The same goes for ghosts who feel trapped in their current incarnation. Some Sin-Eaters have even had success in dealing with unruly shades by casually pointing out the possible consequences of continued misbehavior.

Unquiet Prisons

Fetters have a Threshold and one Key that relate to the character of the ghost bound within. The ghost of a man who died after being sucked into industrial machinery might produce a memento with the Forgotten Threshold (accidental death) and the Industrial Key (death by machine). The ghost of a woman who committed suicide by slashing her wrists after the death of her husband might produce a memento with the Torn Threshold (suicide) and the Stigmata Key (blood). Sin-Eaters gain a +2 bonus to Manifestation rolls with a Key that coincides with that of the fetter.

Although a ghost bound within its anchor loses the ability to affect the material realm in any manner, it doesn't lose its knowledge or capabilities. Ghosts retain the Numina they developed after death; they are simply barred from using those Numina. With effort, however, the Sin-Eater owner of the fetter can still benefit from the ghost's supernatural abili-



ties. By spending a point of Willpower, a Sin-Eater can compel the ghost inside the fetter to channel that Numen through his body, basically borrowing its power. This task is extraordinarily difficult for the ghost. Even with permission, reaching beyond the confines of its prison is taxing. For this reason, the ghost may only ever channel its most powerful Numen, with the result that every fetter only has a single Numen associated with it. The strain of producing the Numen on command – and remotely, as it were – also means the ghost requires some time to recuperate before producing the Numen again. This means a Sin-Eater can only use the Numen power of a fetter once per scene.

Channeling a Numen effect relies on the senses and abilities of the Sin-Eater more than those of the ghost. Characters should use the standard Attribute + Skill dice pool to create and control the Numen, in place of ghostly traits. Exactly what Attribute and Skill is required should be determined when the fetter is created, based on the Numen in question. A channeled, “Compulsion” (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 211) could call for a Manipulation + Persuasion roll in place of Power + Finesse. Only successful rolls to channel Numen count against the once-per-scene limit. Regardless of the description, a channeled Numen may only ever affect one target, unless the created effect is entirely area based. A list of Numina can be found in the *World of Darkness Rulebook* starting on p. 210 and in this book on p. 233.

Fetters are in no way tied to the Sin-Eater that created it. They can be stolen, sold or traded to

other Sin-Eaters and some Sin-Eaters do just that. It’d be a stretch to say fetters act as a form of currency between krewes, but these ghostly *memento mori* have been used to repay debts or sweeten the pot in potential deals.

Fetters Summary

- Fetters have a Threshold and one Key that relate to the character of the ghost bound within.
- Sin-Eaters gain a +2 bonus to Manifestation rolls with a Key that coincides with that of the fetter.
- The presence of a fetter may instinctively anger ghosts imposing a penalty to Social rolls.
- Each fetter has a single Numen associated with it that may be channeled by a Sin-Eater.

Sample Fetters

The Collar

Anchor, the Prey (Death by Nature)

Key: Primeval

Channeled Numen: Animal Control
(Resolve + Animal Ken)

A dog really can be a man’s best friend – that’s no exaggeration. Dogs are loyal, true beasts. That dog might be the strongest and most stable thing in a person’s life. Of course, dogs die. Five years, ten years, maybe fifteen. Some people understand this and deal with it. Others can’t.

CHANNELED NUMINA

The effects of most Numina are self-explanatory, even when channeled through a Sin-Eater using a fetter. The character simply uses the Numen in the same way a ghost would, substituting Attribute + Skill for trait + trait. Some Numina, however, produce effects that don’t readily translate without a bit of extemporization. This sidebar provides explanations for how Numina from the *World of Darkness Rulebook* work when channeled through a Sin-Eater. New Numina presented in *Geist* contain insight on this topic contained in the entries.

In general, any Numina that results in taking control of a person, animal, or object requires complete concentration from the Sin-Eater. In effect, a Sin-Eater controller spends her action guiding the action of her target. The Essence cost of a Numen is paid by the ghost bound within the fetter, but it isn’t necessary to keep track of the ghost’s pool. Channeled Numina are considered to have spent the minimum amount of Essence needed to produce an effect.

- **Clairvoyance:** A Sin-Eater that channels this Numen can force her target to speak a single sentence. This can be useful for forcing false confessions or for sowing discord among enemies.
- **Ghost Sign:** The Sin-Eater can create ghostly disturbances in her immediate area that bear the signature of ghost sign. This could be used to communicate short messages to allies or just to freak people out.
- **Ghost Speech:** Use of this Numen changes the voice of the Sin-Eater, giving it the sepulcher tones and tenor of the fettered ghost. This could be used to disguise the actual voice of the Sin-Eater or to intimidate and frighten others.
- **Possession:** Rather than an actual possession, when channeled, this Numen creates an effect identical to the Compulsion Numen.

John Brainerd would've given anything for his dog, including his life — and that's exactly what happened. His dog tussled with a raccoon, ended up rabid. John couldn't bear to put the dog down — the dog didn't feel equally toward John, what with the rabies eating its brain. It bit him, but still John refused to do anything about it. He cradled that dog until eventually all the fight left him, and the animal's life, too.

John didn't get tested or treated. He kept on living his life. Before too long, it was too late, and the rabies consumed him, too. He died slumped over the makeshift grave he dug out back of his farmhouse, a grave reserved for the dog, and for him.

The love for that dog kept John connected to the living world unintentionally — and a Sin-Eater bound his ghost to the collar of the dog. Now, whenever a Sin-Eater dons that collar around his own neck and channels the Animal Control Numen (pp. 210-211, **World of Darkness Rulebook**), the character can control a single animal.

The Girl's Marionette

Anchor, the Forgotten (Death by Chance)

Key: Phantasmal

Channeled Numen: Telekinesis (Strength + Empathy)

The death of a child is a wretched thing. Those left to grieve are often ravaged by the event: marriages crumble, siblings sink into depression, and entire communities are locked in mourning. It's worse for the child, at least when her ghost remains. A child's ghost is troubled because it doesn't understand. It is, appropriately, childish. The good things are stripped from the shade, leaving it a tantrum-driven entity, mired in its own misunderstood anger. Poltergeists often result from the death of a child — and binding a poltergeist to a fetter memento often results in an object that can grant its keeper a measure of the poltergeist's ability to telekinetically lash out.

This anchor — a jester marionette with a porcelain mask — was a young girl's beloved toy, a puppet given over to elegance and grace. She had it in her hands when she took a tumble down an icy step. The puppet is now bound up with her poltergeist ghost (sometimes known as a *lithobolia*, or "stone-throwing devil"). The Sin-Eater who uses it may manifest Telekinesis to affect his environment, though he may go ahead and use it on the puppet as well, channeling the Numen in an effort to make the marionette walk, dance, and act. (See Telekinesis, p. 212, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Using this fetter, however, may disturb the Sin-Eater when he discovers that the puppet can often be heard quietly crying or whispering profane invective in a little girl's voice.

Mirror Mirror

Fetter, the Stricken (Death by Disease)

Key: Phantasmal

Numen: Plasticity (Dexterity + Expression)

Mary was never happy with the way she looked. All her life she idolized women with (she thought) better skin, better hair,

and better figures than her own. As a teenager, she wore more makeup than was actually necessary and when she managed to marry into money, the real alterations began. First it was her breasts, then some collagen in her lips. Botox took care of imaginary wrinkles and a slew of other procedures eventually transformed her from the attractive woman she really was to a freak, plastic Barbie doll. By the time she got sick, her husband had already divorced her and moved on to a younger playmate. Mary died from silicone poisoning at the age of 34, but her ghost remained, tied to the world through her vanity.

Mary's favored possession was an ivory-backed hand mirror she carried with her everywhere, always checking to ensure her hair was just so and that her makeup remained flawless. Upon death, the mirror became an anchor and when her ex-husband presented the mirror to his third wife as a present, Mary was enraged and began to haunt the poor girl. Eventually, a Sin-Eater put an end to the haunting by binding Mary to her mirror and now the same plasticity that Mary was so enamored of in life can be used by Sin-Eaters that hold her fetter. Tellingly, perhaps, the mirror only seems to reflect the worst qualities of anyone that gazes into it. (Plasticity can be found on p. 235).

The Notebook

Anchor, the Silent (Death by Deprivation)

Key: Industrial

Channeled Numen: Magnetic Disruption (Manipulation + Computer)

Lee Nanpong was a teenager who lived a dual life — in one, he was a friendless, regularly-abused boy who excelled at his classes but was an emotional recluse. In the other, he was a many-friended wonder, a hero in a fantasy land, the head of a powerful warrior's guild. Lee loved his massively-multiplayer roleplaying game, and with two working parents, he had all the time in the world to play. His parents left him for a week at a time, often flying back to South Korea for business, and during this time, Lee would skip school and play his game till his heart's content.

Or, till his heart withered and died. Lee played without food and water. He played without sleep. And soon, deprived of these critical components, he died in front of the computer.

This notebook is a computer, not a pen-and-paper notebook, and it was Lee's own personal PC, a jacked-up game-ready laptop covered in stickers and black permanent marker. Lee's restless specter — kept to the living world through his connection to the game and the other players within it — now infuses the laptop. A Sin-Eater can use the laptop as a normal computer, though sometimes it fritzes out and manifests strange ciphers or sounds over the PC's tinny speakers. However, the Sin-Eater can also channel the ghost's Magnetic Disruption Numen (pp. 211-212, **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The laptop itself remains unaffected by this Numen, and continues to operate provided it has battery power remaining.

REMINDER: RULES IS RULES

Channeling any Numen through a fetter memento means that all that Numen's rules are firmly in place. The Animal Control Numen, for instance, demands that the animal's Resolve score be subtracted from the ghost's Power + Finesse dicepool before rolling, and that's true for the Sin-Eater's dicepool, too (which is no longer Power + Finesse, of course, but the idea still applies).

The Projector

Anchor, the Torn (Death by Violence)

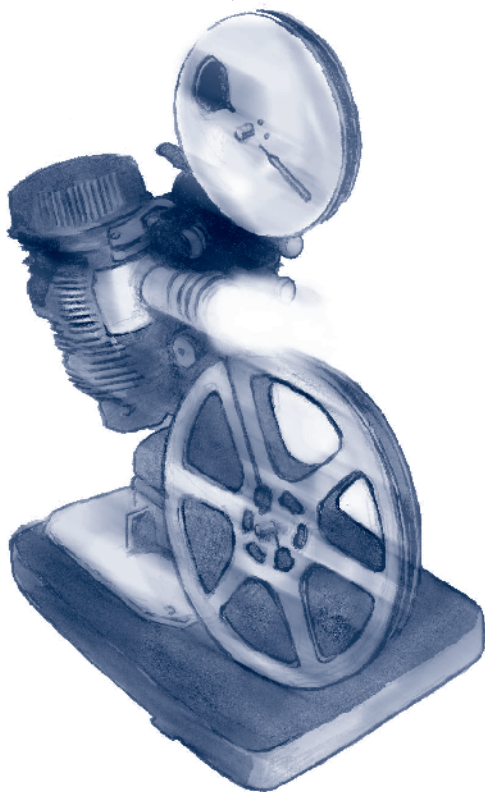
Key: Phantasmal

Channeled Numen: Phantasm (Wits + Expression)

Snuff films are supposed to be myth — a grim urban legend about people who make movies of other people dying (or worse, being murdered). It's no myth. They're out there, and some Sin-Eaters collect them out of intense morbid fascination (some of course revile the practice, while others still are actually the ones *making* these movies).

Rose Neville was one such producer of so-called snuff films. A documentarian three decades dead, she discovered that her husband was cheating on her. So, she bludgeoned him to death with one of her own cameras — it destroyed the camera, but some of his death was caught on film. It was, in her disturbed mind, art — art that demanded continued expression. She killed again and again, all men, all adulterers. Each murder was worse than the last. She filmed every last attempt and watched them in her cellar on an old Bell & Howell 9280 silent projector. Her last murderous endeavor didn't end so well — she failed to overpower her victim, and he turned it around on her, choking the life from her tender neck. She died on film.

Her ghost remained, clinging to the dark emotions she left behind, hovering about the small cache of films that lurked in a hidden wall along with her projector. Her ghost is now bound to that Bell & Howell projector, the result being a fetter memento that allows a Sin-Eater to use it to project the effects of the Phantasm Numen at a distance. (This Numen can be found on p. 212, *World of Darkness Rulebook*).



Screaming Mace

Fetter, the Torn (Death by Violence)

Key: Stigmata

Numen: Banshee Wail

Jenny was an avid jogger. Every evening after work she'd strap on her jogging shoes and go for a run in the park along the cliffs. No fool, Jenny always carried a can of mace with her on her jogs, just in case. The path along the cliffs was lightly traveled and she figured it was better to be safe than sorry. One evening she was halfway through her jog when two men emerged from the wooded side of the path and attacked her. Jenny tried to defend herself using the mace, but it only seemed to enrage them further. It took the police over a week to find her body lying bloody and beaten at the bottom of the cliffs. No one found the can of mace, though, emptied and discarded, tossed in the bushes by her attackers.

Jenny's ghost returned to the trail shortly after police gave up on ever finding her attackers. She appeared as she had in life, clad in shorts, jogging shoes and a sports bra, running the same path over and over. Any time Jenny encountered men on the trail she stopped them with a word before emitting a piercing scream that could have no earthly source. Several of the men she accosted were so disoriented by the assault that they stumbled near the edge of the cliffs where it was an easy thing for Jenny to give them the slightest of pushes, sending them tumbling to their deaths. After reading about the number of fatalities along the cliffs, a Sin-Eater put two and two together and managed to find the now rusty can of mace along the path and bound Jenny to it. Now, pressing the little tab at the top doesn't release a spray of chemicals. Instead, it releases the pent up rage of Jenny in a sonic shriek (Banshee Wail can be found on p. 233). Atypically for a fetter, the Numen refuses to work for men.

The Screwdriver

Anchor, the Stricken (Death by Sickness)

Key: Stigmata

Channeled Numen: Terrify

(Presence + Intimidation)

Nobody ever caught Eamon Pitts. For damn near two decades, police puzzled over a series of corpses found across the tri-state area, each punctured multiple times with what they surmised was a screwdriver. They never tracked it back to Pitts, who served as a janitor at the local school, a scout leader, and a churchgoer. Maybe it was karma that caught up with him, maybe it was just his time. But it was cancer. Pancreatic. Happened fast, and his system shut down swiftly. His last thought before dying in hospice care was a deep and vile regret that he'd never get to kill again.

His ghost remained, clinging to the living world with that lingering wish — thankfully, some Sin-Eater was good enough to at least put the ghost out of com-

mission (as Pitts' murderous spree would've surely continued) by shackling it to one of Pitts' own anchors, the long flat-blade screwdriver that had served as his weapon for over 20 years.

The screwdriver serves normally as a 2(L) weapon, but suffers a -1 penalty due to being improvised. However, it has the armor piercing quality.

That isn't the screwdriver's gift to the user, however. Any screwdriver can stab and kill. Not every screwdriver can conjure images in the minds of all who see it, terrible visions of blood pouring from puncture wounds, of victims screaming with hands trying desperately to restrain an arterial spray. Use of the Terrify Numen can send all who gaze upon this simple tool screaming and weeping, fleeing for safe corners. (Terrify can be found on p. 212, *World of Darkness Rulebook*.)

The Thirty-Thirty

Anchor, the Torn (*Death by Violence*)

Key: Phantasmal

Channeled Numen: Dement (Presence + Occult; see p. 234)

Donnie Pritchard was not a sane man — while he was no Sin-Eater, he remained obsessed with ghosts and ghost towns, driven to the very edge of madness in his pursuit of understanding what lurked in the great beyond. Haunted in life, it only makes sense that he was haunted in death, too (and therein lies one of the great ironies about ghosts — yes, they themselves do the haunting, but that's because they are themselves *haunted* by unfulfilled tasks and unrequited passions).

Donnie had with him a rifle, a lever-action Winchester 94 of the .30-30 caliber. With that rifle, he took some people hostage, trying to offer them up as a sacrifice to an old supposedly sentient ghost town way out in Texas, somewhere. Of course, his hostages got the better of him and beat him to death with his own rifle.

The rifle served as Donnie's anchor — those who took the rifle repaired it, reattaching the butt to the stock with a series of crooked nails — but anywhere the rifle went, so did the keening specter of Donnie Pritchard. Took a whole krewe of Sin-Eaters to bag him and bind him to the rifle, forming a fetter memento.

The rifle works (see stats, below), but it's best-served as the memento that it is. A Sin-Eater who calls upon its Numen finds that he can assail a victim with images, from which fresh madness springs. Of course, it can break down the user's mind, too — the nightmares that come as a result feature an old blasted ghost town way out in the dusty nowhere, whispering for the character to come closer.

| Type | Dmg | Range | Clip | Str | Size |
|-------|------|-------------|------|-----|------|
| Rifle | 5(L) | 150/300/600 | 6+1 | 2 | 3 |

Deathmasks (••••)

Geists are no more immortal than the Sin-Eaters with which they bond. While it's true they don't age, geists can still be killed or even just fade away over time. Unlike their human counterparts, however, geists always leave behind enduring physical evidence of their existence in the form of a keystone. Much like the cold flesh remains of a human

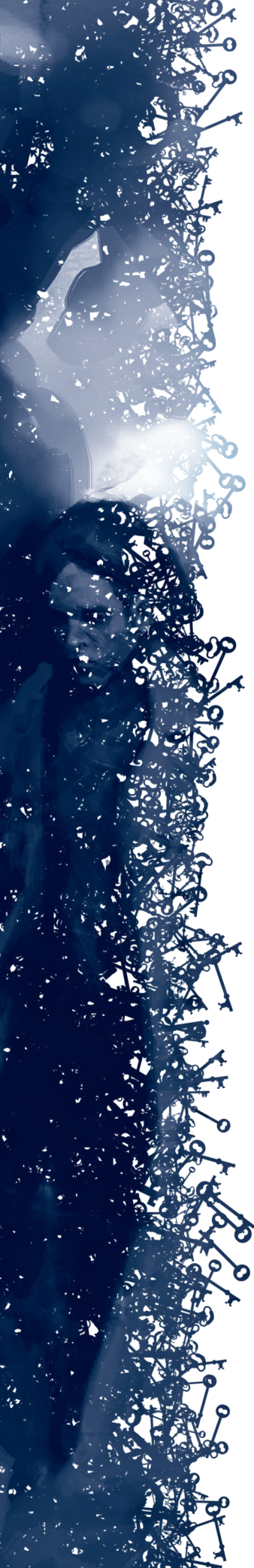
that has passed beyond the veil, a keystone is the corpse of a geist. When a geist is destroyed, its keystone becomes permanently material, leaving the state of Twilight forever. The keystone retains the memory of the geist it was part of, as well as the remnants of the geist's ephemeral corpus.

Upon destruction of a geist, its keystone is imprinted with the geist's visage. The rest of the keystone fades away, leaving nothing more than a mask constructed from the materials of the keystone. Sin-Eaters refer to these leftovers as deathmasks and wear them to both honor the dead and access the lingering powers of the transformed keystone. (Some call these "visages," or "vestiges," as that's exactly what they are — a vestige of the once-geist, a mask with its visage roughly or abstractly imprinted upon it.) As an example, if the Burning Woman was destroyed, the ever-burning torch would finally be snuffed and the torch itself would bend and stretch, becoming flatter and taking on the visage of the Burning Woman. Deathmasks are no larger than Size 3 objects and must be worn to be used. Most deathmasks duplicate the face of the geist, or whatever passed for such — a geist that was forever bound with a burlap hood might leave a deathmask in the form of said hood. However, deathmasks can take a variety of forms, such as gloves or greaves or even scarves.

Beyond Death

A deathmask lacks the dark luster associated with an active keystone. The difference is readily apparent to Sin-Eaters, geists, and ghosts. In a way, deathmasks look and feel more like dead objects, rather than deathly objects, than active keystones. An observer that has previously encountered an active keystone or a character that has researched or collects knowledge about keystones may roll Intelligence + Occult to identify the geist the deathmask used to be part of. Depending on the circumstances in which the keystone was acquired and on the feelings about the destroyed geist on behalf of the observer, this could lead to awkward social situations or could possibly increase goodwill. Storytellers should feel free to impose penalties or grant bonuses to Social rolls for characters that openly display or use a deathmask depending on the situation. As an example, if a Sin-Eater witnessed the use of a deathmask that he recognized as originating from a geist that was an ally to the character, unless a very compelling argument was made for that geist's destruction, the owner would suffer a penalty to all Social rolls in future dealings with the Sin-Eater.

Deathmasks are both more and less useful than active keystones. A deathmask loses one of its Keys upon the destruction of the geist (reducing it to one), grants only a static +1 bonus to associated Skill rolls or when used as a ritual tool for ceremony rolls, and reduces the bonus to +2 for corresponding Manifestations. What makes a deathmask truly valuable is the remnant of the geist's corpus that remains in the *memento mori*. A Sin-Eater can draw on that remnant to supply her with plasm. Each deathmask holds five plasm points, from which a Sin-Eater can draw as though she were drawing upon her internal stores. A Sin-Eater can draw as much plasm per turn from the memento as allowed by her Psyche, but may either draw plasm from the deathmask



or her personal stores, not both in the same turn. Deathmasks naturally replenish spent plasm at the rate of one plasm per day, at dusk.

One advantage a deathmask has over active keystones is the power of the geist from which it was formed that remains within. The deathmask retains the memory of the missing Key of the active keystone, which allows a Sin-Eater that wears it to produce an effect tied to that Key. The singed deathmask of the Burning Woman, which lost the Elemental Key when it became a deathmask, might allow a Sin-Eater to produce ghostly flames that burn without fuel or heat, but still provide light.

Keystones have a metaphysical weight, apart from and transcending their physical weight. It's the weight of accumulated knowledge, of supernatural forces, and the gross weight of death itself. As a Sin-Eater becomes more powerful, she gains the strength necessary to carry the weight that comes from multiple keystones. A Sin-Eater may only ever carry (as opposed to owning) a number of deathmasks equal to half her Psyche rating (round down).

Deathmasks Summary

- Deathmasks have a Threshold and one Key that relate to the geist of which they were a part.
- A deathmask offers a +1 bonus to associated Skill rolls, a +1 bonus to ceremonies that contain elements related to the Deathmask's Threshold and a +2 bonus to corresponding Manifestations.
- Deathmasks retain the memory of the Key lost during its transition from keystone to deathmask, giving it the ability to manifest a ghost power related to that Key.
- Deathmasks hold five plasm points, which can be accessed by the owner in place of expending internal stores of plasm. Spent plasm regenerates at a rate of one plasm each day, at dusk.
- A Sin-Eater may only carry a number of deathmasks at any one time equal to half her Psyche rating (round down).

Sample Deathmasks

The Beaked Mask of Bile and Blood

Deathmask, the Stricken (Death by Sickness)

Key: Stigmata

Skill: Medicine

The face of the Coronated Coroner lingers in this mask, which resembles one of the beaked plague masks from the Middle Ages. It's not inappropriate, given that the Coroner was a geist whose grim sympathies forever linked the spirit with disease. The mask itself is streaked with yellow and red — the colors of bile and blood.

The Coroner was once a geist fascinated by the mechanisms of the living human body — how each system fed into the next, how the blood channeled throughout the flesh, how the brain was a mastermind that could still be overridden by the body's other systems. Of course, the geist also was fascinated by how those mechanisms broke down, how disease and injury sent the body's systems into disarray, leaking... well, blood and bile. The Coroner's keystone was always a plague mask — when the geist was destroyed, the memento didn't change much beyond the fresh spattering of red and yellow.

When worn, the mask has an ancillary effect — any within 50 yards of the mask suffer tiny respiratory ailments, many of which call up beads or flecks of blood. A little boy might get a bloody nose, or a woman coughs into her sleeve and finds it peppered with red. This *seems* to indicate an underlying condition for some, but no such condition exists — or, if it does, it existed before the mask ever entered the picture.

The Coral Mask

Deathmask, the Silent (Death by Deprivation)

Key: Passion

Skill: Empathy

Not much is known about the Wailing Widow. Speculation suggests that this geist was once a widow who waited for her husband to return from a long voyage at sea, a voyage from which he never did return. And so she stood on the outcropping of rock overlooking the crashing surf, wept tears that caught on a sea spray wind, then tossed herself into the turbulent tide.

The Wailing Widow became as her name suggests, an undying emblem of unrequited love and loss, a sorrow-besotted entity whose tears tasted of brine. Her keystone was a hunk of dead, bone-bleached coral whose craggy pockets were home to the desiccated corpses of colorful fish. The deathmask is similar: the face itself is the rough, sea-beaten coral, but the dried tropical fish ring the edges of the mask, their shriveled eyes staring out at nothing.

A Sin-Eater who wears this mask can turn up to a dumpsterful of any water he sees into a dead, salty brine — undrinkable and stinking of rotted fish. In addition, nearby listeners might catch the distant sound of violent waves crashing against dark rock.

The Gold Teeth

Deathmask, the Torn (Death by Violence)

Key: Stillness

Skill: Stealth

Always hungry was the geist called the Gluttonous Shadow — forever desperate for human flesh, this disembodied geist would hunt dearly for his prey with a pair of awful gold teeth that allowed him to bite through muscle and crush bone. The Shadow

was deadly silent, following prey for hours or even days. When the time was right, the Shadow would strike — fast and violent, gleaming teeth working swiftly.

Thankfully, someone dispatched this mad geist, and its keystone — the teeth — molded into a half-mask. The teeth are still present, able to be slid over a character's own teeth (and they always seem to fit perfectly). A hinge present allows the gilded jaws to open and close. The gold at the edges appears as if melted, and the teeth don't just fit inside the mouth — strands of now-hardened gold grip the character's cheekbones and jawbone like the tightening legs of a spider.

The mask reflects the geist's ever-unsatisfied hungers. Those nearby a Sin-Eater wearing the mask (within sight of it) feel suddenly starving, as if they haven't eaten in days. In addition, the mask allows the character to make lethal bite attacks without first establishing a grapple.

Gravedigger's Shovel

Deathmask, the Silent (Death by Deprivation)

Key: Grave-Dirt

Skill: Weaponry

In life, the man that came to be known as the Gravedigger was very bad indeed. The kind of bad that children tell stories about around a campfire, late at night when any weird noise makes you jump. They say the Gravedigger would sneak up behind unsuspecting folks and whomp them over the head with his trusty shovel. Oh, not hard enough to kill them. What would be the fun in that? No, just hard enough to knock them out. See, what the Gravedigger really enjoyed was burying people alive. He'd chuckle to himself as he pounded nails in a pinewood box and nearly dance with glee as he dropped the first shovelful of dirt. Then he'd wait. He'd get all comfy in a camp chair beside the new grave, beer in hand (digging is thirsty work), and listen. Did you know you can still hear someone scream beneath three feet of dirt and through a wooden coffin lid? The Gravedigger knew it and those screams are what he lived for.

No one besides the Gravedigger knows how many he killed. The police found a few of his victims, their fingers torn and bloody from trying to claw through the pinewood box, but they never found him. Eventually, the killings ended and the police could never figure out why. This is what happened. The Gravedigger was doing his thing one night and smacked some poor bastard upside the head with his shovel. Whistling a merry tune, the Gravedigger set to work nailing together a coffin for his new friend and didn't notice when the man sat up groggily and took stock of his surroundings. Seeing the Gravedigger at work, the man, who had heard stories about victims of a serial killer trapped in the earth, snatched up the shovel and kissed the Gravedigger on the skull with it.



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Most people would've run then, with the Gravedigger down and a chance to escape, but this fella got angry. In fact, he got so angry he nailed the Gravedigger into his own coffin and buried the murderer six feet down, with the coffin laid lid-down just to be sure. Only then did he drop the shovel and leave. That would've been the end of the story, but the Gravedigger was an ornery sort and refused to stay dead. He gathered up all his rage and escaped from his own grave as a geist. Before long, the Gravedigger found a human partner who shared his taste for fun, a miner that had barely survived a cave-in and only then by eating the corpses of co-workers that hadn't been as lucky. Needless to say, the partnership would likely have ended in a new string of corpses, buried here and there, had it not been for a krew that took a good luck at the new Sin-Eater and found they didn't like what they saw. The krew killed the Sin-Eater and, for good measure, destroyed the geist the Gravedigger had become. All that remains of the Gravedigger is the head of his shovel, warped into the leering visage of its owner.

The Gravedigger's Shovel is a pitted, metal deathmask, with rusty eyeholes and a leather strap bolted in place, which allows it to be worn. The whole thing smells of blood and dirt and fear. The face of the Gravedigger bulges out of the metal head of the shovel like some kind of ugly bas-relief, his malicious humor still apparent. While worn, the owner can see in utter darkness as though it were high noon, but the deathmask cuts off peripheral vision, giving the wearer a slight feeling of claustrophobia.

TRIVIA

Some say the word "mask" is from the Latin *masculus/masca*. What does that mean? Why, it just so happens to mean "ghost." Geists are themselves ghosts who have become the focus of an idea, or the manifestation (little 'm') of an archetype. As such, their original identities — meaning, their human identities — are long gone, or at least long-hidden. Masks conceal, and so that's why some Sin-Eaters speculate that the geist leaves a deathmask behind — it's the shedding of its costume. Perhaps in a geist's destruction, the ghost it once was is free somewhere, or is capable of "moving on" to its final reward. Maybe that's just wishful thinking.



The Perfect Fifth

Deathmask, the Forgotten (Death by Chance)

Key: Passion

Skill: Expression

House-fires are terrible things. A squirrel chews through a wire. Lightning strikes a too-dry roof. A short somewhere in the wall starts a spark. Whatever the cause, some fires are random, starting swiftly and burning all within.

Imagine, then, that the fire begins at night when everybody's sleeping. Imagine that it isn't just a house, but a whole apartment building, a place that's long fallen below code and is little more than a many-chambered tinder box ready to go up in flames.

A woman finds her apartment pressed in by the growing flames, and by the time she awakens it's probably too late to go anywhere. The smoke inhalation alone is enough to kill her, and the searing flames will finish the job. She crawls over to the one possession she loves more than anything: her violin. She clutches it to her breast. It's no antique, valuable only in that it's hers, the symbol of her life's work and passion. She dies.

Whether it's immediate or over-time, nobody knows, but one night she ceases to be the ghost she was and becomes geist: the Violinist-in-Ash. Charred flesh. Smoldering, stinking hair. And a beautiful violin held in crispy black fingers.

When she was destroyed, her keystone — the pristine violin — became her deathmask. Her face, actually a visage of some peace, presses through to the front (or top) of the instrument, stretching the strings over the bridge of her delicate nose and down to the chin. The Sin-Eater who dons this mask finds that his words are lyrical, literally carrying the chords of string music over his every word. In addition,

when hearing music while wearing the deathmask, the Sin-Eater can automatically infer the mood of the musician, even if it's a record from 1950 playing over an oldies station.

Swallow-in-Glass

Deathmask, the Prey (Death by Nature)

Key: Primeval

Skill: Investigation

This mask looks like a bird whose delicate curved wings are outstretched to the left and right of the face — the bird in question is actually a swallow, its feathers formed of thin and seemingly brittle blue glass. (Truth is, this mask isn't brittle at all, and could easily survive a blow from a baseball bat or a long drop off a several-story building.) The swallow's head and beak extend up above the wearer's forehead, as if ascendant. Its eyes are tiny X's formed of bird bones.

This is the face of the Birdwatcher, a curious and lonely geist whose powers of perception were once unparalleled. The Birdwatcher was once a woman, her name long lost to the tide of time, who disappeared on a day hike into a deep forest. None know how she died, only that her body was left to rot, her one ankle snapped in a compound fracture — unable to walk, she perished there in the woods. The geist became the emblem of one whose gaze is vigilant, as ever-searching as both bird and birdwatcher. Then, when the geist herself perished, her screaming face pressed into the glass of the entity's keystone — a small swallow figurine.

The Sin-Eater that wears this mask finds she can mimic any bird's call known to man. No roll is necessary — she merely forms her mouth into the proper configuration and the call comes freely.

THE SHAPE OF THE MASK

Many deathmasks exist as nothing more than the geist's keystone, warped in just such a way that the entity's dying visage becomes imprinted upon the keystone — a watch's clock-face stretches and features a face formed from the once-flat surface, while an old book fans open and finds the visage coming through both cover and pages.

This isn't universal, though. A keystone needn't simply stretch to accommodate the geist's face — some become a merged mask of elements within the geist and elements of the keystone. The straight razor keystone of a geist known as the Perfect Cutter doesn't simply warp to feature a face: the razor is instead incorporated into the mask's features — the ivory handle becomes pearly eyes, the gleaming steel razor becomes the teeth, even the razor's tiny hinges can be found like beads on the mask's cheekbones. It needn't be a perfect physical transition (this is a metaphysical transformation, after all). The laws of physics need not apply.

One other note: Sin-Eaters have a bit of divergent culture when it comes to adorning deathmasks. Some are for it, and they blithely engage in making changes to deathmasks. Beads and chains. Drill holes. Swirls of paint. Others, though, feel that modifying deathmasks in such a way is a crass attempt at personifying something that needs no personification — to respect the fallen geist, some Sin-Eaters believe it is critical to leave the deathmask as pristine as one can manage.

Memorabilia (•••••)

Oswald's rifle. Hitler's teeth. The Archduke Ferdinand's limousine. The *globus cruciger* of Mary II.

Famous — and infamous — people die. And when they do, some of the things they possess or that surround them in that fateful moment become infused with potent energies from beyond the living world. Collectors love this sort of “death memorabilia” — in a morbid way, death is the one thing that connects all of us, from the humble counter jockey at the gas station to the president of the United States. We all die. We all leave things behind.

Sin-Eaters are among the most precious of collectors when it comes to this memorabilia. To them, these icons and relics can offer a big bounce in status (acting as big bling), but can also grant them a measure of power. Memorabilia are ultimately Charms, but go well beyond what those one-dot death trinkets can provide. These are iconic. These are infamous.

Memorabilia Summary

Memorabilia are technically Charms, after a fashion — just very powerful ones. They are given over to a particular set Threshold as determined by how the Charm's owner perished. These items must be tuned to a certain Key, just like other Charms, and one does this by using the Dedicate Charm ceremony found on p. 158. Beyond that, the following benefits are considered in-play:

- Like with all Charms, the character gains +1 to all Manifestation rolls utilizing the Key bound to the item.
- The character gains the Social bonus associated with all Charms: +3 when dealing with other Sin-Eaters. However, such Social rolls now gain the 9-again feature, as well. Note that this bonus is only considered “in-play” if she's wearing or otherwise displaying the object at the time the Social roll is made. Also note that the Storyteller is the final arbiter of whether or not this bonus is appropriate. If the character is dealing with a mortal enemy, another Sin-Eater, shaking a necklace made from Hitler's teeth is unlikely to warrant a bonus to, say, Persuasion.
- If the item is a piece of equipment (such as Oswald's rifle, the one that killed Kennedy), it has a +5 equipment bonus in addition to its usual accepted bonus. So, while most rifles have 5(L) damage (which is essentially its equipment bonus), Oswald's rifle in particular offers an additional +5 beyond that. This is only true for Sin-Eaters; a normal human character does not gain this additional bonus.
- If the item is not a piece of equipment (i.e. Hitler's teeth or Mary's *globus cruciger*), then the Sin-Eater must choose a single Skill with which the memorabilia “bonds” upon purchasing this memento. When the character uses that Skill, he can choose to first concentrate for a single turn. On the next turn, the character's action gains a +3 bonus as he gains a measure of focus and power from the death energies resonating from the memento.

Drawbacks: Memorabilia offer a couple drawbacks to their use, however:

- Whenever the Sin-Eater gains any benefit from the memento (even the Social bonus), she is haunted during her next period of prolonged sleep by nightmares involving the former owner of the item. (Dreams about Kennedy's assassination or anything to do with Hitler can, obviously, be quite unsettling.) As a result, the character fails to gain a Willpower point upon waking.
- Memorabilia might excite other Sin-Eaters, but once it's infused into becoming a Charm, the death energies it radiates can disturb “normal” people. It doesn't matter if they can see the memento or not — as long as it's within 50 yards, it unsettles those nearby. Any Social rolls made by the Sin-Eater to affect a normal human in such a situation suffer -3 dice. The Storyteller may rule that this penalty doesn't apply to *some* humans — another collector of death memorabilia may remain unaffected, as might a coroner, graverobber, medium, or other individual otherwise touched by death. Similarly, those with derangements may not be affected by this penalty.
- Note that most items of memorabilia are difficult to come by. Procuring Archduke Ferdinand's limousine, for example, is no easy trick. Those hoping to claim such items should be willing to go through a tough story to get a hold of them, and the Storyteller may impose other restrictions (buying Oswald's rifle at some strange black market collector's auction might necessitate Resources of four- or five-dots to purchase, for example).

Sample Memorabilia

Below you'll find a handful of memorabilia that a Sin-Eater might purchase. These famous — or infamous — mementos serve not only as unique items pulsing with resonant death energies, but also work as interesting story hooks. Storytellers are encouraged to use these not only as items a player can purchase for a character, but as plot seeds that can be dropped into your game.

The Bournemouth Heart

Memorabilia, the Prey (Death by Nature)

Skill: Empathy

Many theories exist about the death of poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, writer of *Ozymandias* and husband to *Frankenstein* writer, Mary Shelley. Some say he was swept off the deck of his boat. Others say he was killed by pirates, or pushed over the edge by a secret assassin, or murdered for political reasons. Whatever the truth, what is known is that his last moments were spent in the cold waters, and his sodden body would wash up days later. At his funeral, he was burned on a pyre — but, according to legend, his adventurer friend Edward Trelawny snatched

up the poet's heart from the pyre before it turned to ash. When Mary Shelley later died, interred at St. Peter's Church in Bournemouth, the story says that the heart was buried next to her. And it was. Of course, things don't always stay buried, and now the heart exists (dried, largely mummified and shrunken down to the size of a child's fist) in the hands of some Sin-Eater, serving as a very strange piece of memorabilia, indeed.

One curious factor: before he died, Shelley claimed he was visited by a shadowy doppelganger who warned him of his demise. Those who dare to use the Bournemouth Heart often meet Shelley's doppelganger — or one of their own—in their disturbed dreams.

Sample Keys: Elemental (Shelley died by drowning); and Passion (Shelley was a renowned poet).

The Derringer

Memorabilia, the Torn (Death by Violence)

Skill: None (equipment bonus, see below)

Beneath the Ford's Theater, where President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, one will find a museum. In this museum sits the single-shot .44 caliber derringer that ended his life, a pistol wielded by the assassin John Wilkes Booth. Except it's a fake. The real one is out there, serving as a memento to any who dare to use it. Produced by Philadelphia gunsmith Henry Deringer (the term "derringer" is a persistent misspelling of the man's last name), this one-shot assassin's pistol can serve its wielder well, if they're willing to put up with the night terrors that often replay Lincoln's murder as if the character himself performed the act. Actually, rumor exists that the knife that sits next to the fake derringer in the Ford's Theater — the knife with which Booth stabbed Lincoln's theater guest, Major Henry Rathbone — is similarly a fake, and that the real one is out there, also serving as mad memorabilia for some murderous Sin-Eater.

Sample Keys: Industrial (the derringer was handcrafted by Henry Deringer himself); and Stillness (Booth was a stealthy assassin); and Stigmata (a gunshot to the head spills blood).

| Type | Dmg | Rng | Clip | Str | Size | Special |
|-----------|------|-----|------|-----|------|------------|
| Derringer | 3(L) | 15/ | 1 | 1 | | Adds +5 |
| | | 30/ | | | | to attack; |
| | | 60 | | | | takes |
| | | | | | | two |
| | | | | | | turns to |
| | | | | | | reload |
| | | | | | | .44 ball |

Kennedy's Final Ride

Memorabilia, the Torn (Death by Violence)

Skill: None (equipment bonus, see below)

Dallas, 1963. President John F. Kennedy probably didn't think this would be his last ride — but, at the very least, it was certainly a *sweet* last ride. The

limousine, a Lincoln Continental, was tricked out for the time. Plush carpets? Golden thread in the lap pillows? Flood lights? Hydraulic seat? Yes to all. Ironically, the car also came with a removable *bulletproof* bubble-top, but hindsight is 20-20, right?

Kennedy died in this car, but oddly, the car continued in service for nearly two decades. After that, the car found its retirement within the Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Or, so everyone thought. What sits in the museum is a replica, but even the museum's owners know that. They think *they* have the real-deal stashed away in a basement garage, but of course, they're just as snowed because they have a second replica.

So, who has the real deal? Well, the car's been bounced around from krewes to krewes, often passed off as payment for some debt. Some have stolen it. Others have killed for it. It continues to find its way into circulation for the Sin-Eater who's willing to make a play for it. The car receives a +5 equipment bonus, which is added to the vehicle's Handling stat (see below).

Vehicle Stats: Durability 4, Size 15, Structure 19, Acceleration 12, Safe Speed 103 (70 MPH), Maximum Speed 176 (120 MPH), Handling 3

McCall's Necktie

Memorabilia, the Torn (Death by Violence)

Skill: Firearms

Wild Bill Hickok is a legendary name in the annals of the Old West. Gunslinger, sheriff and gambler, Wild Bill was the epitome of an era. Nearly anyone with even a passing interest in history or folklore knows the name Wild Bill and most could probably come up with the name Deadwood as the place where Bill met his maker. Less well remembered is the name



Jeff Holt

of his killer, Jack McCall. Little is known about McCall's life before he moved west to hunt buffalo and eventually to Deadwood to become a gold prospector. Even less is known about McCall's possible motives for the murder. Some sources site a personal dispute between Hickok and McCall, and McCall himself claimed he sought revenge for Hickok having shot his brother in Abilene, Kansas (which was later proven to be false). Whatever the truth may have been, multiple witnesses reported seeing McCall walk into Nuttal and Mann's Saloon No. 10 and shoot Wild Bill in the back of the head with a .45 revolver.

A summary court made up of Deadwood miners and businessmen found McCall innocent of the crime in less than two hours, and ordered his release. From Deadwood, McCall moved on to Wyoming where he began to brag openly about killing Hickok in a fair duel, which led to his eventual arrest. Found guilty of murder by a judge in Yankton, Dakota Territory, McCall was hung on March 1, 1877 and then buried in the local cemetery. The graveyard was moved in 1881, and when Jack McCall's body was exhumed the workers found he still had the noose around his neck. That same evening, one of the workers returned to the corpse, removed the noose, and later sold it to a collector. A genuine piece of memorabilia, those that put the noose around their own necks find they are filled with a drunken courage that ends with a vision of bloody aces and eights.

Sample Keys: The Passion Key (Jack certainly hated Wild Bill enough to kill him); the Phantasmal Key (Jack claims of a fair fight); and the Stigmata Key (Wild Bill's spilt blood).

Presley in Repose

Memorabilia, the Stricken (Death by Sickness)

Skill: Expression

True story: the *National Enquirer* snuck a camera into Elvis Presley's funeral. They paid Presley's cousin to carry the camera in and snap a shot of Elvis in the coffin. He did, and that shot ended up on the front page of the tabloid. Money-wise, it was the most successful front page the paper had ever run, netting them a Herculean profit. Here's the twist, though: the *Enquirer* claims the photo got shredded during an anthrax probe of their offices. Except, that's not true. The photo still exists as a memento, a piece of death memorabilia for a Sin-Eater to use. Those who hold onto the photo when making an Expression roll can, after concentrating, feel the unfettered, can-do spirit of Elvis the entertainer.

Sample Keys: Passion (the world around was entranced by Presley's pivoting hips and lascivious rockabilly gestures); Phantasmal (Elvis' life was one very much of illusion); and Stillness (Elvis in his coffin is just that, silent and still).

Pulverized Porcelain of Pol Pot

Memorabilia, the Stricken (Death by Sickness)

Skill: Intimidation

The news reports said that Pol Pot died of a heart attack, and that's not a lie. But it doesn't tell the whole story, either.

The leader of the Cambodian Khmer Rouge – the man singularly responsible for the death of millions and the deplorable conditions of his countrymen – killed himself with a fist full of pills. He took those pills at 1PM, and then he wandered upstairs to the bathroom. He sat down, and it was there that his heart gave out and he died. On the toilet.

Curiously, the toilet seat gained some fame in “death collector” circles – a bar owner in Siem Reap actually has the seat on display, and it draws a lot of visitors. But the toilet itself is still out there, too, the porcelain having been pulverized down to white granules and dust. The pulverized porcelain has been mixed with a thimble full of Pol Pot's ashes, and kept in a small glass phial that can be hung around the neck. It seems a trivial thing, and some are pleasantly amused at how the memorabilia humiliates and reduces this profoundly inhumane (or even inhuman) dictator to something of a joke – but it isn't a joke to those who suffer from the nightmares (fields of bodies, temples made from skulls, starving victims).

Sample Keys: Passion (say what you want, but Pol Pot was certainly... passionate about his country); and Stigmata (the killing fields were sodden with blood spilled by Pol Pot or his Khmer Rouge soldiers).

The Starlet's Ring

Memorabilia, the Stricken (Death by Sickness)

Skill: Socialize

Marilyn Monroe – the starlet of all starlets, the pinnacle of blonde bombshells – died of an overdose. Barbiturates, actually. Suicide has long been suspected, though whether or not that's true... well, someone would probably have to find her ghost (and her ghost is out there, be assured).

Her ex-husband, baseball legend Joe DiMaggio, supposedly reconnected with Monroe that evening. Some say he was going to ask her to marry him again (and some say she turned him down and, because of this, he murdered her).

Marilyn had a jaw-dropper of a funeral, including an unrivaled casket (hermetically-sealed silver-and-bronze coffin with champagne silks and pillows). While her body lay in that casket, DiMaggio went to say his last goodbye – and, while there, snuck a ring on her finger, a platinum affair ringed with princess-cut diamonds.

Of course, others saw. Someone – a Sin-Eater, probably, someone lurking around to check out the scene – went up and plucked that ring right off her finger. DiMaggio never saw a thing, and the casket went into her pink-marble tomb. It's now a long-lost piece of Marilyn Monroe death memorabilia.

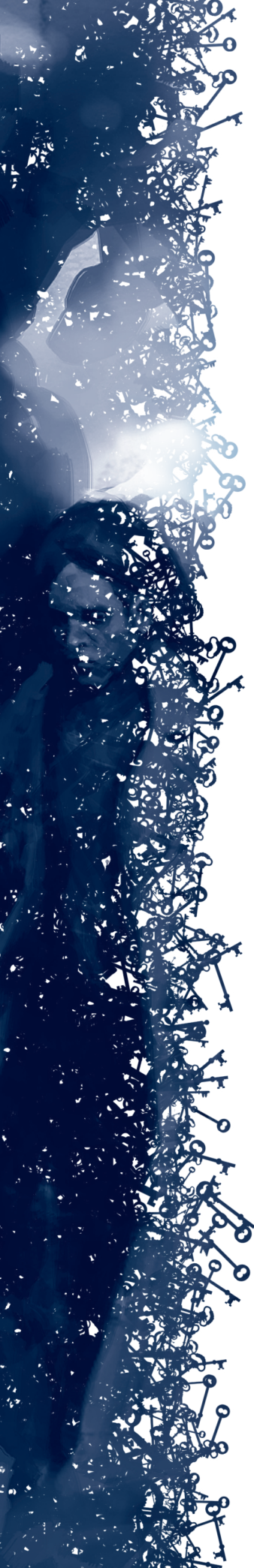
Sample Keys: Passion (it's Marilyn Monroe, c'mon); and Stillness (the way it was stolen silently from the finger).

Vidocq's Lens

Memorabilia, the Silent (Death by Deprivation)

Skill: None (equipment bonus, see below)

Francois Vidocq is arguably the first “famous” detective the world over, and some say the character of Sherlock Holmes was based on him. Vidocq was instrumental in bringing forth modern criminology: he invented the first



plaster cast, he was the first one to introduce balistics into an investigation, and he created indelible ink. (Of course, he was also a criminal before he was a detective, but that's really neither here nor there.) Vidocq made use of a magnifying glass to study crime scenes — the glass was not something he carried with him, but that instead was affixed to a table so he could study evidence as it was laid out before him. Vidocq died in his house in Paris, only a few months after his wife passed. He died, paralyzed from an unknown disorder, and some reports have him clutching the magnifying lens, it having been broken off its mooring at the table nearby.

A Sin-Eater who uses this lens will find that it offers a generous +5 equipment bonus to all Investigation rolls in addition to its other benefits. These days, it hangs around the neck on a silver chain. The character that *does* use it for this purpose is sure to suffer a bevy of varied nightmares: Vidocq was witness to several brutal crime scenes, and all of these may replay in the mind's eye of the character, a cruel flip-book of grisly sights.

Sample Keys: Industrial (Vidocq modernized criminology and forensics); and Stillness (he died literally silent, paralyzed in his home).

D

esigning Mementos

No Sin-Eater is complete without her collection of mementos. They are handy ritual tools, status symbols, and darkly magical artifacts, all rolled in to one neat package. Included below are some guidelines on the creation of *memento mori* to broaden Sin-Eater collections.

The Play's the Thing

At the heart of each memento is a story. It can be a story about the geist the memento came from, a story about the ghost bound inside or a tale about the death that created the memento. The mechanical aspects of a *memento mori* are then pulled from the story to create an in-game item by assigning a Threshold, one or more Keys, and possibly a Skill or a Numen,

depending on the type of memento being fleshed out. Start with the story and see where it leads. The tale of a lonely ghost, slowly driven mad by despair that stalks a stretch of highway, intentionally causing accidents to bring it visitors could be forged into a fetter with the Forgotten Threshold (describing both the manner of death and the loneliness of the shade) and the Phantasmal keystone (use of illusions to cause automobile accidents). Thresholds can be found on p. 23 and Keys can be found on p. 110.

Most mementos have a ghostly power that is a flavorful representative of the memento as a whole. The Ever-Burning Torch of the Burning Woman is impossible to quench by any known means. It continues to burn under water, covered with mud and in the absence of oxygen. These unique properties of mementos are more in the nature of special effects than potent magics and just like everything else to do with mementos, should be derived from the story of the object in question. A general rule of thumb when assigning an effect to a memento is the effect should, at best, provide a minor perk of some kind. More often than not though, the effect should add to the flavor of the memento by drawing on its story and theme. The Dead Man's Wallet Charm (see p. 196) is a good example of this. Money placed in the wallet picks up bloodstains and the memento gives the contented sigh of a newly rich man when opened.

Keystones

The creation of keystones requires a Skill be tied to the memento and the Skill chosen should reflect some aspect of the geist of which the keystone is a part. A geist with ties to sailing might result in a memento with the Drive (Pilot Ship) Skill attached or the Athletics Skill for swimming. A geist with a history of violence might attach the Brawl or Weaponry Skill to the keystone.

The story of a memento is particularly important when it comes to keystones, even if a Sin-Eater doesn't know the whole story of her geist. The nature and history of the geist should come to life in Threshold, Keys, and associated Skill of the keystone. A Sin-Eater should be able to look at a keystone and infer something about the geist of which it is a part.

THE COLLECTORS

As we've said, some Sin-Eaters are notorious collectors when it comes to morbid memorabilia. One such conspiracy makes this their sole task, however.

The Collectors comprise dozens of Sin-Eaters spread across various krewes. They operate globally under the direction of a mysterious death's-head figure known only as the Auctioneer. They are vicious collectors, and will do anything to "complete" their collection (odd, since their collection is forever growing and can never be completed). Any character that has memorabilia may end up the target of these bloodthirsty masters-of-antiquity. Some say they have various cache spots around the world, each acting as home to countless items of morbid memorabilia. A krewa could certainly earn some powerful mementos were its members to raid such a place... of course, it would earn some powerful enemies, too.

Then again, maybe one could join the Collectors...

Deathmasks

The most important element of a deathmask is the keystone from which it was created. Rather than setting out to create a deathmask, first create a keystone complete with associated Skill, Keys, and Threshold, along with all the relevant backstory of the geist of which it was a part. Then attempt to visualize what would happen to the keystone after the geist was destroyed. The visage of the geist is imprinted in the very material of the mask. How would this affect the overall appearance of the deathmask? The transition from keystone to deathmask also drops a Key from the memento. What effect would the loss of such an integral part of the keystone have on the memento as a whole? Using the Perfect Fifth as an example (see p. 208), as a keystone, the memento might have included the Pyre-Flame Key and might have literally smoked when played. The destruction of the geist finally extinguished the flickering flames that still played around the form of the Violinist-In-Ash, which led to the loss of the Pyre-Flame Key and the end of the smoke it inspired.

Fetters

In the case of fetters, the Numen assigned to the *memento mori* should play up some aspect of the ghost bound within. Going back to the example of the highway ghost, the Phantasm Numen seems appropriate, as it creates illusions. Determining what Skill + Attribute should be used to channel the Numen requires a tad more thought, but should still be based on common sense. Remember that ghostly traits are representative of a group of Attributes. The Power trait translates to Intelligence, Strength, or Presence. Finesse to Wits, Dexterity, or Manipulation. Resistance to Resolve, Stamina, or Composure. With this in mind, the attribute half of the equation should be fairly easy to determine.

As an example, Phantasm asks for a Power + Finesse roll. This quickly rules out Resolve, Stamina, or Composure as Attributes, since they fall in the Resistance group. Creating a successful illusion requires quick thinking to react to potential changes in the environment that might reveal the illusion for what it is. This suggests Wits would be an appropriate Attribute. Different ghosts and Sin-Eaters

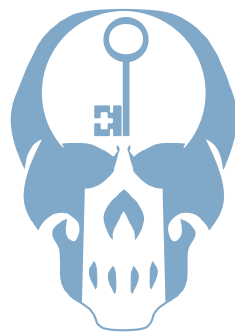
might approach the problem in different ways. Another valid interpretation of Phantasm is that a successful illusion requires attention to detail, which would suggest Intelligence as the Attribute. The Skill half of the equation is more a reflection of taste than hard rules. Expression would be a fair choice, since the creation of an illusion is a kind of performance. Subterfuge would also be a reasonable selection, since an illusion is a lie. Players and Storytellers should work together to decide on the exact Attribute + Skill roll required to channel a fetter's Numen. Numina can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** starting on p. 210 or in **Geist** on p. 233.

Vanitas

The genesis of a character's vanitas is a personal affair; her krewe cannot help her in its creation. No roll is necessary to create a vanitas, though the Storyteller may ask for a proper roll (Dexterity + Crafts for a sculpture, Wits + Expression for a poem, or even an Intelligence + Computer roll if it's a programming or Photoshop-based affair) to determine its artistic or functional quality. Even a failure on that roll doesn't obviate the memento's actual metaphysical effect, however (though a dramatic failure might). As long as the player spends the character's experience points on the Merit, the vanitas works as created.

Charms and Memorabilia

Charms and memorabilia *are* their stories. Without an explanation for how an otherwise mundane object became associated with death, these mementos are nothing more than ordinary objects. A Sin-Eater takes pride in being able to relate the exact details surrounding the creation of a Charm or piece of memorabilia. The Threshold of these mementos should be determined by the history of the object. Teeth of a serial killer that breathed his last on Old Sparky? The Torn. A ticket from a passenger on the *Titanic*? The Prey, and so on. Potential Keys should also relate to the background of the object. The aforementioned teeth could be tuned to the Industrial, Passion, or Stigmata Keys, while the ticket could be tuned to the Tear-Stained Key, Passion Key or, perhaps, even the Silent Key.



You promised.

I lied. It sounds almost gleeful.

I peel back the Caul on my face and sit up. My shirt is riddled with bullet holes and caked with dried blood. Mine. I pull it, and it rips the hair from my chest as it comes free. I don't know how long I've been here. My body is whole, but not unblemished. A hole in my shoulder, one in my legs, and violent bruises on my torso... but I can move. No bullets. Where did they go? Did they vanish, pulled into the Underworld to await some violent shade that dragged his gun down with him? Did my body absorb them? Did my other half take them away?

I did not, it replies.

I stumble to my feet. I'm in a crypt. Makes sense; I was in a cemetery when she shot me. I don't remember much — I remember she was dark-skinned, maybe Latino or Arabic. She wore something around her neck that gleamed, not just in the moonlight, but with emotion. Love, I think. Regret. She was a Sin-Eater, I'm sure of that much, but she didn't seem familiar...

Yes, she did.

All right, then. Who was she?

I don't know her. I know the one that rides her. I know the Unrequited Lover.

I wonder how he knows her, but I don't wonder too long. If I ruminate on the question, I'll know the answer, and just at the moment, I don't care. I'm more interested in the poor bastard dying at the other end of the cemetery. My Caul — my ticket back to this world — is melting away in my hand like gelatin under a faucet. I saw the last thing he saw: headlights. And then pain. And then nothing. Not so very different from me, from what I saw years ago, except I lived. He did not. His name was Allen Michael Brexton, and he had a wife and three children. He thought of them as he died.

You said you wouldn't bring me back.

I lied, it says again. *I needed you back. I need you to find her again.*

Her?

Her, it insists. *The Unrequited Lover. Find her, and help her reach her end. And then you can die, if you wish.*

Her end? I'm not sure what it means. The geist inside me remains a mystery in many ways. I only know its name, one single word... "Regret."

Oh. You... knew her.

I did, it says. *And now you must. If she is to have any peace.*

Why should I care if she does? But I already know the answer.

Because until she does, you won't, it says.

I peel off my shirt and go looking for Mr. Brexton's body. If it's still there, I'll be taking his wallet. There might be money, yes, but more important, there might be Love. And I'll need that.

CHAPTER FOUR: STORYTELLING



2007.09



If you're reading this chapter, congratulations. You've got the hard job.

The **World of Darkness Rulebook** describes the Storyteller's role (beginning on p. 188), but in very general terms. This chapter talks about Storytelling a **Geist** chronicle, and that means taking into consideration what the game *means*, on a thematic level. More important, it means considering what the game means to the players (that includes you!), what facets of the game are most compelling, and what kind of story arc would best fit into your experience of **Geist**.

If all of that sounds a bit high-concept, don't worry. The point of this chapter is not to bury you in theory or tell you how a **Geist** chronicle begins, progresses, and ends. The point of the chapter is to give you the tools to create a great chronicle, to tell you the bits of the game (both system and setting) that might catch you off-guard, and to help you get the players to do as much of the work as possible.

The Chronicle

The chronicle is everything. It includes the World of Darkness as a whole (as much of it as you choose to use), the characters, the Underworld, the themes, the antagonists... everything. That in mind, approaching "the chronicle" as a Storyteller is a little daunting. Krewes? Kerberoi? Laying ghosts to rest? Venturing into the caverns below the living world? Where do you *start*? Don't fret — you have multiple options.

The Characters

A character-driven chronicle is one in which the players' characters, their backstories, their goals, and their experiences drive the story. Running a chronicle this way means you can take many of your cues from the players, since it is their work creating the characters that fleshes out much of the setting for you. Another advantage to this style of Storytelling is that it allows the players to delve deep into their own characters, discover how they change over time, and explore whatever aspects of their pre-Sin-Eater life you and they find interesting.

A character-driven chronicle has some challenges associated with it, of course, not least of which is how to get the characters together. Sin-Eaters don't have much in the way of an over-arching society. The fact the five people are bonded with geists doesn't mean they know anything about one another. In an event-driven story (see below), you can create the circumstances that bring the characters together, but in a character-driven story, it should really come from character interaction.

The Gang's All Here

You might stipulate that the characters already know one another. This saves a great deal of time in play — if you don't have to play through the characters meeting, deciding that they need to hang around together, finding common ground, distrusting each other, and so on, you can jump straight to the "meat" of the story. If you take this approach,

"Leave no path untaken," repeated Bod. "A difficult challenge, but I can try my best."

— Neil Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*

you might consider having all of the players create their characters together, answering the questions on p. 67 as a group and looking for opportunities to work each other into their backstories. The characters begin the chronicle knowing each other, not necessarily traveling the country in a big van looking for ghosts, but having a frame of reference when they meet up.

You might also decide that the characters begin the game not knowing each other, or having met only in passing. If this is the case, be prepared for the first one or two chapters to involve characters working separately to follow whatever story hooks you dangle before them. In this case, though, you should always be looking for ways to bring two or more of the characters together. In a character-driven chronicle, it's usually best to allow these connections to happen organically. That is, try to set up situations that would encourage the characters to interact, and then let them (preferably with as little interference from supporting cast as possible). At the same time, reward any player whose actions lead to the characters coming together as a group, possibly with a point of krewé experience (see p. 184) that the characters can use in the future.

Including "sample chronicles" for a character-based chronicle is difficult, because the action and the plot progression come from the characters (which we, of course, don't have access to). Below, however, are some points to consider when creating the group and its history. If, during the chronicle, you get stuck for ideas, it's a good idea to return to the characters and their backstories to decide what happens next.

- **Reputation:** What are the characters individually known for, if anything? If a character has the Fame Merit, it means he's known to mortals, but what if he's gained a reputation among Sin-Eaters, or in the strange, murky underground that is the World of Darkness? Have a look at the character sheet — any Skill rated 3 or more is probably something that the character is known for. A character with high Streetwise might be

known as a guy who can get odd or expensive black market items. A character with high Athletics might be a cat burglar, or might simply be known as someone who can hustle a few bucks playing basketball. A Sin-Eater with a high Science rating might be a good source for quick and dirty analysis of strange substances.

Using reputation this way doesn't require that the characters have any particular Merits or traits. People know people, and it's not a stretch to imagine that supernatural beings such as Sin-Eaters associate with others who see the unseen in the World of Darkness. Using reputation to bring the characters together can be rewarding, because it allows each of the characters a chance to shine in their respective areas, but it can also be slow. If you use this method, it is recommended that you "cross cut" between the characters, running a scene of roughly 15 to 20 minutes for each one before jumping to the next. Don't be afraid to leave off at an exciting moment — just as a fight is about to start or a ghost is about to reveal its true nature, for instance. Pacing cross-cut scenes well is difficult, and the best way to do it is to pay attention to the players. If they start to wander, crack open books or chat amongst themselves, it's probably time to switch the focus to someone else. Likewise, reward actions that result in the characters getting closer together. If a character needs to find someone who can identify the particular breed of dog used in a sacrifice, he could spend some time digging around online, or could contact one of the other characters who happens to have a high rating in Animal Ken. Either would resolve the immediate issue (what kind of dog was it under the knife?), but only the latter brings the group together. If the player calls up his animal-expert acquaintance, add a point of krewe experience (see p. 184) as mentioned above. The players should get the message.

As Storyteller: Note what each character is "known for," and use it in the first story. If one character runs across an odd, blue salt-like substance that grows noticeably warm in sunlight, she might have no idea what it is — but she knows someone who would be able to figure it out.

- **Preludes:** The prelude, discussed on p. 65, is important because it establishes how a character became a Sin-Eater and what life was like before this merger. Depending on what kind of time you have and your own preferences, you can structure preludes as scenes in which everyone takes the role of a supporting character for the character in question, as out-of-character conversations in which all of the players (you included) ask questions of the character's player, or even as questionnaires that enable the player to think through the important events and set them down in paper (or electronic) form for later reference.

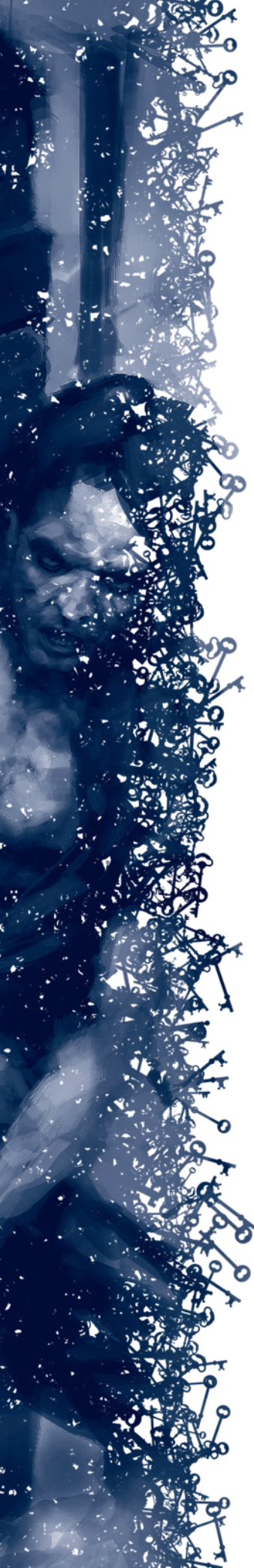
One question here is how much the players should know about one another's characters. If you intend for the characters to eventually form a krewe, it might be appropriate for everyone to know everyone else's backstory (that is, for the players to know — whether

the characters know each other's histories or not is a separate matter). If you want to run a story in which the ugly truth is gradually revealed during a harrowing trek through the Underworld, it's probably better for the players to keep their characters' secrets, so that revelation has a greater impact. Take it as read, too, that players can keep what their characters know separate from what they know, but that they can let information their characters don't know yet direct them, if it would lead to a good scene. For example, the players know that Bethany's character once killed an innocent person to obtain a memento, but the characters do not. Suddenly "realizing" the character is guilty of the murder is bad form. As questions about the memento — where she got it, what the story behind it is, etc. — is not, since the questions could be motivated by simple curiosity.

As Storyteller: Occasionally remind the players of the events of their prelude and their characters' lives before the merger. As Storytelling games progress, it's common for characters to change and drift away from their original concepts. That's fine — it's called "development" — but it's also important that the character's origins don't become lost amidst the strangeness of the chronicle. A plot arc is one that charts the changes that a character goes through, and for change to be meaningful, one needs to remember the starting point. Likewise, looking over notes from a prelude can inspire stories or remind the Storyteller of a character he'd long forgotten about.

- **Remember When?** If the characters know each other personally, even if they only met once, have the players consider what happened during past meetings and how it affected them. As a Storyteller, you are well within your rights to insist that the characters made *some* kind of impact on one another (they're all going to be the stars of the story, after all). Decide on the circumstances — a funeral? A party? A natural disaster? The event that bonded one of the characters with her *geist*? Have each of the players describe their own character *at that time*, and talk through what happened. Each player then states (or writes) what her character thought of the others. When the characters reunite, they therefore have at least one frame of reference, at least one evening of shared experience.

The point of this set-up is to give the characters some shared history and to establish relationships. This requires that each of the players takes an interest in the other characters, and fills in some of the details. It also requires the players to be flexible enough with their own characters to allow the others to take a hand in their development. For instance, the troupe decides that the characters met up at a block party. One of the players says his character witnessed another player's character making out with a man in an alley. The amorous character's player is, of course, within her rights to say, "No, my character wouldn't do that," but it's a better idea to roll with the idea: did the voyeur really see what he thinks he saw? Maybe the character wasn't there willingly. Maybe she was being attacked by



a vampire. Maybe she was consoling a grieving friend. Maybe she really did have a lover, but not one that she would admit to (she was drunk, the other figure wasn't a man, the other figure was someone that the character's family would disapprove of, etc.). The moment between the two characters isn't necessarily going to define all further interaction, but it does give them some shared history.

As Storyteller: Figure out where the holes are in the shared story and fill them in. If the characters all met at a funeral, make sure you know *whose* funeral it was and what each of the characters were doing there. If the characters met up in the aftermath of a riot in the city, be sure you know what city, what caused the riot, and whether any of the characters did anything that night (looting, violence, a good deed) that might come back to haunt her later.

- **Before the Geist:** You might decide the characters knew each other before they became Sin-Eaters. Using this conceit requires the same kind of attention to shared history as discussed above (possibly more, if the characters were childhood friends or otherwise spent a great deal of time together), but it also requires an answer to an important question: why did *all* of them become Sin-Eaters? Saying that they all joined with a geist out of sheer coincidence is not only lazy, but it also stretches suspension of disbelief. Instead, what if the characters' geists planned it? Something that the characters did during their time together caught the attention of the geists, who then, over the ensuing years, conspired to push the characters into the near-death situations that allowed them to become Sin-Eaters. Obviously, this sort of set-up requires careful attention to *why* the geists chose this particular group of people. One possibility is that the geists wish to form a krew, and in the characters saw the perfect tools to do so. Another is that the characters might be indirectly (or directly) responsible for creating one or more of the geists. Consider: The characters are college buddies, and go out on a bar-crawl after final exams. On their way home, an apparently drunk man staggers up to them, smelling of booze and rot, asking for help. They brush him off, not knowing he is dying of a knife wound. He remembers them — and the geist he eventually becomes does as well. The Storyteller needs to consider why the geist chose to merge with one of the characters, rather than seeking revenge, of course (more on geist/Bound relationships can be found below).

Another possibility is that the characters all became Sin-Eaters during the same event. Taking the same example, maybe the college students all pile into someone's car on a drunken quest to find a meal at 3AM. The driver hits

a patch of black ice and the car goes spinning out of control, skidding down an embankment and over a frozen lake. The characters, desperately trying to clear their heads of alcohol and fear, hear the ice crackling beneath them. If it breaks, they will surely freeze to death. This by itself might be enough to cause the merger, but what if the characters slowly try to pick their way back to the shore? One character falls through the ice and nearly dies of hypothermia (Prey or Silent). One deliberately pushes a character ahead to test the ice, and watches in horror as she falls through (Torn for the victim). Another is knocked unconscious in the crash and left behind in the car (Forgotten, or possibly Stricken if the character had a previously unknown heart defect). All of the characters become Sin-Eaters of various Thresholds (though nothing says Storyteller couldn't stipulate that all of the characters die under the same Threshold, of course, and it might make for good synergy among the characters). Whether the chronicle picks up the next day in the hospital, or six years down the road when the characters finally meet up again, they shared an event so profound that it defines them.

As Storyteller: Take notes. Write down inside jokes, shared experiences, supporting characters that the players make up ("remember when my uncle John came home drunk on gin and tried to break down the back door?") and any other details that seem pertinent. Stories that refer back to prelude events *must* make use of those details, otherwise there's no point in playing through the prelude at all. Pay attention to motif — the biting cold of the wind as the characters pull themselves across the ice in the example above, for instance, can be used to remind the characters of the night they all (almost) died.

The Events

In an event-driven chronicle, the Storyteller has a series of events mapped out before the chronicle starts. You might want to tell a story in which the characters come together and usurp control of a powerful krew from its corrupt masters, or collect a series of mementos from their present owners or locations in order to awaken a powerful being from the Underworld. Whatever the particulars, you as Storyteller have a definite beginning, middle, and ending in mind for the chronicle. All you have to do is let the characters make it happen.

The danger of an event-driven chronicle is that you run the risk of ignoring the players' concerns in favor of the story that you've dreamed up. The term "railroading," in the context of roleplaying games, usually means the Storyteller is invalidating

player choices unless they lead to the planned storyline, and it's usually a negative term. That isn't to say that a bit of direction isn't useful or even appreciated, just that players usually prefer to have their choices *mean* something in the context of the story. It's fine if you know where you want the chronicle to end up or what you want to have happen along the way. Just be ready to let the players take you there, and that can be a roundabout journey.

What Happens Next

Below are several “starters” for event-based chronicles. They are meant to power whole chronicles, not just single stories (the story receives attention later in this chapter), so they are broad by design.

- **Into the Underworld:** The Storyteller introduces the concept of the Underworld and how to travel there early on in the chronicle. Perhaps the characters have a contact or mentor who is a seasoned traveler (and, though they don't know it, is hopelessly addicted to the pleasures of Vice in the Great Below), or perhaps they stumble through an Avernian Gate that was somehow left open for them. In any case, every story includes a trip to the Underworld, perhaps to rescue, perhaps to learn. As the chronicle goes on, the characters battle Kerberoi and eventually cross one or more of the Rivers of the Underworld, passing through strange Dominions with arcane and obtuse laws. They meet ghosts of people who died centuries or millennia before the characters' time, people who can unlock some of the greatest secrets of history — if the characters can ask the right questions, obey the right laws, and make the right offerings.

The “event” in this chronicle is the trip into the Underworld, and it needs to happen often enough that the characters gain a reputation among other Sin-Eaters as being frequent travelers of the Autochthonous Depths. Provide the troupe with different options for Underworld quests, and make sure they meet characters during their travels that interest them and entice them to come back. The end of this chronicle should probably involve a conceptual breakthrough, wherein the characters learn some grand secret about death in the World of Darkness. What that secret is, of course, depends on you and your needs for the game. It might be tied to the curse of undeath (what allows the bodies of the dead to rise as vampires or zombies?). It might be the secret of how human souls linger as ghosts. The characters might even learn what comes after, what Heaven or Hell awaits ghosts who “pass on” from the Underworld.

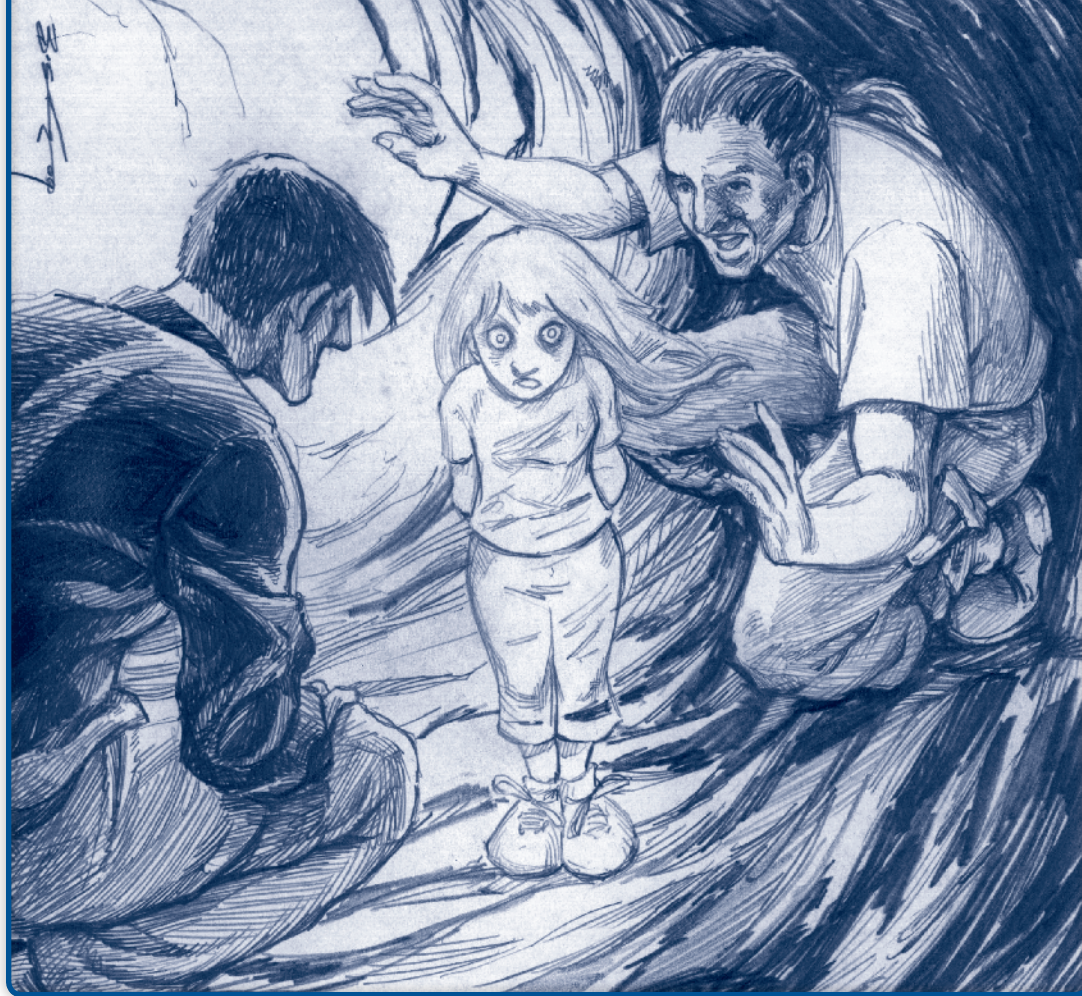
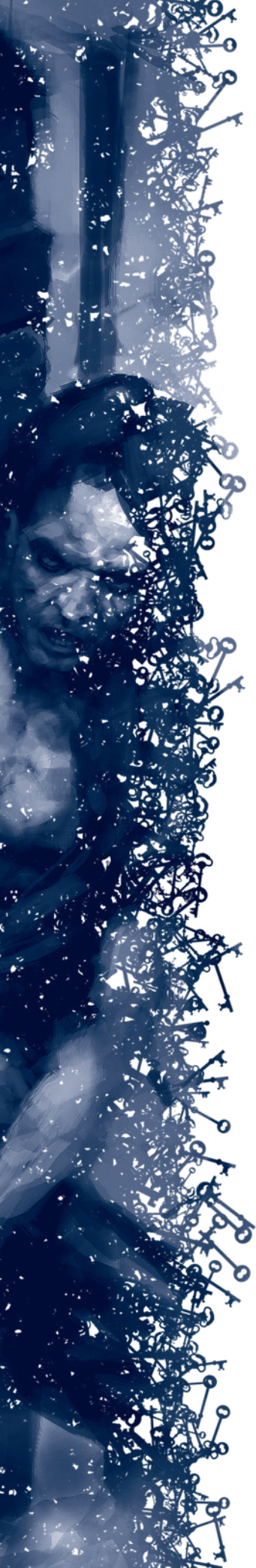
- **The Krewe:** Sin-Eaters don't have a complex, omnipresent social stratum, but krewes can become quite powerful — even mythic — over time. A chronicle built around the formation of a krewe can be quite compelling, and can give players who enjoy building up power bases and expanding influence some unique challenges. If you wish to run a chronicle like this, it might be a good idea to expose the characters to other krewes during the

early part of the chronicle, perhaps allowing them to become associated with an existing krewe. You should also pay careful attention the characters' geists, since it is through the geists that a krewe's channel is revealed (see p. 180). Obviously, the players should be providing input in how their characters' geists approach the mythic framework of the krewe, but if you as the Storyteller are portraying the geists during the chronicle, it's up to you to make sure enough common ground exists that the characters *could* form a krewe later.

As the chronicle progresses, the characters might add members to their krewe. These might be Storyteller-controlled characters, or, if you wish, you might have the players create a secondary group of Sin-Eaters that the primary characters target for indoctrination or recruitment. This secondary group might even allow *you* to play a character, with one of the other players taking over as Storyteller for a story or two. The influence of the krewe expands, and the endgame of the chronicle might even allow them to become a Third Tier krewe (p. 183).

- **Twilight Network, Compromised:** The Twilight Network allows Sin-Eaters some modicum of communication. It's sporadic at times, true, but for characters who find themselves traveling to new areas without a point of reference, it can warn them of danger or present them with story hooks (characters might hear on the Network that a now-deceased Sin-Eater left a house full of mementos, free for the taking — if they can find the house). If the Twilight Network was compromised, though, then Sin-Eaters the world over might feel the effects. Worse, depending on what entity compromised the Network, they might not realize what was happening until it was too late.

In this chronicle, the characters need to become active on the Network. Allow them to solve problems and mysteries using information they gain from the Network, cultivate contacts and even meet people in person that they know from it. And then introduce changes. Little glitches in the Network, misinformation, contacts who suddenly don't recognize them, and so forth. Something is clearly wrong, but finding anyone who believes them is difficult (and those who do believe might end up vanishing or dying shortly after learning the truth). Why are the characters not so afflicted? It might be because whoever or whatever has control of the Network is herding them. Maybe it's an Underworld entity trying to break free into the living world. Maybe it's a group of hunters who haven't so much taken control of the Twilight Network as infiltrated it, and is trying to learn as much as they can about the Sin-Eaters. Maybe a powerful geist has merged with the Network, and is trying to grow to encompass all online communication. Whatever the case, the chronicle might take the characters all over the world as they chase leads, or it might be restricted to their home region (if they've determined that the source of the problem is there).



JOEL BISKE

- **Collections:** *Geist* lends itself well to “collection”-style chronicles. That is, the stories revolve around chasing down mementos, artifacts, ghosts, creatures, or some other type of character or objects. This is a simple type of chronicle to run, and it allows you to pull inspiration from as many different sources as you wish. Every story can be very different in tone or mood, and if the characters are willing to travel, you can explore different locations across the world while the characters chase down this story’s MacGuffin.

The trick in chronicles like this is to avoid losing character for “MacGuffin of the week.” The characters need a chance to develop their own stories, too. That might mean occasionally running “Interludes” between stories, wherein the characters take time to visit their contacts or loved ones (if any), work on their own projects, and pursue their own agendas. Of course, nothing says these Interludes can spark full stories — if one character goes back to his hometown for the holidays and learns that his cousin had a near-death experience and then left the area, he might conclude that she has become a Sin-Eater and wish to find and help her.

The other problem with Collections chronicles is that they don’t lend themselves to endgames. Consider a television show like *Tru*

Calling — every episode includes the title character being called to service by a recently-dead person. While the particulars of each episode vary, the basic plot structure is the same. Character progression becomes important and largely the purview of the players. Pay close attention to the Learning Curve experience award (see p. 217 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), because what the characters learn as the chronicle progresses should inform the kinds of stories you present to them.

- **What is Going On?** Something strange happens. All of the ghosts in the city freeze in place, and remain so for a full night. The moon appears drenched in blood, but only to Sin-Eaters, ghosts, and other beings touched by death. Avernian Gates fly open and spectral riders pour out, seize people seemingly at random, and return to the Underworld. Quite simply, something *changes* in the world, and the characters are left to figure out what is happening.

Scale is important in such chronicles. A murder mystery is a “What’s Going On” kind of chronicle, but it might not involve anyone except the players’ characters and a few supporting characters. What matters is that there is a mystery to be solved, and the characters are uniquely suited to doing so. The Storyteller

needs to keep two major concerns in mind when designing this kind of story.

First, make sure the characters *are* uniquely suited to solve the problem. If the “head honcho” of the area foists the problem off on the characters, then they aren’t the stars of the show for any particular reason, they’re just getting handed this problem because they are the players’ characters. This rings false (not least because *Geist* doesn’t lend itself to the kind of power structure this would require). The characters might be the first to witness or piece together the mystery, which means that even if they do approach someone else with it, that character is likely to feel it isn’t her problem. They might be an established krewe with a reputation for solving problems like the one at hand, and therefore be approached by another party for help. They might also be the only Sin-Eaters in the region, and therefore the only ones capable of recognizing and dealing with the problem.

And this leads into the second problem – the characters need to *care* about what’s going on. Some of this is incumbent upon the players, of course, but as the Storyteller, you can help things along by asking the players, during character creation, “What would compel your character to investigate? What headline in the newspaper would entice your character to read the article?” If you get answers like, “My character doesn’t read the paper” or “my character can’t be compelled,” explain to the player that, without some idea of what motivates the character, running the chronicle is going to be difficult.

In this sort of chronicle, it’s important to know ahead of time what is really going on, but be willing to change it. Stories evolve, characters evolve, and you might be faced with the choice between letting the players (who were more brilliant than you initially reckoned) figure out What’s Going On before you had planned, or changing the backstory. Usually, it’s better to let the players discover what’s happening, but add another layer or allow the story to evolve further. The characters learn that the ghosts’ immobility for a night was caused by the violation of a rule of the Underworld, track down the krewe responsible, hear their side of the story, and exact punishment. Then what? The characters might take this opportunity to form their own krewe, if they haven’t already. They might go looking for other infractions to punish. There might be more side effects of the broken laws, and now that they’ve become involved, the Underworld thinks they should *stay* involved.

The bottom line is: it’s better to change what you had planned and let the players have their victories than misdirect the players to keep your story “pure.” You can also come up with more challenges, after all.

The Theme

The Storyteller might have an idea about the *style* of the chronicle more than the substance, basing the chronicle

around a theme or an idea rather than events or characters. A theme-based chronicle requires attention to atmosphere and mood more than logistics and, more than any other kind of chronicle, it requires cooperation from the players to make it work. Some examples follow:

A Series of Letters

Each story begins with the opening few paragraphs of a letter. As the Storyteller, you need to determine who wrote the letters and to whom; these characters will almost certainly be significant to the chronicle. They might be the players’ characters, or they might be Storyteller characters who are involved in the stories enough to relate them, but not direct participants like the characters. The characters probably don’t see the letters, and it is assumed that they are written some time after the events they are describing, perhaps even enough time to grant some perspective to the writer. For example:

Dear Antoine,

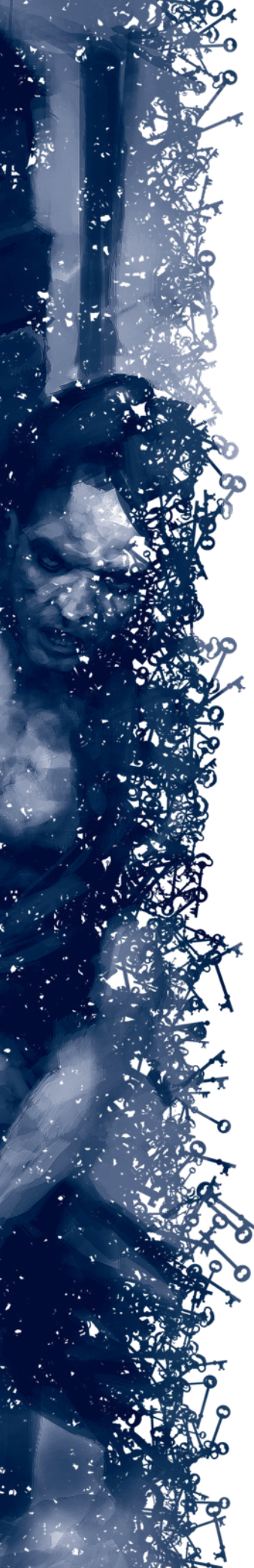
My vision is getting worse, and I find that staring at a computer screen makes my head pound. Writing like this, the lights in my studio dimmed, the noise filtering in from the streets outside, is soothing, both to my senses and my soul. I know that I promised to keep you abreast of events here, and I am ashamed to admit how far behind I’ve fallen.

Let me tell you, then, about an odd situation that occurred some months back. It was only a week after I’d met [CHARACTER NAME] and her compatriots that they approached me with an odd text that they had found. They thought, at first, that all they needed was a translation – they knew it to be a memento of some kind. They didn’t realize, and neither did I, that the text was a requiem, the last dying lament of Mona Swanson, and that the crescendo of that requiem would bring tragedy....

In this letter, the Storyteller introduces several assumptions to the chronicle. First, the letter writer is a contact of the characters, someone skilled as a translator. Second, he is aware of the significance of “mementos,” based on the context in which he uses the term, which probably makes him a Sin-Eater. Third, the characters come to him for a translation, meaning that they are unable to decipher it themselves. Finally, the book kicks off a series of events that ends in “tragedy,” and a woman named Mona Swanson is involved somehow.

Within these assumptions, though, is a myriad of possibilities. Mona Swanson might already be dead, and the book might be an anchor to her ghost. She might be a Sin-Eater on the cusp of becoming Wretched, and the book might somehow push her over the edge (perhaps it tells the story of the death of her lover, or perhaps it was written by someone she thoughtlessly murdered). The “tragedy” that the letter speaks of might be the death of one of the characters (from which he can return, of course), the destruction of Mona’s unquiet shade, or some other unpleasant event that will only be revealed as the story progresses. But for any of this to happen, the characters have to fulfill their role in the story – that is, they have to go to the letter writer for help with the translation.

Variation: An auction house, selling off mementos. The mementos belonged to the characters or their associates,



and for each one the Storyteller begins with the auctioneer's description of the item, its history, and a mystery surrounding it. (This narrative device, obviously, was used to open the musical *The Phantom of the Opera*.)

Seven Deaths

The chronicle is designed to run for seven stories (not chapters, so each story can be as long or as short as necessary). Every story ends, or begins, if you prefer, with a death. The victim can be a player's character, an important supporting character, or someone apparently unrelated, but the characters become involved in the story as a result of that death. The characters might not even associate with each other outside of these stories, allowing the Storyteller to take large amounts of downtime between each death.

As an example, consider the following nursery rhyme:

*Seven blackbirds in a tree,
Count them and see what they be.
One for sorrow
Two for joy
Three for a girl
Four for a boy;
Five for silver
Six for gold
Seven for a secret
That's never been told.*

The chronicle begins with the preludes, with the characters joining with their geists and becoming Sin-Eaters. In each prelude story, the character in question sees a blackbird nearby, looking in through a window, picking apart an insect, roosting in a tree, dead by the side of the road, and so on. During the first story, the characters meet up during a sorrowful event — a funeral is a good choice. It's obviously sorrowful, and can incorporate some of the somber aspects of the death process. The second story, just for contrast, might take place at a wake. It's still a ceremony marking someone's passage from the world, but it throws the first story's sad and grim mood into sharp relief. Here, the mourners celebrate life, and drink and cavort to the wee hours... but someone still *died*. The third story might involve a bride killed on her wedding day (perhaps using the old urban legend about the poisoned wedding dress?), while the fourth might tell the story of a young man killed in battle (a soldier, maybe, or the casualty of gang violence). And so on. The chronicle has the freedom to grow in any number of directions, but it always comes back to death, and the blackbirds, patiently waiting.

Variation: The *characters* each die three times during the chronicle — once during the prelude, and twice during play. You might allow the players to choose one of their deaths and let you (or circumstance) choose the other. If you use this idea, it's probably a good idea to interpret the rules for cheating death (see p. 173) a bit more leniently. Perhaps the Synergy cap only drops by one, or perhaps you forego the roll to gain a derangement post-death.

No Escaping Fate

For this chronicle, the players choose their characters' fates. A character might be fated to be lost in the Underworld, to be murdered by a close friend (or, specifically, one of the other characters), to merge with his geist and pass on (see endgames, below), or to die and refuse to come back. Have each player write down the character's fate and turn it over to you — or, if you really want all cards on the table, have the players state their characters' fate aloud during character creation.

What, you might wonder, is the point? If you know how the story ends, why read it? But that's somewhat shortsighted — it's one thing to know that Hamlet dies at the end of the play (it's a tragedy; *everybody* dies at the end), but the important thing is his progression along the way. In such stories, the end isn't a twist or a spoiler, it's a foregone conclusion, and we enjoy the story not because we're expecting to be surprised but because we appreciate the craft of the story itself. We watch as Hamlet questions his family, his resolve and his own sanity, cringe as he dooms himself, and finally take part in the bloodbath that is the final scene. A chronicle in which the players choose their characters' fates doesn't have to be tragic (some aspects of it probably will be, of course, but nothing says a player can't choose something positive or uplifting as his character's fate), but by removing the fickle element of chance from the character's endgame, the troupe is free to explore all of the other possibilities that might happen along the way. The player can take risks that he otherwise wouldn't, open doors that he might otherwise ignore, because he knows what's coming (even though the character doesn't, necessarily).

In short, it's very much in-theme for **Geist** for the player to know how it all ends, at least in an abstract way. We all die, but we don't (shouldn't) let that knowledge stop us from living the story of our lives.

Variation: If you'd like to give players some control over their characters' fates, but not quite abandon all elements of chance, ask the players what the "tragedy thresholds" of their characters are. That is, ask them what kind of ending, for the character or even for a given story arc, would be too glum for the player. Some players enjoy playing tragic characters, doomed by their own mistakes or even the vagaries of chance, while some players would rather see their characters come out of a story victorious, or at least none the

worse for wear. Likewise, some Storytellers are reluctant to target characters for events that they find too unpleasant, which can leave a player feeling like his character is being handled (unnecessarily) with kid gloves. By establishing up front what would be too much (or not enough) trauma for a character, the Storyteller can keep the end result a surprise but still stay within the player's comfort zone.

Elements of the Chronicles

It's a common problem with putting a chronicle together, especially in games like *Geist* (and the rest of the World of Darkness games, honestly) — density. The game is so big, the world so robust, that it's simply not possible to include all of the elements presented in this book and not wind up with a chronicle that feels too busy. It only gets more overwhelming if the Storyteller tries to incorporate material from other World of Darkness game lines. That's not to say you *can't* (or shouldn't) dig out your copy of *Vampire: The Requiem* and have the Sin-Eater characters play cars with some ancient undead creature, just that if don't keep a hold on the thematic center of the chronicle, it starts to feel unwieldy, the themes get diluted, and it's harder to see the metaphorical forest for the trees.

But on the other hand, the World of Darkness has a myriad of options for characters, creatures, places, and events that are highly suitable for *Geist* chronicles. Why ignore them? Simply be circumspect in what you choose to mix in.

A good method for choosing your chronicle's elements is to pull out whatever materials you choose to use (be they movies, graphic novels, traditional novels, Web sites, and, of course, World of Darkness books), grab a notebook and your favorite pen, and start making a list of what you think should be included in your chronicle. If your players have already made characters, that's fine — consider what elements would dovetail nicely with them. If not, make yourself a separate list of notes for the players when they do create characters, with suggestions for traits, background, and whatever else would highlight the elements of the chronicle you've chosen.

A Brief Example

Eloy is putting together a *Geist* chronicle and, thus far, only one of his players (Kat) has made a character. On p. 67, you can see Kat's character, Zita, and the process the player went through to create her. Eloy, wanting to get a jump start on the chronicle, decides to list a few elements he wants to include.

He already knows that he wants to focus the chronicle around a gang war. The war includes both the living gang members, and the ghosts of those who have been killed in the previous battles. He grabs a pen and a piece of scratch paper, and makes the following list:

- Gun battles
- Drugs
- Day of the Dead celebration
- Stubbornness; refusing to let the past lie
- Mexican food
- Friendship

- Cops as adversaries
- Lying with a smile
- Catholic imagery
- Rap music
- Underground clubs
- Remembering the fallen

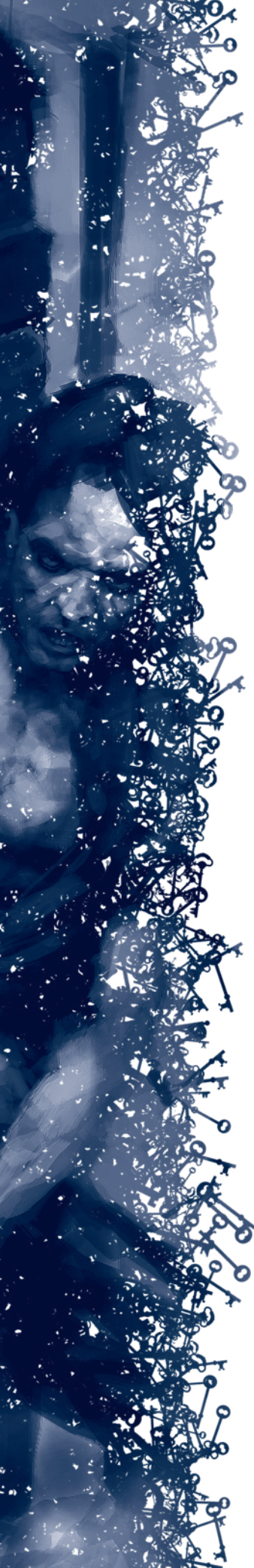
With all of that in mind, Eloy considers where he'd like to take the first story (he wants the chronicle to be character-driven, and so he's not making decisions about the whole chronicle yet). Since Zita writes rap lyrics when she thinks no one's looking, Eloy decides to tie in the “underground clubs” and the “rap music” angle, and have the story begin at a makeshift party in an abandoned building. The place is going to be loud, smoky, and dark, but there's an expensive sound system and a rap battle going on — two people facing off and dissing each other in lyric form. It's a battle of improvisation and quick observation (Eloy notes that this will probably require an opposed Manipulation + Expression roll, since he's not about to make his players try to improvise rap).

Eloy does a little research on the *Día de los Muertos* celebration, and notes that some folks write *calaveras* (literally, “skulls”) about their friends. These are mocking epitaphs, meant to highlight the funny stories, in-jokes, or odd habits of the participants. Eloy likes this as a backdrop for the rap battle and decides that for this party, taking place on November 1st, the participants will use their time on the microphone to create *calaveras* about their opponents — stories about how they died. He also decides every single one is going to come true, and he spends a little time making up some participants and the basics of their verses (and in the process, he discovers that coming up with good lyrics isn't as easy as it looks).

Eloy saves some of the elements that he writes down for later — he loves the idea of the characters going to a feast or a block party with a lot of authentic Mexican dishes being served, but he decides to save it for a later story. Likewise, while he wants a drug deal gone bad to form the backdrop of a story, he's having too much fun coming up with *calaveras* for the characters now.

After more brainstorming, Eloy decides the characters are all going to attend this party/rap battle (and he'll leave it to the players to decide *why* the characters are there). They can participate if they want to, but any *calaveras* they create are going to come true within a week. He decides he'll use the first session as this party, include some shady dealings, introduce the warring gang factions (the party has been declared neutral ground), and play up the odd atmosphere — it's a party, but half of the attendants would just as soon kill the other half as look at them. Finally, Eloy decides the party will be raided by the police (he wants to portray the police as a kind of not-quite-human force from on-high; when they arrive, things have definitely gotten out of hand). In the wake of the raid, some fights break out, which will allow Eloy to demonstrate the basics of the combat system to any new players.

For the last scene of this chapter, Eloy plans to have the characters realizing the next morning that one of the participants in the rap battle died last night — exactly as



his *calavera* described. If possible, Eloy wants Zita to have been the one telling the *calavera* (even if she didn't take the stage, maybe she wrote the rhymes), and have that odd "coincidence" drive the rest of the story.

Player Input

How much influence should you allow the players to have on the chronicle? The short answer is "a lot," but let's examine the question in a bit more detail.

If the chronicle is character-driven, then the players really are doing most of the heavy lifting. Certainly, you are fleshing out antagonists and other supporting casts, adjudicating dice rolls and systems, and helping things along, but the ultimate goal of this kind of chronicle is being able to show up at the game, say to the players, "Okay, what are you doing?" and run the session from there. The players decide what the leads or agendas characters are pursuing, and all you have to do is make up the results.

That's not as easy as it sounds, of course. If you have trouble thinking on your feet and would rather rely on a script, then this kind of Storytelling is going to be problematic. But one way around being caught flat-footed is to spend some time detailing the history and present state of the game setting. For instance, if you are setting the chronicle in New York and making use of the information in the Appendix, make sure the players know that they can (and should) read that section and decide which characters, events, rumors, and places they find interesting. You therefore know what to focus on and flesh out, but you also have enough of a "sandbox," as it were, that the characters can go all over the city and you'll still have characters and material to present. If the troupe decides that the characters are going to take a road trip somewhere, ask that they give you a chapter's notice so that you can make up some details about the World of Darkness version of Cleveland (or wherever). Another good practice is, after every story, to ask players for three suggestions about what the next story should

be about. If several players make the same suggestion, you've got a good chance of making everyone happy — use it!

In an event-driven chronicle, of course, it's assumed that the Storyteller has some idea about where things are going. That doesn't mean you should ignore suggestions that the players give you, of course, it just means that you should look for ways to incorporate them into the ongoing story. A request to see more of a particular supporting character, or the opportunity to settle the score with an enemy gives you the chance to engage the players fully in the story and advance your own plotline at the same time. Regardless of how much you love the intricate story you've created, don't be afraid to tweak it when necessary. Also, if the players give you an idea that is better than what you were working towards, take it! Storytelling is collaborative, and you should never feel lazy for taking a player's suggestion (whether you admit that you took it or pretend that's what was happening all along is up to you).

In a theme-driven chronicle, your ideas about how things should progress probably factor heavily into how you run the game. That's not to say that you should ignore player input here, either, just that it might or might not fit in with what you are trying to do. In such a chronicle, it's crucial that your players trust you and your vision, but incorporating player suggestion is a good way to foster that trust. Make a list of the aspects of the game that *cannot* change, as far as your vision is concerned, and then consider implementing suggestions that fall within other areas.

The takeaway message here is this: if the players aren't having fun with your chronicle, they won't want to continue the story. If they don't feel their characters' actions have any effect on the story, they won't have fun with it. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Storyteller to ask for and to accept feedback from the players, to an extent based on the troupe in question. That, of course, is for the Storyteller to sort out with the players.

CHANGES TO THE SYSTEM

No game engine is perfect, in part because no two troupes are looking for precisely the same thing in a system. After you have been running your **Geist** chronicle for a while, you might get players complaining about certain mechanical aspects of the game, or of the Storytelling system in general. Don't dismiss these complaints out of hand — if a player is unhappy with the Synergy system, it might be that you've been using it too harshly (or too leniently) and should have another look at it. If the players feel that the mechanic allowing Sin-Eaters to return from death is too forgiving, cut it or limit it. The rules aren't sacrosanct, and frankly your interpretation of them shouldn't be limited to "that's the way I see it."

Of course, a fine line exists between listening to your players and letting them dictate the system. Like everything else in Storytelling, this is a balancing act; listen to the players' suggestions, make a decision, and explain why you made it. If everyone's having fun, you're doing your job. If not, you need to come to some consensus. That's the most — the only — important rule.

The Stories

The chronicle is made up of stories, of course. Within each story is an opportunity for character development, for exploring the world of **Geist**, and for the characters to meet and overcome interesting new challenges. When designing a story for your chronicle, first consider these three questions:

- **How does the story tie into the chronicle as a whole?**

If you are running a theme-based chronicle, the stories might all start the same way (a death, a letter, etc.). The story is one part of an overarching whole, and so seeing how it ties into that whole shouldn't be difficult. For event- and character-driven chronicles, the principle is the same; you simply don't have the same kind of formula to follow.

In an event-driven chronicle, think about where the last story left off. Is downtime necessary or desired? If so, how much? A story might end at something like a cliffhanger, and that means the Storyteller might wish to jump forward a few months and reveal in the first few scenes of the next story how things were resolved. Or, the break in the chronicle might be more thematic. That is, the last story ends in the middle of the action — the characters are stuck outside as a hurricane threatens to sweep them all away, but the story (which involved chasing a madman out into that storm to reclaim the memento he stole) is over. The next story might pick up with the characters still fighting for survival in the storm, and this theme of

fighting the elements might be the predominant one of the story.

Also, in an event- or theme-driven chronicle, you need to consider where the chronicle is going, and whether the story you have in mind fits into that design. If, for instance, you are running a “Twilight Network, Compromised” chronicle (see above), the stories in that chronicle should all have some element that moves the plot along toward the characters figuring out what compromised the Network. You might pick up a new *World of Darkness* sourcebook and become inspired by something therein, but unless you can make it fit the story you are creating, it's probably best to leave it alone (that said, please do take inspiration from any source you can — *World of Darkness* books, movies, music, literature, etc. — and make the inspiration work for your chronicle! See the sidebar for an example).

In a character-driven chronicle, you should still pay attention to what has come before and where you want the chronicle to go, but recognize that the main sources of conflict and drama are the characters and their agendas. In such a chronicle, it is crucial to get feedback from the players as to what they want their characters to do next, and base the story around those answers. Naturally, if one of the characters has a skeleton in the closet that you want to unearth, that's fine — the chronicle is still character-driven.

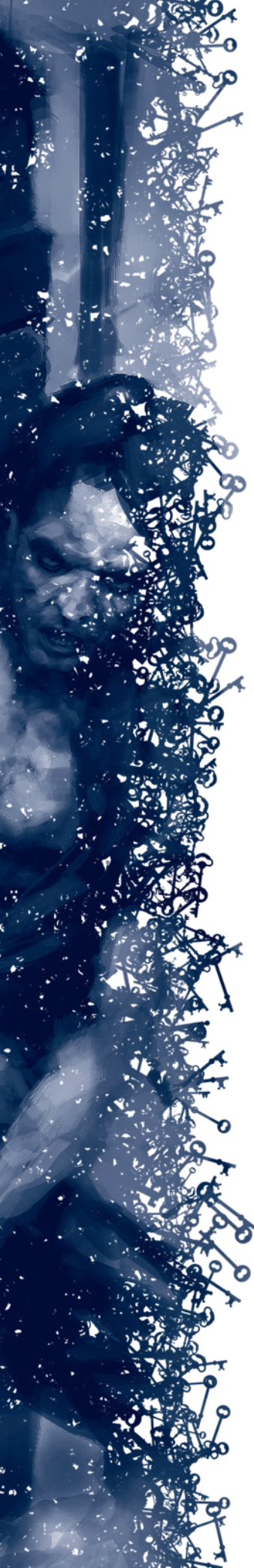
THE WORLD OF DARKNESS AND MAKING IT WORK FOR GEIST

You can run a long and successful **Geist** chronicle with nothing more than this book and the *World of Darkness* Rulebook. Now, with that said, the **World of Darkness** line includes a host of really excellent resources for Storytellers, and that's without even considering the other game lines. Of course, they aren't written with **Geist** in mind, specifically (because if they were, they'd be **Geist** sourcebooks), and that means that if you use material from these books, a bit of massaging might be in order.

To wit: consider **World of Darkness: Midnight Roads**. This sourcebook concerns travel and the out-of-the-way places in the **World of Darkness** (highways, little towns, truck stops, etc.). The book includes a story hook about a man who runs a “Reptile Land,” a little roadside attraction full of poisonous snakes and ugly-looking lizards. The characters find him dead of snakebite, his eyelids taped up, and a note on his forehead that says, “Can you pray with your eyes open?”

In order to make this story hook work for a **Geist** chronicle, the Storyteller has to consider a few points. Obviously, she needs a way to get the characters out to this roadside attraction, but that's true no matter where she takes her inspiration from. More specifically, she needs to figure out what killed the man, who wrote the note, and what it means. The answers to these questions in, say, a **Mage: The Awakening** chronicle will be very different than the answers in a **Geist** chronicle.

Just so we don't leave you hanging, here's a possibility: the proprietor was a Sin-Eater, a member of a krewe whose channel concerned humility before the power of death. Much of their adopted symbolism was from the Old Testament, and this particular member has a serpent fixation. Over time, he grew apart from the other members and left... and they finally tracked him down. The note on his forehead was an admonition to be humble before God. A bit of investigation reveals the man's **geist** hanging around the area, and it would love revenge. It might even show the characters how to kill and devour the krewe's founders, which would enable them to steal the power (see p. 192).



- **How many chapters should the story include?** You don't have to answer this question with an exact number, of course — sometimes a story might be built for a specific number of chapters (maybe one per character), but usually a story takes as many chapters as it needs to take. That said, you can and should figure out whether this story is meant to be a long, involved one (as many as 10 chapters), a mid-length story (four to six chapters) or a brief, fast-paced story (two or three chapters).

A long story probably has multiple arcs, all tying back to a central plot that, in turn, furthers the chronicle as a whole. For example, the story might involve a character's mentor and his disappearance. The mentor has, in fact, slipped away into the Underworld, and the only people who know this are an ascetic cult living on a commune in upstate New York. The characters must therefore learn about the cult, find it, communicate with the members (they have taken a strict vow of silence, and the whole commune is eerily hushed at all times), and learn from them which Avernian Gate the missing mentor used. *Then* the characters can enter the gate and track him down. The story might also involve the other characters getting in touch with *their* mentors (if any), just to check in.

A mid-length story has one central plotline, and while individual scenes might stray from it, most of the action relates directly to it. For example, the characters might be called upon to lay a ghost to rest. The story therefore focuses on learning about the ghost, making contact with it, and helping it resolve its anchors (or destroying them).

A short story, one that can be resolved in one or two sessions, typically involves an immediate and urgent problem. It's not going to be an issue for long, but it can't be ignored. For example, the characters are caught in a big city during a blackout and subsequent riot. The story involves them protecting their home from opportunists trying to break in, and possibly with taking advantage of the chaos to further their own goals.

- **What event will end the story?** You don't need to plan out every scene of a story (and in fact, it's probably a waste of time, since the players will undoubtedly throw you for a loop somehow). What you should do, though, is figure out when the story ends. What needs to happen for this plot arc to be complete? It might be something the characters have to accomplish — they must kill a target, save someone's life, reach a goal, or destroy an object. It might be something

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

It's a truism, almost a cliché: no story survives contact with the players. The players will always find a way to approach things that you didn't foresee (which is why planning out stories in a lot of advance detail is of dubious value), and sometimes they ignore the story you want to tell and go chasing off after red herrings, minor characters, or whatever shiny object catches their collective eye. What do you do then?

First, remember that this isn't a novel, a film, or a painting. It's a roleplaying game, and that means all decisions are collective. Don't get annoyed at the players, especially if they're having fun.

Then, consider your options. You could try and steer the players back into the story that you've created. If they just decided to pursue a false lead, make it a real lead! Give the innocent old man some information to share. Plant a clue in the "empty" old factory. Have the character's Contact, who really shouldn't know anything of value, be terrified and unwilling to talk because of "what he saw last night."

If the characters are moving away from the plotline because they have something they'd rather do instead, you could merge their interests with your story. If that seems a little too pat, though, let them deal with whatever interests them. If they decide not to lay the ghost to rest for now, it'll keep — the ghost isn't going anywhere. And later, when the ghost attacks and injures a comrade of the krewé, they can feel little pangs of guilt for not dealing with it when they could. On the other hand, if the matter is something that requires immediate attention, you might have someone else take care of it. The ghost might be lashing out at passersby, and a local medium "exorcises" the ghost... but all she really did was steal the gold watch that was his anchor. Since she's carrying it around, the attacks are going to get more frequent and more widespread — will the characters get involved now?

Most of the time, players try to follow (and shape) the storyline. It's part of the unspoken agreement between you and the players, after all. Another part of it is that you present stories that are interesting to the troupe, and they keep you informed about what they find interesting. If everyone communicates appropriately, the tension arising from the players not following the plot hooks shouldn't be an issue.

they don't have any control over; you might decide the story ends when a certain amount of time has passed, regardless of what the characters do.

Using the examples above, the long story about the mentor who fled to the Underworld ends when the characters bring him back out. This is because what he has to tell them will drive the *next* story, but he can't tell them until he's back in the land of the living and has recovered from his traumatic trip into the Lower Mysteries. Therefore, when the characters reach the living world with the mentor in tow (or fail to do so — maybe the mentor dies en route), the story ends.

In the mid-length story, the end point comes when the characters lay the ghost to rest or destroy it. The ghost might give them some hint about where to go next, depending on how the characters got there to begin with. If the chronicle is a character-driven one, then the next story might not be related to this one at all.

Finally, the short story ends when the blackout does. The sun rises, the police (or National Guard, if things got really out of hand) arrive, or the lights flicker back on — something indicates that this event has come to an end.

Conflicts

The meat of any story is the conflict. What forces are working at opposition to one another, and where do the characters fit in? As you design the conflicts for the stories in your chronicle, keep the following in mind:

- **The Whole Troupe:** Many works of fiction concern themselves with one central character. That's not true in roleplaying games. While a given story might be centered on one character, the conflict involved needs to be one that all the characters can take part in.

On a more practical level, when you use combat scenes, remember that every participant in a combat only receives one action per turn. As such, if your troupe includes five players and they face off against one adversary, they get five actions for every *one* the adversary takes. Minions and allies can provide some backup, but if the characters do outnumber the foe and you want the scene to be a challenge, don't be afraid to add Armor- or Defense-increasing powers or mementos.

- **Motivation:** A conflict that can't be resolved any other way except combat is rare. It might happen if the characters face off against a geist that has become utterly obsessed with bloodshed, true, but most enemies are more complex than that. More important than an enemy's combat traits is his motivation — why is he working at cross-purposes to the characters? How important is it to him that he "wins" their fight? Would he sacrifice his livelihood? His allies? His own life? What is his history and how does it inform his decision? If he is a Sin-Eater, to what extent does his geist direct him (and this should be reflected in traits like Synergy and Psyche)? If you understand the adversary's goals,

you can better address player strategies such as bribery, reason, and threats.

On a related note, some Storytellers are tempted to have adversaries fight to the death. This isn't necessary, and in fact lets the characters off too easy, in a way. If an enemy surrenders, what then? Killing the enemy is no longer a matter of self-defense or striking in the heat of the moment. It's a premeditated act, and therefore carries a greater risk of degeneration (see p. 85).

- **Themes:** How does the conflict play into the themes of the story? Into the themes of the chronicle? Of **Geist** in general? What imagery or mood elements best highlight the conflict? No scene in a story should be wasted, so no matter what's going on in the game, consider what you could add or highlight to throw the focus on the themes, even just for a moment. The sample scenes below include some examples of moments or descriptors that bring out the themes.

Example Conflicts

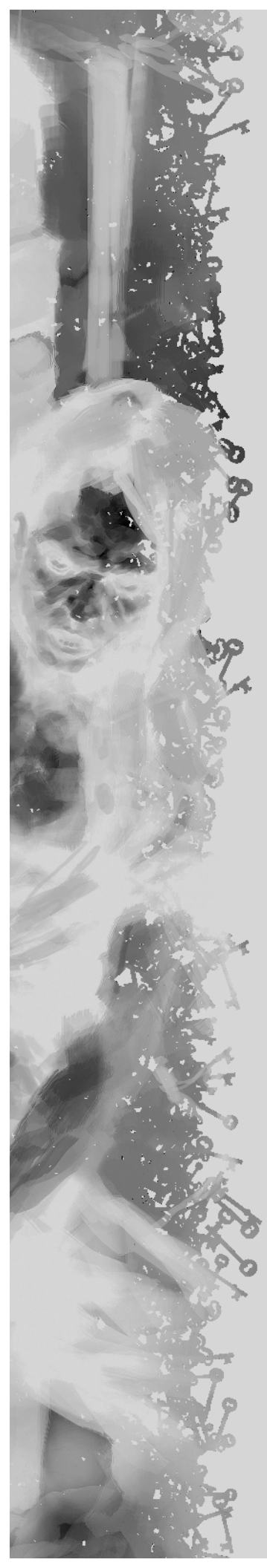
Below are seven sample conflicts that work well for **Geist** stories, along with an example of how a Storyteller might make use of that conflict.

- **Sin-Eater versus Sin-Eater:** The Bound don't all have a common purpose and they certainly aren't necessarily friends. Two Sin-Eaters might hate each other for all the same reasons that people do, and on top of that, they have their approaches to dealing with ghosts to consider. What if a given group of Sin-Eaters feels that ghosts are best off banished sooner rather than later, and destroys anchors without even trying to resolve them? Another group (maybe the players') might feel this approach is tantamount to murder of the dead, banishing ghosts to the Underworld (at best) without so much as giving them a chance to find their own way.

The conflict between Bound can also be a war for resources. If two groups of Sin-Eaters both take up residence in the same area, they might compete for ghostly resources, mementos, or access to Avernian Gates. They might also attempt to court a more powerful krewé.

Likewise, two krewés might be opposed on ideological grounds, but even *within* a krewé, characters can have plenty of reasons for strife. Sin-Eaters can devour each other to gain successor status in a krewé. A founder that names a successor might come to regret that decision. He might request that a younger, eager group of Sin-Eaters kills his would-be successor so that he can reclaim that power he placed into his disciple (see *Founding a Krewé*, p. 191).

And this brings up an important point about Sin-Eaters — killing them is difficult. As long as they have Synergy to burn (and as long as the geist agrees), a Sin-Eater can return from the grave. Likewise, every time this happens, someone else dies. So a character that knowingly kills a Sin-Eater is responsible for the death of an innocent human being (provided that the Sin-Eater returns to life). This fact should make characters hesitant to resort to lethal force.



Story Hook — Nihilists: The characters run afoul of a Sin-Eater who believes himself to be the incarnation of Death itself, and he's built up a cult of followers who believe him. He tells them he doesn't so much decide when people die as facilitate it, and the cultists are brainwashed enough that they are willing to die by his hand in order to serve him. This enables him to heal himself, gain plasm, mementos, and so on. Regardless of how the characters feel about this methodology, the cult leader *hates* other Sin-Eaters because they are proof against his delusions of grandeur. He sets his cultists upon them as soon as he learns about them, and that isn't just a matter of black-robed zealots attacking with knives. Some of his death-worshippers are police officers, civil servants, doctors, and other professionals.

- **Sin-Eater versus Ghost:** Sin-Eaters can see ghosts everywhere. They have to make an effort to *avoid* seeing them, and that means that evidence of death — death by misadventure, death by murder, death by disease — is all around. Ghosts aren't necessarily common, but thousands of people die every day, and at least some of them are passionate or obsessed enough to linger. That means Sin-Eaters never have to look very far for company, whether they want it or not.

A story involving a ghost doesn't have to be an adversarial one, of course. Some ghosts are hostile, some are sympathetic, and some just want to move on but cannot figure out how. Some might have developed enough self-awareness to know that "passing on" doesn't mean things are going to get any better, and fight the efforts of anyone trying to resolve or destroy their anchors. Some ghosts are tethered to living people, making them more mobile (and often more functional) than others.

Dealing with a ghostly adversary might require an exorcism (see p. 214 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). It might require extensive investigation into the ghostly individual's life, or it might simply be a battle to break the ghost's remaining anchor.

Consider how the ghost in such a story (and, in fact, any ghosts that make appearances in your chronicle) sees the Sin-Eaters. Not all ghosts realize what they are, and a ghost that still thinks of itself as "alive" might view the Sin-Eater as someone it can talk to. The character might be able to talk the ghost into remembering what happened to it, clearing the way for resolution of anchors and passing to the true afterlife. Of course, some ghosts, when they realize what they are, allow anger, hatred, or fear to take them over and become violent poltergeists or insidious possessors, and a Sin-Eater runs the risk of

unleashing one of these beasts every time she has a conversation with a still-confused shade.

Ghosts that do realize what they are might see Sin-Eaters as a way to accomplish what they cannot. Sin-Eaters are mediums and necromancers by nature, and a ghost that realizes that the woman having a quiet drink in the corner *can see him* isn't likely to leave her alone once he realizes she could fulfill his dying wish (whatever that might be). Of course, ghosts are bound to their anchors, and this fact reduces their bargaining or threatening power with Sin-Eaters — if a character doesn't want to deal with a ghost, she can leave the area. Some ghosts get insistent, and start haunting the area aggressively until the Sin-Eater agrees to help.

Story Hook — The Cheated: A ghost attacks one of the characters, accusing him of murdering her. The character has no memory of committing this crime, but the ghost is absolutely certain that the Sin-Eater killed her, and is powerful enough to make trouble for the character. Worse, she seems to be anchored to him, meaning that she can follow him around and use her Numina on those nearby. Did the character kill her? In order to answer that question, the character needs to investigate his own history. Maybe he did kill her by accident — a stray bullet during a fight, perhaps. Maybe his geist did it while he was asleep. Maybe she died so that he could be resurrected, but if that's the case, how did she learn about him?

- **Sin-Eater versus the Supernatural:** The World of Darkness has an extensive list of creatures that cause death, and therefore can work at odds with Sin-Eaters. Vampires drain people dry and leave them in dumpsters, werewolves rip their foes to bits and consume their flesh, and mages sacrifice their victims for the energy contained in their souls. Of course, Sin-Eaters have their own uses for the deaths of mortals, so they can be on either side of this conflict.

When the dead meddle in the affairs of the living, Sin-Eaters can become involved. Normally, that means ghosts, husks, and other undead creatures are the purview of Sin-Eaters (as least as far as they see it). The Sin-Eaters deal with horrors from beyond the grave, and they do so with the knowledge that they may one day wind up sharing the Underworld with these beings. This lends a certain degree of care to all they do — a Sin-Eater might need to put down a ghost or a cannibal geist today, but is it truly destroyed? Does anything ever really *end*, or will all of the combatants wind up in the Lower Mysteries? Sin-Eaters should consider these questions very carefully when they enter battle with their foes.

Beyond that, what of the notion of “guarding the living from the dead?” Does that include vampire predations (since vampires are technically dead)? It might, depending on the predilections of the Sin-Eaters in question. Likewise, Sin-Eaters might find themselves in conflict with all sorts of restless (or at least ambulatory) dead people – but so might other supernatural beings. A cabal of mages might consider Sin-Eaters to have cheated death, and want to help balance the scales, so to speak. A pack of werewolves might see an Avernian Gate as a dangerous anomaly, leading to a part of the spirit world they can’t identify and therefore fear.

Often, the conflict between supernatural beings in the World of Darkness is based on misunderstanding. This is because no faction is interested in spilling its secrets to outsiders in order to promote harmony or cooperation – what says that, even if *my* side is honest, *yours* will be in return? Sin-Eaters, not having the widespread society that many other supernatural beings do, have a little more leeway (no Prince or Hierarch is going to punish them for talking), but they also have very little in the way of backup. A Sin-Eater krewe that goes looking for the other denizens of the shadows had best do so very carefully.

Story Hook – The Gatekeepers: The characters meet a man with no breath, who feeds on the blood of living people – obviously a vampire. But this vampire claims his soul belongs to Ghede, the *loa* of the dead and crossroads in the vodoun religion. Once per year, he says, he and his kind must guard the gateways to the Underworld, as Ghede himself walks the Earth in physical form. Is this creature telling the truth? Is he a different “breed” of vampire? Is he simply delusional? And if he is telling the truth, are the characters obligated to help him?

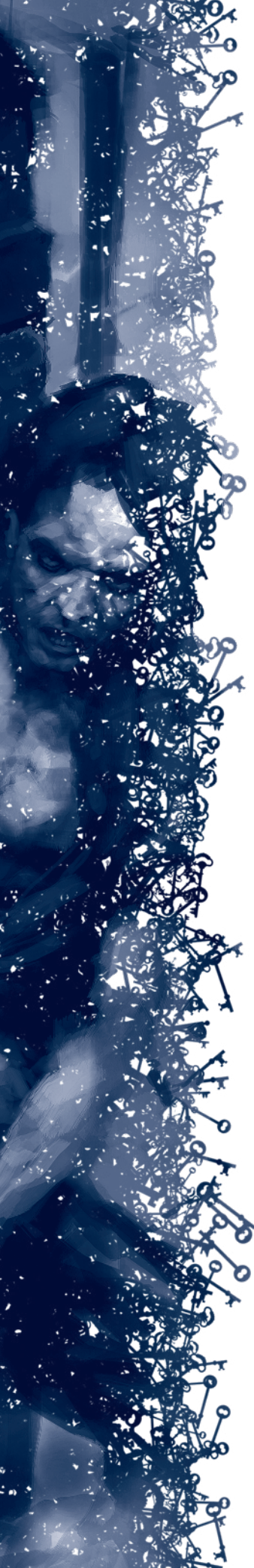
- **Sin-Eater versus Humanity:** At a basic level, humanity can conflict with Sin-Eaters due to fear of their abilities or association with death. Brave or suicidal mortals hunt supernatural beings, after all, so it’s not a stretch to imagine such people seeing Sin-Eaters as harbingers of death. These mortals, of course, won’t fully understand the being that they stalk, but misunderstanding is great fodder for conflict.

The conflict between humanity and Sin-Eater can be more nuanced, though. Investigating ghosts leads Sin-Eaters into odd situations – breaking and entering, destruction of property, potentially even assault or murder. Their intentions might be good, but the mortals who own the house into which they’re breaking won’t see it that way. And even if a mortal is made to understand the nature of the situation (there’s a ghost and we need to put it to rest before it hurts someone), the mortal might project her own religious or moral standards onto the situation. What if the ghost was a suicide, and its mortal daughter believes that suicides go to Hell if they “pass on?”

Another potential source of conflict here is that humanity is largely afraid of death. Look at the monuments that have been erected over time to appease the dead, or the intricate fables about life-after-death that virtually all cultures invent. For an example a little closer to home, consider the funeral industry, a multi-billion dollar business that preys upon the fears and best wishes of the bereaved. The question of “what comes next” is a terrifying one, especially in the World of Darkness, and Sin-Eaters are emblematic of that question because they *have* experienced what comes next (up to a point). Sin-Eaters, of course, don’t necessarily represent the morbid side of death. Indeed, one of the themes of the game is the notion of making merry today, since “today”

joel BISKE





is temporary. A story that puts Sin-Eaters in the midst of humanity might focus on getting the mortals to see the value in that attitude.

Story Hook – Hospice: A young man dying of AIDS simply refuses to accept his fate, and stops the disease. This isn't a cause for celebration, however — he *should* be dying, but he digs in his heels, metaphysically speaking. This has odd repercussions for the world around him; perhaps ghosts grow more powerful or start losing the bonds their anchors impose, or maybe Manifestations and other death-related powers are disrupted around the man. In any event, the characters need to convince him to let go, to let his life end so that the threads of Fate, as it were, don't become tangled. This requires a great deal of convincing on their part, but if anyone is suited to showing someone about the necessity of death, it should be a Sin-Eater. Simply killing the man, incidentally, might work — but then again, if he doesn't die by the disease, that might make things worse, skewing Fate even further. Do the characters want to take that risk?

- **Sin-Eater versus the Underworld:** One of the classic conflicts is “man versus nature,” and this is usually understood to mean a conflict in which the human character struggles with the world around him — animal attack, blizzard, storm, etc. These conflicts can plague Sin-Eaters, too, but the most obvious representation of this conflict is in the Underworld. The Underworld allows the Storyteller to present the kind of immediate survival problems that a trek through the wilderness would pose to a mortal. The characters have to contend with dangerous creatures (Kerberoi), environmental dangers (rockslides, twisting caverns, and that's before one considers crossing a river of scorpions), and that's before they reach whatever goal brought them to the Great Below in the first place.

Story Hook – Trapped in the Great Below:

The characters fall through a rent in the world during an earthquake or another natural disaster, and find that they are stuck in a canyon, miles below the world of the living. They can climb the walls, but what will they find if they reach the “top”? The Underworld is entirely subterranean, so how did they fall into it? Is there now a crack in the ceiling? These questions and more should nag at the characters as they climb the canyons walls, and every time they find tunnels that might lead them to level ground, the tunnels open again at a different point along the rock wall — maybe even on the other side of the gap.

- **Sin-Eater versus Self (or Geist):** All Sin-Eaters are gestalts of two beings, the mortal and the geist. Achieving some kind of synthesis is arguably a goal for all Sin-Eaters, or at the very least, maintaining enough Synergy to stay functional and not become Wretched (see p. 173). If the geist bonds with a mortal sympathetic to its agenda, this kind of synthesis isn't as difficult, but sometimes that isn't the case. Some geists bond with people that they think will be easy to control, and wind up surprised by the host's tenacity. Some Sin-Eaters are truly repulsed by the desire of their geist, and vice versa. The conflict between these two halves of the Sin-Eater is one that every Geist player at least needs to consider.

The conflict of Sin-Eater versus self, though, can go beyond the geist. What part of the mortal died when the geist took up residence? What does the character think about death, now that she has firsthand experience? What are the character's doubts and fears, and how does the geist view them? All World of Darkness characters benefit from some consideration toward thresholds for violence, the supernatural, and morality, but only Sin-Eaters have another,

THE VOICE OF THE GEIST

The default set-up for Geist is that the Storyteller plays a character's geist when it becomes necessary. Consider this as an alternative: Each of the players portrays another character's geist. Players shouldn't spend more than a few minutes per scene in “geist mode,” unless the scene is strictly between a Sin-Eater and his geist. The idea here isn't to give everyone the responsibility of playing a second character, but simply to give the geists their own voices and personalities without overburdening the Storyteller. If you choose to use this option, consider the following:

- The questions and considerations for geist creation (p. 67) should involve both the Sin-Eater's player and the player who is going to take the role of the geist (presuming that the same player will handle the geist all throughout the chronicle). The Sin-Eater's player has veto power, but the geist's player should certainly have some input.
- When playing the geist, the player should bear the character's present Synergy level in mind — as the trait gets higher, the character and the geist are more in sync, so the demands it makes on the Sin-Eater are more reasonable and in line with the Sin-Eater's ethos. Low Synergy means that the geist is demanding, and its demands are purely related to its own desires, with no regard for the Sin-Eater's desires or morality.

sentient presence that is privy to everything they do. Does being constantly watched influence those decisions? It might lead to a certain amount of self-loathing in a Sin-Eater.

Story Hook – I Know What You Did: The geist knows the Sin-Eater’s mind, and it knows the deepest parts of her psyche. In this story, the characters notice that once a day, always at the same time, their geists go completely silent. During this time, which lasts for seven minutes, no more, no less, the characters feel cold and drugged, as though under the effects of a powerful barbiturate. Later, the characters receive blackmail letters, naming secrets that only their geists could know about. The blackmailer knows exactly how to hurt the characters, exactly what buttons to push. How is this person (if it is a person) accessing the geists this way? Are the geists allowing it?

- **Sin-Eater versus Time:** Sin-Eaters only have a certain number of years. During that time, they might strive to become one with their geists, to expel their geists, or just to have a great time, but whatever the case, it’s only temporary. A story playing on this conflict should introduce Sin-Eater characters who are near the end of their lifespans, looking back on what they have done (or haven’t), and expressing their regret. Unlike mortals at this stage of life, though, Sin-Eaters aren’t decrepit, sick, or infirm – they are just as healthy as they’ve ever been. What does that do to the last few months of life? Sin-Eaters might become bitter, they might try to go out in a blaze of glory, or they might search for the secret of true immortality with a fanatical fervor. Any of those can drive a story.

Story Hook – Time In a Bottle: The characters meet a Sin-Eater belonging to a krewé whose ethos concerns remembering the dead. The krewé has found a way to bottle memory, and with a skilled enough practitioner, memories of months or years can be distilled and captured. Upon consuming the contents of the bottle, the drinker relives those memories – as a passive observer, true, but during that time the drinker’s body does not age. The Sin-Eater is nearing the end of his life, and wishes to prolong things by consuming the memories of the dead, living their lives instead of coming to the end of his own. What do the characters think of such a plan? What happens to the memories once they are consumed? Are there side effects to consider?

Antagonists

The latter half of this chapter discusses various types of antagonists suitable for **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**. No matter what the specific antagonist, though, the Storyteller needs to consider the antagonist’s place in the chronicle. Motivation, as discussed above, is paramount – you need to know why the antagonist is doing what he is doing, what he hopes to gain, and to what lengths he’ll go in order to achieve his goals. Consider, too, how an antagonist develops through the chronicle.

Just as player-controlled characters gain experience points and develop over the course of the chronicle, antagonists should change as well. That doesn’t mean you need to add experience points to them; the experience point system is meant for the players’ characters and isn’t set up to accommodate supporting cast, since it is partly based on roleplaying. But you can certainly consider what a given antagonist has learned during a story. If the characters got the better of him because they heard him trying to creep up on them, he might well raise his Stealth rating. If they beat him in combat without breaking a sweat, he’s not going to be in a hurry to fight them again, at least not without a lot of backup or superior weapons. Quite apart from trait increases, though, pay attention to how the adversary learns from the story’s events and what effect the lessons have on his motivations.

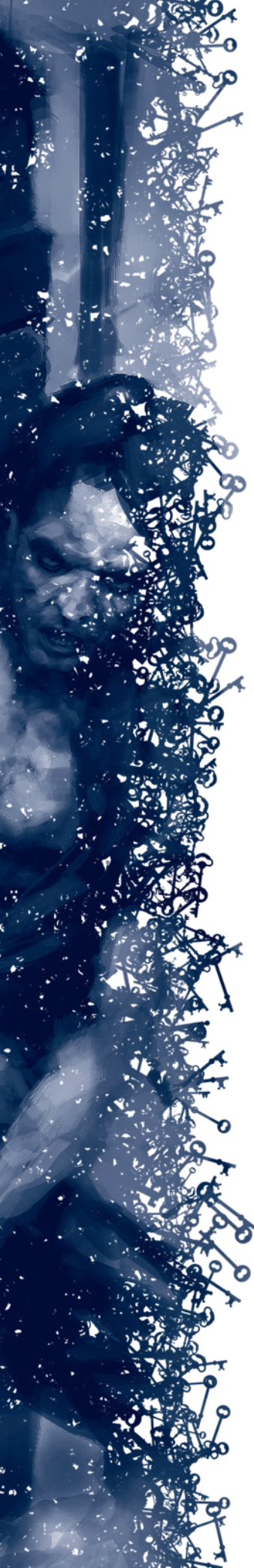
For example: after a few stories, Eloy (the Storyteller brainstorming his chronicle on p. 223) decides that Angelo Morales, the “Hungry Exorcist” found on p. 248 of this chapter, would be an interesting antagonist. Word of the gang war has reached him, and he decides, correctly, that such an environment would be a good source of nourishment. He travels to the area and consumes one of the characters’ ghostly allies. During the course of the story, the characters track him down, engage him in combat, and utterly annihilate him in a single turn.

Of course, since Angelo is an abmortal (described later in this chapter), he can’t be killed by mundane means, and he slowly heals himself. The Storyteller must therefore consider what to do with Angelo. Does he flee the area, knowing that these Sin-Eaters are too much for him? Or does he modify his tactics? It makes sense for him to leave (there are ghosts everywhere, after all), but it wouldn’t make for a very interesting story, and Eloy wants to use Angelo later in the chronicle. He decides that Angelo took this personally – he would have responded to conversation, rather than violence, but the characters didn’t give him that choice. Angelo will remain in the area, but refrains from hunting ghosts where the characters would notice. Instead, he sells his services as an exorcist to the upper crust, hoping to build enough goodwill and influence in “high society” to orchestrate a crackdown on the gang violence, and put the characters in a compromising position. If he can get them in a jail cell, he might be able to feed on their plasm at his leisure.

The End

No matter what kind of chronicle you decide to run, it’s a good idea to think about how it might end. A chronicle with no endpoint in sight can drag on after the players’ interest fades, eventually dying out when everyone agrees they don’t want to play anymore. That’s a highly dissatisfying situation, obviously.

If your chronicle is character-driven, finding an endpoint can be difficult. Pay attention as stories progress, and check in with the players often as to where they see the chronicle going. If there is an antagonist that emerges as a central “enemy,”



maybe the chronicle ends when this enmity is resolved (however that winds up happening). If the characters are working through their own agendas, maybe the chronicle consists of one or two stories per character, dealing with their histories as mortals, whatever loose ends they bring to the table, and so on. The chronicle ends when the characters' stories have all been told. Or, as the krewé gains its own identity, the geists reveal their channels and the characters form a true krewé, it might decide upon one overarching goal for the group. That, of course, becomes the focus of the chronicle and handily provides an endpoint.

For event- and theme-driven chronicles, the Storyteller probably has an ending in mind from the get-go. If you run a "Twilight Network, Compromised," chronicle (see p. 219), it probably ends when the characters discover how the Network was compromised and correct it (if they can), or deal with those responsible. In a theme-driven chronicle such as the Series of Letters (p. 231), the Storyteller should decide in advance how many letters the chronicle includes, and have some idea of how the plot arc is revealed through them.

No matter what ending you have in mind for your chronicle, though, the same caveat applies here as with all things Storytelling-related. You *must* be willing to alter your ideas in response to the players' actions. If you have the whole story planned out, beginning to end, there's nothing for the characters to do except go along for the ride. Not only is this not a lot of fun for the players, it's completely counter to the themes of *Geist*. It's impossible to live life to the fullest, to spit in the face of Death, when one is nothing but a marionette. So, consider what the ending *might* look like. Plan out the scene, take into consideration all of the important Storyteller characters, their motivations and their plans, and let the players walk into that situation. Then *see what happens*. It should be as much a discovery for you as for them.

Resolution of the Geist

Sin-Eaters are ghostlike, in a way. They nearly died, but got a second chance at life — and more — through the attentions of the geist. But the geist isn't human, and its desires can seem alien and even *wrong* to a Sin-Eater. High Synergy indicates a good merger between the two, but it might be possible for a *perfect* merger to occur, in which the geist is laid to rest. It fulfills its goal, like a ghost, and moves on to whatever is next — the Underworld, the afterlife, a new incarnation.

How can the Storyteller handle this? There's no one obvious way: that is, when speaking hypothetically. In actual play, it may become quite obvious. If a chronicle runs long and successfully enough that it seems that a character could achieve this ultimate goal, then events in the chronicle may very

well suggest a solution. For instance, if the player actively pursues what's right for both his character and his geist no matter the cost, his actions may be enough. A character dedicated to bringing a cabal of murderers to justice may find that once true justice — not simply vengeance — has been applied to each one, and reparations made to all their victims, the geist is ready to pass on. Perhaps it's a matter of time — a certain amount of time spent at Synergy 10 without fail. Or perhaps a bizarre but uplifting ceremony, a particularly obscure ritual, would suit the dramatic needs of the chronicle best. Between player and Storyteller, the path of resolution may become evident well before the actual achievement of a perfect merger becomes likely.

And what happens to the Sin-Eater if the geist is laid to rest? Consider the following possibilities:

- **Death:** The Sin-Eater lays down and dies, her soul moving on to its own afterlife.
- **Mortality:** The geist departs and the Sin-Eater picks up where she left off, mortal once again. Whether she remembers her life as a Sin-Eater is up to the Storyteller. On the one hand, it can feel a little too pat for the character to forget everything and move along as though nothing had happened. On the other hand, if the character knows about Sin-Eaters but is no longer one of them, what does that make her? The character might at least retain her ability to speak with ghosts, and perhaps knowledge of how ceremonies work, even if she can no longer perform them.
- **New Geist:** Another geist takes the place of the one that has passed on. This might allow a character to rearrange her Keys and Manifestations, and to begin the process again — but with a very different view of the world, colored by her new passenger.

Antagonists

Death spawns conflict. The Bound find themselves caught up in many struggles that involve the boundary between the living and the dead. Sometimes they can resolve the conflict by careful investigation and diplomacy — sometimes it takes memento weapons and raw, bleeding plasm to set things straight. Or at least to set things straight for a time: for the problems that beset Sin-Eaters will only stop emerging when people stop dying and Death is just a memory.

Ghosts

Ghosts don't always play the role of antagonists in a *Geist* story. However, they are the most numerous and pervasive supernatural entities to cross a Sin-

Eater's path, and not all of them are harmless. The information here can be used with the information on ghosts in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** to provide even more variety — and danger — for dealing with the restless dead.

New Numina

No two ghosts are alike. It follows that the Numina possessed by ghosts should be as varied as the specters. Collected below are a number of new Numina (and some old friends) to horrify and bewilder Sin-Eaters and humans alike. Included in each entry is a channeled header that describes the effects of the Numen when channeled by a Sin-Eater using a fetter.

Banshee Wail

The ghost creates an earsplitting scream that deafens anyone nearby. Spend one point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse. Anyone within 20 yards of the ghost must succeed on a Resolve + Stamina roll — the number of successes gained or be stunned for one turn (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 167). Characters that are stunned by the wail also suffer a -3 penalty to any Perception checks that rely on hearing for the remainder of the scene.

Channeled: The effects of the Numina remain the same when channeled by a Sin-Eater, with the Sin-Eater acting as the source of the wail. The Sin-Eater is immune to the effects of a wail channeled by him.

Chain of Death

This Numen is a powerful addition to Corpse Ride. Chain of Death allows a ghost currently using the Corpse Ride Numen to transfer its consciousness to any of its

victims' corpses. The ghost-ridden body must touch the targeted corpse to use this Numen. It costs three Essence per jump.

Channeled: Channeling this Numen requires the Sin-Eater to spend one point of Willpower; the action is changed from instant to extended. The target number of the extended action is 10 successes and each roll is equal to one turn. Success results in the creation of a zombie under the control of the Sin-Eater exactly like the results of the channeled "Corpse Ride" Numen. See zombie sidebar for more information on zombie traits and rules. The Sin-Eater channeling this Numen needn't have actually killed the body to be raised, but he must have contributed to the death of the individual that provided the corpse in some way.

Corpse Ride

This Numen allows a ghost to possess a dead body rather than a living host. The ghost spends three Essence and possesses the body automatically over the course of a single hour. This results in a zombie-like hybrid that allows the ghost a physical presence out of Twilight without needing to manifest. See zombie sidebar for more information on zombie traits and rules. The ghost must expend an additional Essence each hour to maintain its hold over rotting flesh. If the possessed body is destroyed, the ghost is forced back into Twilight.

Channeled: Rather than possessing a dead body, the Sin-Eater raises that body as a zombie. The Sin-Eater spends a point of Willpower and spends an hour communing with the corpse. At the end of that hour, the corpse automatically rises as a zombie. Sin-Eaters may only control one zombie through use of this Numen at any time.

ZOMBIES

Zombies retain the characteristics of the corpse from which they were made with the following modifications: Strength, Dexterity, and Stamina ratings are all reduced by one dot, to a minimum of one. All other Attributes are reduced to a single dot.

Zombies possess only very basic problem-solving skills and can only communicate through moans and rasps. All Mental or Social Skill rolls are considered unskilled attempts and zombies may not have more than one dot in any Skill from either of those Skill sets.

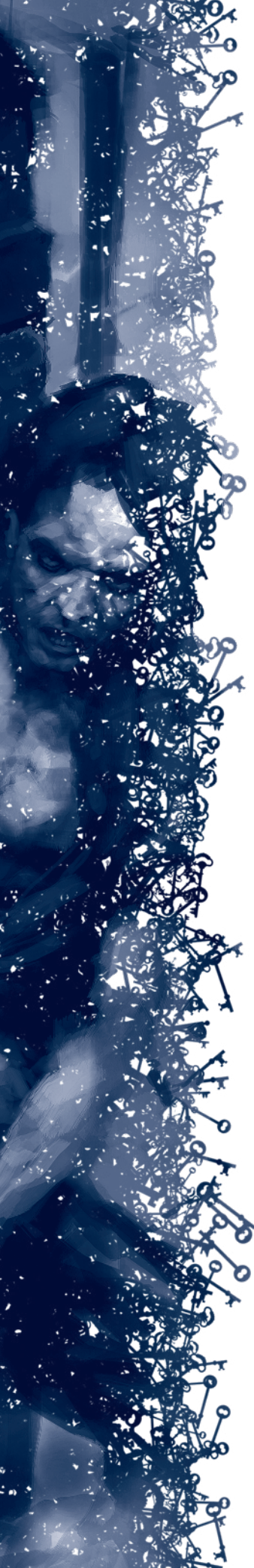
Physical Skills remain unchanged. The exception is any Physical Skill dice pool that includes an Attribute other than Strength, Dexterity, or Stamina is considered unskilled.

Fire deals aggravated damage to zombies; all other weapons deal bashing. Zombies don't suffer wound penalties and can only be defeated by filling their Health tracks with aggravated damage. The bodies of the dead are also immune to any sort of poison or disease. Zombies don't heal and may not be repaired.

Zombies raised by a Sin-Eater channeling the appropriate Numina remain active until the following dusk or dawn, whichever comes first. Zombies follow the commands of the Sin-Eater and attempt to work on her behalf even when she is incapacitated or out of range of communication. For whatever reason, zombies raised through channeled Numen possess an intense hatred for the living and will attack them on sight unless ordered otherwise by the Sin-Eater.

A zombie created by a ghost using either the Corpse Ride or Chain of Death Numina is slightly more intelligent than those raised by Sin-Eaters. The ghost possessing the corpse may substitute its Power + Finesse dice pool for any Mental Skill roll and ignores the unskilled penalty.

Raising a zombie is a Synergy discord trigger and requires a roll for degeneration for Sin-Eaters of Synergy 8 or higher (roll four dice).



Dement

This power assaults a person's mind with a cavalcade of nightmarish imagery, breaking down the victim's sanity in the process. Such images are often personal and culled from the target's own memory. The ghost doesn't itself control these images, and in fact doesn't know what they are — thus, it's probably the victim's own mind that draws up the mental torture. The ghost *can*, however, use some of its own memory and history to affect the victim, thus furthering the visions of terror.

Spend one Essence and roll Power + Finesse versus the target's Intelligence + Composure. Success indicates that the victim gains a mild derangement (choice of the ghost) for a number of days equal to the successes gained over the victim.

Dissembling Guise

This Numen draws on the memories of a manifested ghost's target to give it the features of a loved one that has passed on. Spend a point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse. With success, the manifested ghost takes on the appearance of a dead friend or family member of the target to all who view it. This false countenance carries a subtle compulsion that exploits the emotions of the target, making him unwilling to harm (or countenance harm being done to) the ghost or the ghost's anchor. The target may spend a point of Willpower to overcome this effect for one turn or can roll Resolve + Composure - the number of successes gained on the Numen roll to negate the effect completely.

Channeled: The Sin-Eater must nominate a target as he channels the Numen. With success, his features are changed in the same way as described above. These changes are more cosmetic in nature on a Sin-Eater, however. Flesh and bone aren't as easily shaped as ephemeral corpus. The target suffers no compulsion from the channeled version of this Numen, but the Sin-Eater may still find the alterations to be useful as a disguise or the changes could act as a modifier to Social Skill rolls (Intimidate would gain a bonus with the guise of an abusive father, and Seduction would gain a bonus with the face of an old lover).

Narrow

Some ghosts have adopted a certain emotional state, such as terror or hate or despair, as part of their nature. This Numen allows them to act as an emotional plaguebearer, infecting others with an overpowering wave of their "passion." Spend a point of Essence and roll the ghost's Power + Finesse, contested by the victim's Resolve + Composure + Psyche. If the ghost wins the contest, the target is overwhelmed by the relevant emotional state for a number of turns equal to the number of successes the spirit gained.

Left-Handed Spanner

This Numen temporarily disables a specific technological object, such as a cell phone, computer, or



an automobile engine. The malfunction has no apparent external cause. In truth, the ghost using the Numen has overloaded the object with spiritual energy, thus causing its breakdown. The ghost expends a point of Essence and focuses on the object to disable it. The object ceases to work for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. Valid pieces of technology that can be overcome include anything manufactured by industrial means with at least three separate parts; a gun is valid, but a hinge or syringe is not. The object cannot be larger than the ghost, but a discernable part of a complex machine may also be targeted. A ghost could affect the engine of a car, for example, but not the entire automobile.

Channeled: The Sin-Eater must touch the object he intends to disable while channeling this Numen. If the object is carried by another who seeks to avoid the touch, a roll is required to make contact (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157). Failure to touch the object does not count against the use of the channeled Numen for the scene.

Looking Glass

This Numen allows the ghost to project its image in glass, mirrors, and other reflective surfaces without an actual physical manifestation. Spend one Essence and roll Power + Finesse. With success, the image of the ghost appears in the reflective surface. Any Numina that require the ghost to manifest but don't have physical effects can be enacted through the projection (Disassembling Guise, for example). In addition, if anyone stares into the reflective surface containing the projection and speaks the name of the ghost aloud three times, the ghost may physically manifest without a roll and is refunded the point of Essence spent to activate this Numen.

Channeled: While channeling this Numen, the Sin-Eater can look into a mirror or other reflective surface and see out of another reflective surface in the same building. Anyone that happens to be looking at their reflection when the Sin-Eater uses this Numen sees the reflection of the Sin-Eater in place of their own.

Mechanical Possession

This Numen allows a ghost to take control of a machine or vehicle within 30 yards of one of its anchors. By spending one Essence point, the ghost may operate the machine for the duration of a scene – the ghost can turn the machine off or on and control any moving parts, though the ghost cannot alter electrical flow. A ghost using this Numen to operate a car, for instance, would have to physically manipulate the radio knob to switch stations or turn the ignition switch to start the car. The ghost may make Finesse rolls in lieu of Drive in order to operate a moving vehicle, including all driving, control and crash rolls.

Channeled: The Sin-Eater must touch the machine he intends to control while channeling this Numen. If the object is carried by another who seeks to avoid the touch, a roll is required to make contact (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157). Failure to touch the object does

not count against the use of the channeled Numen for the scene. If the use of the Numen is successful, the character may direct the actions of the machine as though by remote control. Any necessary rolls to control or direct the machine are made by the Sin-Eater using the appropriate Attribute + Skill pool. Remember that directing the actions of the vehicle or machine takes the place of the character's personal action for the turn.

One Step Behind

This Numen allows the ghost to bind a bit of itself to the target, creating a temporary living anchor. The ghost spends three Essence and rolls Power + Finesse versus the Resolve + Psyche of its target. If the ghost wins the contest, the target becomes a living anchor for the duration of the scene. The ghost may extend the effect of the Numen by spending a point of Essence at the end of the scene and for every hour that passes thereafter. Ghosts can make this effect permanent by investing a point of corpus into the bond. This permanently reduces the corpus of the ghost by one (and some Sin-Eaters claim this was how the first geists were born). Once formed, only an exorcism can sever the bond between a ghost and its target. Ghosts may only have one living fetter at a time.

Channeled: The channeled version of this Numen requires the Sin-Eater to touch her target, necessitating a roll for unwilling targets (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157). With a successful activation, the Sin-Eater instinctively knows the exact location of the target for the remainder of the scene. The Sin-Eater can extend this effect for one hour by spending an additional point of Willpower before the end of the scene.

Plasticity

The ghost uses this Numen to mold hands, faces, and other body parts out of solid, material objects as though they were soft as clay. Spend one point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse. With success, the ghost creates a body part that seems to stretch out from a solid surface. A pair of arms might reach out from the wall, a face could push its way out of the ceiling or more disturbing pieces of anatomy might bubble up from the surface of a table. The ghost can manipulate its creations as though they were part of its corpus, making attacks (such attacks cause bashing damage) that use the ghost's dice pool or just moving them around a room causing panic in onlookers. If a plasticized body part takes a single point of damage, the surface returns to its original appearance. This Numen persists for one scene or until the ghost has manifested and subsequently lost a number of creations equal to its corpus. Ghosts may only create and maintain one body part at a time.

Channeled: Channeling this Numen requires the full concentration of the Sin-Eater, meaning he can take no other actions while it remains active. The character can create a total number of body parts equal to his Stamina. Use of this Numen requires line-of-sight to whatever material the character intends to manipulate.



Speed

This Numen confers uncanny swiftness upon the ghost, allowing it to move at a much more rapid pace than usual. The ghost may spend two points of Essence to move at twice its normal Speed for the duration of the scene. If the ghost spends an additional two points of Essence (for a total of four), the ghost's Speed triples for the duration of the scene. This Numen may affect the physical form of a manifested ghost, but not a physical anchor.

Channeled: The Sin-Eater channeling this Numen need only spend one point of Willpower to double his Speed, but the increase in Speed only remains active for a number of turns equal to his Stamina or Psyche rating, whichever is greater. Each turn the Numen remains active, the Sin-Eater can triple his speed for a single turn by spending an additional point of Willpower as a reflexive action.

Ghost Tree

Quote: (*Eerie creaking sound*)

Background: A ghost tree requires two ingredients: a tree and someone who's died near or on it, in a way that forever associates them. Ghost trees tend to be older specimens because they had to be around at the time of death. Many were used in hangings and, for reasons Sin-Eaters don't fully understand, they tend to occur more often at crossroads. There are supposedly centuries-old specimens in Europe that were used to hang witches, outlaws, and members of unpopular groups. The more who've died at the tree, the bigger it gets. Somehow, nobody ever seems to come to cut them down.

Description: Ghost trees always look dead or dying. They have thick blackened bark, mossy, and rotted areas, and lots of thick spreading branches. The wood is brittle or pliant depending on the will of the entity inside. When branches do break, they tend to leave dangerously sharp points.

To those able to see into Twilight, the trees look bigger. They shudder and sway as if there's a strong wind. The trees can talk with a hollow voice; a hole rips itself in the bark and moves like a mouth. It bleeds, too. Any time a piece of the tree breaks off it releases an unnaturally thick, bloody sap.

Storytelling Hints: Resolving issues from the ghost's life can free it from the tree. Ghost trees get stronger when people die near them, or at their limbs. The tree has one animating ghost that tries to lure and grab victims to reproduce the circumstances of its own death. It can generate the necessary tools, including nails and nooses, from its body. It can inflict lethal damage with its animated limbs and typically uses Compulsion to lure people closer (and when necessary, to forget to have it chopped down).

If someone else dies before the tree without it intervening, it tries to duplicate that death as well. The tree grows with every death, even if it looks dead itself. Add 1 to the ghost tree's Size and 1 to its Power or Finesse for every victim who's died under its branches.

Unlike many ghosts, the tree is visible to everyone. Despite the commonsense idea that a chainsaw or gasoline and match might bring it down, the ghost tree is remarkably resilient. The ghost tree may spend a point of Willpower to add 2 to its Resistance

OTHER SOURCES

Troupes with access to the Book of Spirits may recognize a few of the Numina in this section. Nearly any spirit Numen found in other White Wolf products can be translated into a ghostly Numen with a little elbow grease, excepting Numina that deal directly with the Shadow. Simply replace all references to spirits with that of ghosts and rework any references to influences, bans, or other spiritual trappings with ghostly equivalents. Ghostly Numina should always include an Essence cost, even if the spiritual equivalent does not.

As an example, the Desiccation Numen from Book of Spirits reads as follows:

Desiccation

This Numen is most often possessed by water-spirits, although rumors speak of blood-spirits that use it to devastating effect. Desiccation allows a spirit to withdraw some or all of the fluid most closely associated with it from its opponent's body. Water-spirits can drain their victims of the water in their bodies; blood-spirits can do the same with blood. The range is five yards per point of Power. Roll Power + Finesse; the number of successes determines the number of points of damage the target takes from loss of fluid. The damage is bashing.

Translated into ghostly Numina, Desiccation would look like the following:

Desiccation

Desiccation allows a ghost to withdraw some or all of the fluids associated with life from the target (blood, for example). The range is five yards per point of Power of the ghost. Spend a point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse. Each success garnered on the roll causes a point of bashing damage due to loss of blood or other fluids necessary for life.

against material threats for a turn. If this reduces the attack to a chance die and the roll to use it fails, it usually breaks the axe or ruins the method used to burn it.

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 2, Resistance 5

Willpower: 10

Morality: 4

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7

Defense: 5

Speed: 0 (Immobile)

Size: 10

Corpus: 15

Numina: Compulsion (7 dice), Ghost Speech,

Terrify (7 dice)

Noncombatant Ghosts

Normal people think of faint, strange sounds and loneliness when they imagine haunted places, but Sin-Eaters know that behind the veil of Twilight, ghosts walk the paths given them by their passions, sensitive to anything that would bar them from acting on compulsions. The dead are a busy, noisy community: one that's growing every day. In a **Geist** game, encountering ghosts can turn into a routine. Talking to one isn't always about a potential threat. Sin-Eaters need information, advice, or the skilled assistance of dead people. The traits below describe ghosts in this context: as noncombatants that can help or hinder the characters.

Note that you may also use traits like these for ghosts that use simplified combat traits when you want to further differentiate their abilities without introducing formal Skills. This can define special limitations as well as abilities. A strong ghost isn't necessarily the smartest one, even if he has a high Power trait. In all cases, remember that even though ghosts can appear to have a remarkable amount of self-awareness, even the most articulate are driven by the obsessions that brought them into being. They can get very impatient with queries that don't matter to them, and may not even be able to understand them.

Skilled Ghost

Quote: *No, no, no! Were you my boy, I'd rap your hands with a switch! Do it again!*

Background: He was an accomplished man in his field — well-respected by the community at large and envied by his enemies. Unfortunately, that envy led to his end. They poisoned the tools of his trade. He died in his workplace, never having had the chance to pass his secrets on to the next generation.

Description: The Skilled Ghost is dressed as he would be for work. His eyes look larger than they should be. It's a sign of a life of intense study, as are the phantom versions of tools and papers he carries with him everywhere.

Storytelling Hints: The Skilled Ghost was an excellent practitioner of a trade, science, or other professional field.

He died as a direct result of his expertise so he hasn't forgotten it; in fact, without the distractions of living, he may only now be able to perform at his full potential. He loves to teach others, but when they fail to live up to his exacting standards, he gets very, very angry. Many Skilled Ghosts are good at a field that few people practice in the modern world, and it may be easier to get help from them than a living practitioner.

Abilities

Professional Field (10 dice): The Skilled Ghost is a master in a single field. The only flaws in his understanding come from the fact that his knowledge is dated (and he can't in fact learn to use further developments in his field, though he might enjoy hearing about them) and the way obsession curtails his imagination.

Petty Telekinesis (4 dice): The ghost can manipulate small objects without much precision. Sometimes this lets him finish a project death cut short, but his control is crude enough that this is often unsuccessful and frustrating.

Student of Vice

Quote: *Yeah, that's how you make them beg — just how he made them beg.*

Background: She doesn't have any illusions about human nature. She thought they were her friends — or at the very least, they could keep a secret for a decent reward. But they found a higher bidder, and even held her down when he did it to her. She won't get fooled again, and won't let anyone else get fooled, either.

Description: The Student of Vice was murdered because of a betrayal, so she carried marks of that treachery along with the killing itself. She wears the necklace she got as a gift just below the bullet hole in her neck or a purse heavy with the money that her "friends" got paid to turn on her. These often have physical counterparts in her anchors.

Storytelling Hints: The ghost has become obsessed with looking for signs of betrayal, but in the process has learned much about the motives that drive people to do just about anything. She can perform near-telepathic assessments of other people, but much of the time, she'll add a tinge of suspicion. Her analysis is cynical but that may actually add to its accuracy.

Abilities

Amateur Psychology (8 dice): The Student of Vice can learn surprising things about a person through nothing more than body language or innocuous conversation. The more she witnesses, the more she can tell about what's not being said. She may in fact have mind-reading abilities, but the truth of that is up to the Storyteller. If the target shares the same Vice as the person she holds responsible for her death she gains +2 to her dice pool.

Voyeur (6 dice): She loves to watch people who remind her of her unhappy life. The Student of Vice habitually tracks and eavesdrops on people in the middle of dangerous, betrayal-ridden situations.



Territorial Informant

Quote: *I've seen him. He wasn't supposed to be there! It's my house!*

Background: He was born here and said he was going to die here – and that's exactly what he did. He loved this little corner of the world and the routines he slowly built into his life, but those were threatened by people who said they knew better. They wanted to change things – tear down walls, put up new ones, move the wrong kind of people in – so many changes he stopped keeping track and retreated further into his own world. Nobody noticed the heart attack, including him, but that doesn't matter. He's got things to do.

Description: He's an ordinary old man for his time, dressed comfortably for the things he likes to do – so comfortably that his clothes are obviously a part of him, merging with his flesh. He looks a bit bedraggled because he stopped caring about how other people thought he looked a long time ago.

Storytelling Hints: All ghosts are creatures of habit, but the Territorial Informant was like this before he died. Crossing over didn't make much of a difference, but sometimes he notices how much the world has changed. That makes him angry; he lashes out. He's not unfriendly, but everybody else had better stay out of his way while he does as he likes.

Abilities

Ghostly Area Knowledge (8 dice): The ghost knows everything about the place he haunts. He tends to forget more recent events unless they directly disturbed him but some intelligent negotiation can dredge up that information. His knowledge of his territory as it was when he was alive is unmatched. It includes things nobody ever wrote down or filmed for posterity.

Scare People (8 dice): If a human being gets in his path or changes something he remembers from his life he tries to drive the offender off with a number of classic tricks. He breaks windows. He shakes floorboards. He writes GO AWAY in blood on the mirror. He can't really hurt anyone this way, but it's enough to send anyone who isn't a Sin-Eater on the run.

Unfettered Geists

Every Sin-Eater began with the synergistic merging of a dying (or barely dead) human with a free-roaming geist – what the Bound call unfettered. The unfettered are geists in their natural state, but not necessarily geists in their ideal state. After all, the Bargain is offered so that a geist may have an incredibly useful vessel and partner, and the allure is strong for many to forge pacts of that nature.

Most unfettered geists eschew contact with those who have already become Sin-Eaters. A Sin-Eater offers little opportunity to serve as a host, and may in fact act as a hindrance to such an end. Because of this, most Sin-Eaters' experiences with unfettered geists begin and end with the one who offered them the Bargain. However, despite their elusiveness, geists without hosts roam the Underworld and in some cases the mortal world. In certain rare circumstances, do interact with Sin-Eaters. Depending on their motivations and sanity, they can be either aid or hinder.

The psychology of a geist is intensely variable from specimen to specimen. Sin-Eaters are most familiar with those geists who desired a mortal “partnership,” of course. While geists are far from human, they still possess some needs and desires, motivations that are as important to them as pro-creating is for human beings. High among those impulses is that drive to merge and become a Sin-Eater, which gives them access to a multitude of abilities and powers that are simply not possible as an unfettered geist.

However, that hunger for merging is not always met. At least in theory, the offer of merging with a geist is an optional one. Although the Sin-Eaters prove that many are likely to accept the offer (and continued life) over the possibility of permanent death, not all do. Some truly believe they will ascend to a “better place” after their death and face their end with no fear. Others distrust the offer as “too good to be true” and refuse it on principle. And some are frightened or intimidated by the appearance of the unfettered that has approached them and reject the offer out of sheer terror. For most geists, this is a very temporary matter. Few enough humans would choose death over life, and if the first individual they approach refuses, it is unlikely that the second or third will as well. Sometimes, however, due to fate, fear or simple ill-fortune, a geist will be rejected by the potential Sin-Eaters it propositions over and over. Just as denying a human their basic needs and desires will have disastrous results, so can denying a geist its merger have a long-term debilitating effect on the spirit.

What happens when a geist continually runs into potential Sin-Eaters that refuse its offer of merger? Or when a geist is forcibly severed from its long-time Sin-Eater and is unable to find another suitable one? Or when it is torn from its symbiotic host over and over, unable to prevent the sundering or its other-half's destruction? The result is sometimes an unfettered geist who is driven to extreme measures by the denial of their desires: to remain one with their other half, to find someone worthy of their attentions, or to become Bound once more. It's for

this reason that Sin-Eaters sometimes use the phrase “unfettered” with a certain vocal stress, specifically to mean one of these desperate entities rather than those who are simply between hosts or uninterested in such a bond. Those who desire a bond and are denied it are potentially more dangerous than those who are content to roam free. Not always, but sometimes.

Unfettered Geist Systems

Geists without a host body are functionally very similar to ghosts: they are in a state of Twilight in the mortal realm, they operate with the basic traits of Power, Finesse, and Resistance, and so forth. A few key differences do set them apart, as noted below.

- **Morality:** Geists do not have Morality scores per se. They are driven by often inhuman urges and instincts, and don’t really think in terms of a human’s sense of psychological callousness or conviction. They *do* possess Virtues and Vices, which are often exaggerated beyond the human equivalent. A geist’s Virtue or Vice might be a greater portion of its personality than one would expect.
- **Keys:** An unfettered geist possesses the equivalent of a Key; some particularly powerful geists may possess more than one. This represents the geist’s focus, and may assist it with some Numina.

Each Key has two Skills associated with it. The geist may add three dice to any roll that would normally require one of these Skills, as if the geist possessed three dots in the appropriate trait.

| Key | Skill |
|------------|----------------------------|
| Elemental | Occult or Survival |
| Industrial | Crafts or Larceny |
| Passion | Empathy or Expression |
| Phantasmal | Intimidation or Persuasion |
| Primeval | Animal Ken or Survival |
| Stigmata | Medicine or Occult |
| Stillness | Stealth or Subterfuge |

- **Inhuman Shape:** Geists are only partly the remnants of human personality. Their forms aren’t limited by their human aspect. The unfettered frequently range from Size 4 to 7, and some are allegedly even larger. In addition, a geist’s Attributes can exceed 5, particularly as it grows in age or cannibalizes other geists.
- **Psyche:** All geists have an effective Psyche rating. Though this doesn’t affect their Essence reserves the way it governs a Sin-Eater’s plasm reserves, it does apply to contested rolls where the trait would be of use.
- **Not Quite Ghosts:** Any powers that would normally affect ghosts, such as certain Manifestations unlocked with the Stigmata Key, may affect unfettered geists. However, such powers suffer a -2 penalty to any given roll, owing to the geist’s hybrid nature. Naturally, geists that are already bound to a mortal host cannot be affected by such powers unless specifically noted otherwise.

The Horned Friend

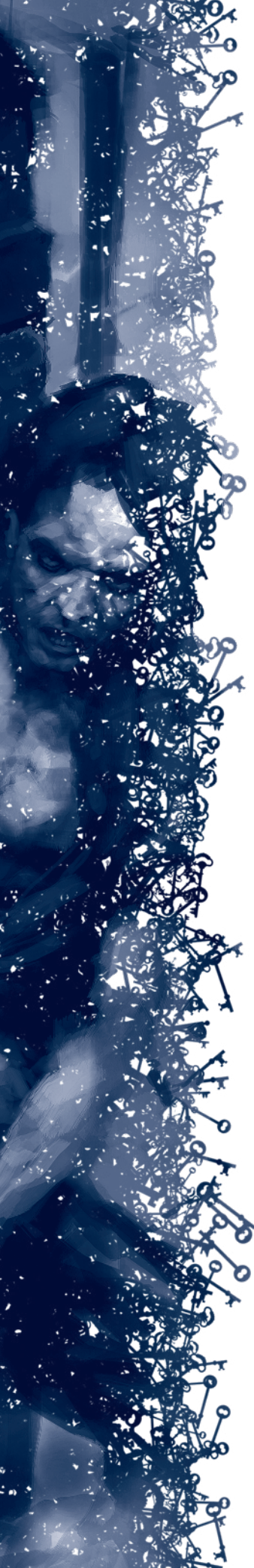
Quote: *Perhaps you didn’t understand my offer. <<the sound of air being forcibly sucked out of a human’s lungs>> Now, let me explain again. Quickly, we don’t have much time.*

Background: It was a human once, or so it believes. It remembers nothing of that, however. It just sometimes sees a glimpse of the fear and revulsion it once knew how to feel, reflected back in its victims eyes. Those are the worst times, it thinks. The times when mothers leave their children behind and willingly embrace the darkness rather than accept its offer. When atheists pray to every god they’ve heard of to protect them from it. When it sees their souls slip away, the light go out in their eyes, and knows that it has failed once more.

Appearance: There are those who have, before being snatched back from the brink of death, seen what they believed to be a glimpse of Hell. When describing the demons and devils awaiting them there, some poor souls are actually speaking of one of the

john WIGLEY





unfettered: a cursed soul who, due to some offense or infraction that even it can no longer remember, has been unable to find a human willing to merge with it and create a Sin-Eater for more than 300 years. With each denial, its appearance becomes more ghastly, as if the rejection further cements its cursed nature. Its eyes (all seven of them) gleam with a sickly yellow glow, arranged haphazardly above a wide gaping maw full of equally yellowed teeth. The Horned Fiend's title comes as much from the jagged thorn-like spikes that protrude at random places throughout his body as it does from the devilish set of horns atop his head. With tattered bat wings and spindly (but razor sharp) claws on all of its extremities, it truly lives up to his fiendish name.

Even worse than its appearance, however, is this creature's aura. So palpable that even mortal eyes cannot help but sense its presence, the Fiend's spiritual manifestation is utterly abhorrent to all it encounters. Other geists shun it, certain that it must be tainted with pure evil. Humans, even those with no faith in the afterlife, would rather face certain destruction than grasp the clawed hand it proffers to them in symbolic bargain.

Storytelling Hints: What does it do to a geist's already inhuman psyche, to know that human after human would rather die than merge with them? Through fate or ill-fortune, the Horned Fiend has been rejected by Sin-Eaters over and over throughout the last several hundred years. It has grown more and more insistent upon the merger, even stacking the odds to put likely human hosts in the way of harm to facilitate the potentiality of merger. Its methods are myriad. At various times, it will haunt terminal care wards hoping to find a hopeless victim, use Numina to nudge its intended targets into the paths of certain death, or even taunt them into suicide, all in the hopes of finding someone desperate enough to risk merging with the creature it has become.

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 6, Resistance 5

Willpower: 12

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 9

Defense: 6

Speed: 21

Size: 5

Corpus: 10

Essence: 12

Key: Passion

Numina: Clairvoyance (11 dice), Compulsion (11 dice), Ghost Speech (11 dice), Manifestation: Passion Marionette (9 dice)

Note: Despite his powerful nature, the Horned Fiend is cursed to be ever-rejected by those with whom he seeks to merge. Storytellers may use this curse as a plot-hook and allow characters to seek a way to break the curse, but so long as it stands no efforts on the Fiend's part will convince a human to merge with him.

Ithmah the Orphaned One

Quote: *No, you won't do. By all that is holy, is there nothing but mongrels and madmen in this world these days?*

Background: Long ago, Ithmah was not known as the Orphaned One. Bound to a strong and talented woman, he lived a long and prosperous existence, both in fiscal and spiritual wealth. He used his powers not only for duty, but to protect and promote the existence of the Sin-Eater he was part of, and together they far exceeded the longevity that even other Bound expected from them.

But all good things must come to an end eventually, and so it was with Ithmah. His human-side died at last, and after what seemed like centuries of merger, Ithmah was alone once more. Since then, he has attempted to find another dying soul with whom to merge, but after so long with a single partner the geist's tastes are exceedingly particular, and his criteria nigh-impossible to meet.

Appearance: Impossibly tall and regal in appearance, at first glance this ghost looks for all the world like a Persian prince or rich Indian rajah, draped in dusky silks and elegant jewels that glimmer in the evening shadows. But he has no face, only the suggestion of features like reflections gleaming in the dark. His mannerisms are imperious, his voice fluid and yet harsh, like a winter stream full of ice shards. When he manifests, his appearance is always accompanied by the overwhelming and pungent scent of funerary incense.

Storytelling Hints: Ithmah is a fickle geist who targets those who remind him of his earlier hosts. He may choose one dying soul for the almond shape of her eyes, another for the perfection of his skin, and yet another for the perfect mew of pain she emits upon her deathbed. What all have in common, however, is that during the process of merging with these dying souls, Ithmah inevitably finds them unworthy and somehow shrugs off the merger mid-process. This is not only fatal for the human involved, but also (understandably) is torturous to their soul. The end result is a dead human, an angry ghost, and a geist who honestly believes himself utterly justified in doing so — over and over again — because those he chose were not up to snuff.

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 4, Resistance 5

Willpower: 10

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 9

Defense: 5

Speed: 19

Size: 10

Corpus: 15

Essence: 9

Key: Elemental (Pyre Flame)

Numina: Compulsion (9 dice), Dement (9 dice), Ghost Speech (9 dice), Terrify (9 dice)

Mother

Quote: *Musn't do that. It's dangerous. You never know what could happen.*

Background: Some geists look at those with whom they merge as little more than tools through which they attempt to achieve their own alien and sometimes incomprehensible goals. Others, like Ithmah, form strong bonds with their human other-halves, and fully immerse themselves in the experience of being a Sin-Eater. For those who connect closely with their other halves, experiencing a mortal host's death can be traumatizing. Losing one human host is difficult enough, but when one loses partner after partner, the effects can be devastating even on the already alien psyche. And, if the geist feels personally responsible for each of the deaths, the results may be a smotheringly protective geist whose own attempts to preserve the health of her human other-halves often results in unexpectedly negative outcomes.

Appearance: Vaguely feminine in form, Mother is simply too voluminous to be mistaken for anything human. Her body and limbs merge into rolls of doughy, smothering shadow-flesh, with crevices between the bugles that seem to dive impossibly deep into her mountainous figure. Each severance has manifested additionally “clingy” physical features to the geist, to the point where she now manifests as an amorphous shadowy blob with sharp hook-like appendages that she attaches deeply into her Sin-Eater in hopes to prevent it from ever being sundered again. Her eyes nearly extend out of her head, bulging dangerously as she watches in every direction for peril she imagines may strike the object of her attention at any given moment.

Storytelling Hints: This geist has been separated from its past hosts in a violent and horrific way more than once, each time resulting in a more overly protective attitude and co-dependent nature. She will eventually smother her host's personality, subverting all other goals or duties for the sake of remaining “safely” connected. This can drive a Sin-Eater to such hermitage that he or she no longer leaves the home in fear of danger, will not eat for fear of poisoning, and eventually will kill the Sin-Eater, leaving an increasingly guilty Mother to once again seeking a potential Sin-Eater with whom to merge.

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 2, Resistance 4

Willpower: 8

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Sloth

Initiative: 9

Defense: 4

Speed: 16

Size: 10

Corpus: 15

Essence: 8

Key: Stigmata

Numina: Clairvoyance (6 dice), Compulsion (6 dice), Phantasm (6 dice), Terrify (6 dice)

Geist Numina

Geists frequently have access to unusual Numina outside the reach of more ordinary ghosts. They might possess any of the Numina in this chapter, as well as one particular to geists alone, listed below. Another good source for Numina is the powers of the spirits of the Shadow Realm, if you have access to works describing these more animistic entities. **The Book of Spirits** is a fine place to pillage new powers to customize geists.

Manifestation

The geist can use one of the Manifestations described in Chapter Two as if it were a Sin-Eater. The Storyteller chooses one particular combination of Manifestation and Key appropriate to the geist. The geist's highest Key rating is the effective level of the Manifestation it can manage. Some of the benefits of the Manifestation may not be a real gain to the geist's natural powers, but it's a small price to pay for such versatile Numina. Generally speaking, the geist rolls using the appropriate Attribute to activate the Manifestation, and adds its Key rating in the stead of a key Skill or Manifestation rating.

Example: The Ailing Patient possesses the Key: Stillness 3 and the Manifestation: Stillness Shroud. Ordinarily, the Stillness Shroud die pool for activation is Resolve + Stealth + Shroud rating. The Ailing Patient uses its Resistance 4 in place of Resolve, and adds three dice for its Key. Many of the non-Armor benefits of the Stillness Shroud are somewhat redundant for a geist, but while the Shroud is active, it still gains a bonus of three dice to any Stealth rolls. Combined with its Key bonus to Stealth rolls, this makes it very difficult for anyone to spy the Ailing Patient before it's far too late.

The Wretched

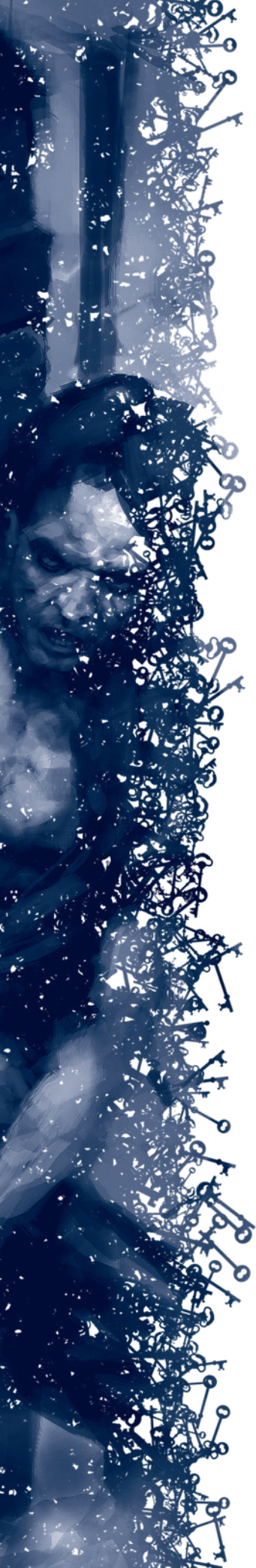
Few fates for a Sin-Eater are comparable to the utter loss of connectivity with one's geist. The geist is an unnerving presence, coldly inhuman the majority of the time and given to bursts of white-hot wrath or tempestuous sorrow — but strange as it may be, it quickly becomes a second soul. The Bargain isn't just a business pact, it's a marriage of the inmost self. To find oneself devoid of that connection once it has been established is a devastating thing.

To make matters worse, most geists are very blatant about expressing their growing displeasure at the Sin-Eater's loss of Synergy. This can manifest in dictatorial demands, cajoling temptations, guilty chiding, or relentless nagging about the topics and actions that are driving the two halves apart. Unfortunately, such a schism, once begun, often rapidly continues until the harm cannot be mended without serious attention on the part of the Sin-Eater and her krewe.

La Diabla Blanca

Quote: *She doesn't have the strength to do what must be done. But don't worry. I do.*

Background: When faced with a choice between life and death, few human beings could resist jumping at any chance for survival. Not all, however, are able to cope with



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the ramifications of having made that choice. Janet White was the victim of a particularly brutal gang initiation. Chosen at random as a target, she was jogging through a local park when a group of aspiring gang members pulled her from the path and into a waiting van. She feels grateful to remember very little of the torture that happened over the next several hours, but one thing she will never forget. As the pain reached its climax, a ghostly figure appeared to her, over the heads of her tormentors. It reached for her and promised relief. She agreed, and everything went black. She woke, later, still in the basement room her kidnapers had taken her to. She was covered in blood, but most of it wasn't her own – around her the sundered remains of her former-tormentors were scattered like debris from an explosion in a butcher's shop. She stumbled home, but the next few months were a series of black-outs and horrible awakenings, as Janet's psyche refused to admit she was capable of committing such heinous acts.

As an unwitting and unwilling accomplice to her bloodthirsty geist, she became the Reaper known throughout the Sin-Eating community as La Diabla Blanca – a remorseless personality that never hesitated before killing those who had committed heinous crimes that resulted in ghosts. As Janet entered therapy to help her deal with the missing time, she began to remember the things she'd done,

and the conscious self began to stop the Diablo personality from coming out. The schism drove her and her bloodthirsty vengeance-seeking geist apart until Janet was left as one of the Wretched, sharing a body and soul with a creature with whom she would not and could not cooperate any longer. Now Janet believes she's "healed" and has eschewed Sin-Eater society altogether. But she can't hide from her nature forever, and at night, La Diabla Blanca still sometimes finds ways to gain control of the young woman and do what must be done.

La Diabla Blanca's keystone is a bloodstained handkerchief that one of the original gang members was wearing when she accepted the Bargain.

Janet's geist actually manifests in a form very similar to La Diabla Blanca, as if the human and geist halves of the Sin-Eater are wholly separate.

Appearance: As Jane White, she is a modestly dressed young woman whose most outlandish activity is to wear her running sweats into the supermarket rather than going home to change after working out. She wears her pale hair tightly bound up in a bun at the base of her neck, and wears glasses she truly no longer needs. Her mannerisms are repressed, her voice quiet and her actions timid.

La Diabla Blanca, on the other hand, dresses all in black in fairly revealing clothing and wears her hair loose and flowing down her back. She uses her

Phantasmal Caul ability to alter Janet’s appearance to something more befitting her tastes, and behaves in a quirky, seductive fashion to draw potential prey to her. When manifested separately, though, or taking on a horrific aspect via the Phantasmal Caul, La Diabla Blanca appears to be a cracked, hollow porcelain shell in the form of a beautiful woman. Vestiges of reddish plasm seep from the cracks and outright holes in her “flesh” as she grows angry.

Storytelling Hints: The two halves of Janet’s personality are not fully aware of each other, although La Diabla Blanca will sometimes make snide comments about “her”, referring to Janet in the third party. Janet is not aware of actions taken by Diablo, although Diablo tends to be fairly aware of traumatic situations that Janet has encountered — and to retaliate when she next takes control of their body. Janet would never hurt a fly. La Diabla Blanca, however, is ruthless, especially when dishing out justice on her own behalf, or for the sake of those who cannot or will not defend themselves against wrongdoing.

La Diabla Blanca may well come to the attention of other Sin-Eaters in the area, both for her ferocity and unwillingness to connect socially with the rest of the local population. If her identity becomes known, she may even feel the need to destroy her Janet personality altogether, for the sake of maintaining her own anonymity and the freedom it provides.

Archetype: Reaper/Wretched

Threshold: The Torn

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 1, Investigation 3, Medicine 1, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3 (Running), Brawl 3, Drive 1,

Larceny 3, Stealth 4, Survival 1, Weaponry 3 (Improvised

Weapons)

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 1, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 1, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Contacts 1 (Gang Members), Danger Sense 2, Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 3

Willpower: 5

Synergy: 0

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7

Speed: 15

Defense: 3

Health: 8

Psyche: 3

Manifestations: Boneyard 1, Caul 3, Curse 1, Shroud 2

Keys: Phantasmal, Stigmata

Ceremonies: None

Plasm/Per Turn: 22/1

Weapons/Attacks:

| Type | Damage | Range/Shots | Dice Pool |
|---------------|--------|-------------|-----------|
| Brawl | 0(B) | N/A | 7 |
| Club | 2(B) | N/A | 9 |
| Broken Bottle | 1(L) | N/A | 9 |

The Vacant

To utterly lose connection with your geist is a terrible thing. Even worse, however, is the fate of the Vacant. These are Sin-Eaters who manage to destroy their own geist (or have it destroyed by someone else). Either way, they are left with a gaping, hungry hole in their souls because of it. They are the walking soul-less, and if they don’t commit suicide from the loss, they often become obsessed with obtaining a new geist — at any cost. However, temporarily killing oneself doesn’t attract a new “resident.” Since geists are likely to avoid someone who has either already destroyed their own, or who is an unlikely candidate to form a successful merger long-term, the Vacant most often have to “force” a second joining, a situation which is rarely conducive to positive bonding with their intended target. And, unfortunately, even if they do successfully regain a geist, they’re still Wretched, starting with Synergy 0, and unlikely candidates for recovery to any functional level.

Vacant still have Thresholds and a Psyche rating of 1 (and no higher), but without a geist “partner,” they possess no Manifestations or Keys, and can reap no supernatural benefits from a krew. They retain all knowledge of ceremonies learned, but cannot empower them (with one profane exception, listed below). They may use plasm to heal their wounds, and retain some measure of deathly senses, though they suffer a -3 penalty to use any of their abilities, such as Haunting Visions. Without a geist, the Vacant also cannot return from the dead.

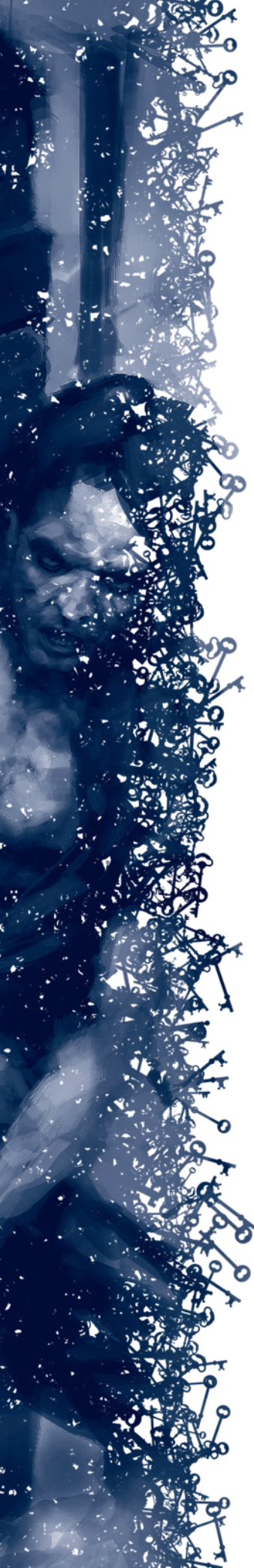
The Vacant would be relatively harmless if it weren’t for the existence of certain profane ceremonies that allow them to affect the very bonds between geist and mortal. It’s uncertain just where these profane ceremonies originated — certainly their very existence is a threat to Sin-Eaters everywhere. The two ceremonies below are the most prominent examples of just how the Vacant might bring a new type of discord into a chronicle.

Reverse Bargain (•)

Technically, this profane ceremony shouldn’t even *work*. Or at least, it shouldn’t work when used on oneself, because the target of the ceremony cannot have a geist bound to him. And without a geist, one can’t empower ceremonies. But it *does* work. It works a little better when there’s a Sin-Eater performing the ritual on another person, but it’s possible — with the right sacrifices, mind — for one of the Vacant to use this ceremony to bind a geist to himself once more.

Performing the Ceremony: The ritualist must have a geist at hand, one that is unable to escape — no small task, particularly given that geists are unwilling to bond with one of the Vacant. The ritualist carves and scars the ceremony’s mortal subject with an obsidian knife, exposing as much blood as is practical to the open air so that the plasm may fuse more readily. The subject of the rite takes five points of lethal damage from this ritual wounding.

It’s possible for one of the Vacant to perform this ceremony without the assistance of a geist. In such a case,



though, the ceremony demands death-energy from another source. The character must slay one adult human for each dot of the target geist's Psyche as part of the ritual, with the same knife he uses to carve his own flesh.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Stamina

Action: Extended (target number of 20 successes)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The target of the ceremony takes two additional points of lethal damage from the backlash, and the geist may have an opportunity to escape.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the required number is reached, the geist and the mortal are forcibly fused. The character in effect becomes a Sin-Eater with a Synergy of 1, three dots of Keys, and three dots of Manifestations.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the number of successes exceeds the needed number by five or more, the character gains an extra point of Synergy from the process (rising to 2).

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +1 | Each additional sacrificial victim beyond those necessary. |
| -1 | Each point of the captured geist's Psyche. |
| -3 | The ritualist is performing the ceremony on himself. |

UnBinding (.....)

This profane ceremony is greatly feared among the Bound – and often secretly desired as well. It is a ritual method of severing host and geist, undoing the Bargain. In addition, it can paralyze both host and geist with the enhanced trauma of separation, giving the character an opportunity to use Reverse Bargain to graft the geist into a new host.

This ceremony is a discord trigger for characters of Synergy 2 or higher (roll two dice). If performed on oneself, it is a discord trigger for Synergy 1 or higher (roll two dice).

Performing the Ceremony: The character must usually restrain the target in some way. Like the Reverse Bargain, this ritual involves bloodshed, preferably with an obsidian knife. The character inflicts one point of lethal damage on the target for every other roll made. If the target dies during the ceremony, the geist is not freed, and may choose to resurrect its host at a future time of its choosing. (It may also choose to abandon the body, in which case it is not bound by the ceremony's power and may do so immediately.)

Dice Pool: Psyche + Intelligence, contested by Resolve + Psyche as a reflexive action. The target may contest the roll even if unconscious; the geist fights while the mortal body is unaware.

Action: Extended (target number of 3 successes per dot of the target's Synergy)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. The psychic feedback is immense, and the character performing the ceremony immediately loses all remaining points of Willpower.

Failure: No successes are gained.

Success: Successes are gained. If the required number is reached, the subject is separated. The human host becomes one of the Vacant, with all the rules changes that entails. The geist becomes unfettered. Both human host and geist are wracked with pain from the ceremony, and can take no action more strenuous than speech for eight hours.

If the host and geist are reunited within 24 hours (by the Reverse Bargain pact, or by the geist's action if it can do so), then none of the character's Keys or Manifestations are lost, and the Bound regains her former Psyche score (instead of having to begin again at 1). The Bound also regains most of her Synergy rating – her new Synergy rating is one point less than it was at the time the ceremony was performed. If the host and geist are not reunited until after that time, they are subject to the limitations of Reverse Bargain, above.

Exceptional Success: Successes are gained. If the number of successes exceeds the needed number by five or more, the separated host and geist can take no action for a full 24 hours.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +1 | The character has found items anathema to the geist and incorporated them into the ritual. |
| +1 | The knife used is obsidian. |
| -1 | The knife used is machine-fabricated. |

Nicholas Burtchell

Quote: *You have something I need. I'm sorry, but it's just that simple.*

Background: A former university professor, Nick died on a surgery table at New York Presbyterian Hospital during experimental brain surgery for a tumor long-thought inoperable. He was offered the Bargain by the Magistar of Words Unspoken, a geist whose focus was academic and knowledge-oriented. He took the offer and became a Sin-Eater, but host and geist almost immediately came to

conflict. The failed surgery (and ever growing tumor) changed Nick's formerly mellow and easy going personality, reducing his memory and capacity for cognitive thought and increasing his temper and knee-jerk reactions to the world around him (including the spiritual world to which his new existence exposed him). Eventually, the changes became such that enough that Nick became convinced he would be better off without his geist. He began cutting into his own body, leaving horrific scars over much of his face, arms, legs and torso, and eventually carving away portions of his body, including his pinkies on both hands. When the cutting didn't release his geist, he covered the scars with arcane tattoos designed to purge the spirit from his soul, further adding to his bizarre appearance. And, eventually, (ignoring the warnings connected to the ritual) he took advantage of one of the "profane" ceremonies his research had uncovered, which was actually successful in severing the connection between himself and his geist, destroying the Magistar of Words Unspoken in the process. Unfortunately, as the warnings suggested it would, this had horrific results.

Appearance: Nick Burtchaell was once a handsome, if bookish man, with dark hair that flopped in a charming fashion over an open and smiling countenance. His time as a Sin-Eater has been hard on him, however. He's now covered in scars, many of which have been covered with arcane, kabbalistic tattoos. He is missing the pinky fingers on both hands, and has a mad, hungry look in his eyes that tends to scare normal humans and make other Sin-Eaters uncomfortable to be around him, even if they are unaware of his cannibalistic tendencies. By contrast, he dresses in very mundane clothing — jeans and T-shirts, covered in a flannel plaid over-shirt, as if trying to (unsuccessfully) mask his insanity by virtue of such "normal" fashion.

Storytelling Hints: Severing Nick's geist left a gaping hole in his soul, a wound that only deepened the downward spiral his tumor had begun. He has become obsessed with filling the gap he can feel but not clearly explain, by seeking out first unfettered geists and attempting to merge with them. Then, when he was unable to successfully convince, trick, or force one of them into binding with him, he began preying on other Sin-Eaters, using a variation of the same profane ceremony that parted him and his geist on them. He hopes to have better luck with an already-bound geist. So far his ritual experiments have been unsuccessful in "stealing" another Sin-Eater's geist, but that hasn't stopped him from attempting this lethal ceremony over and over.

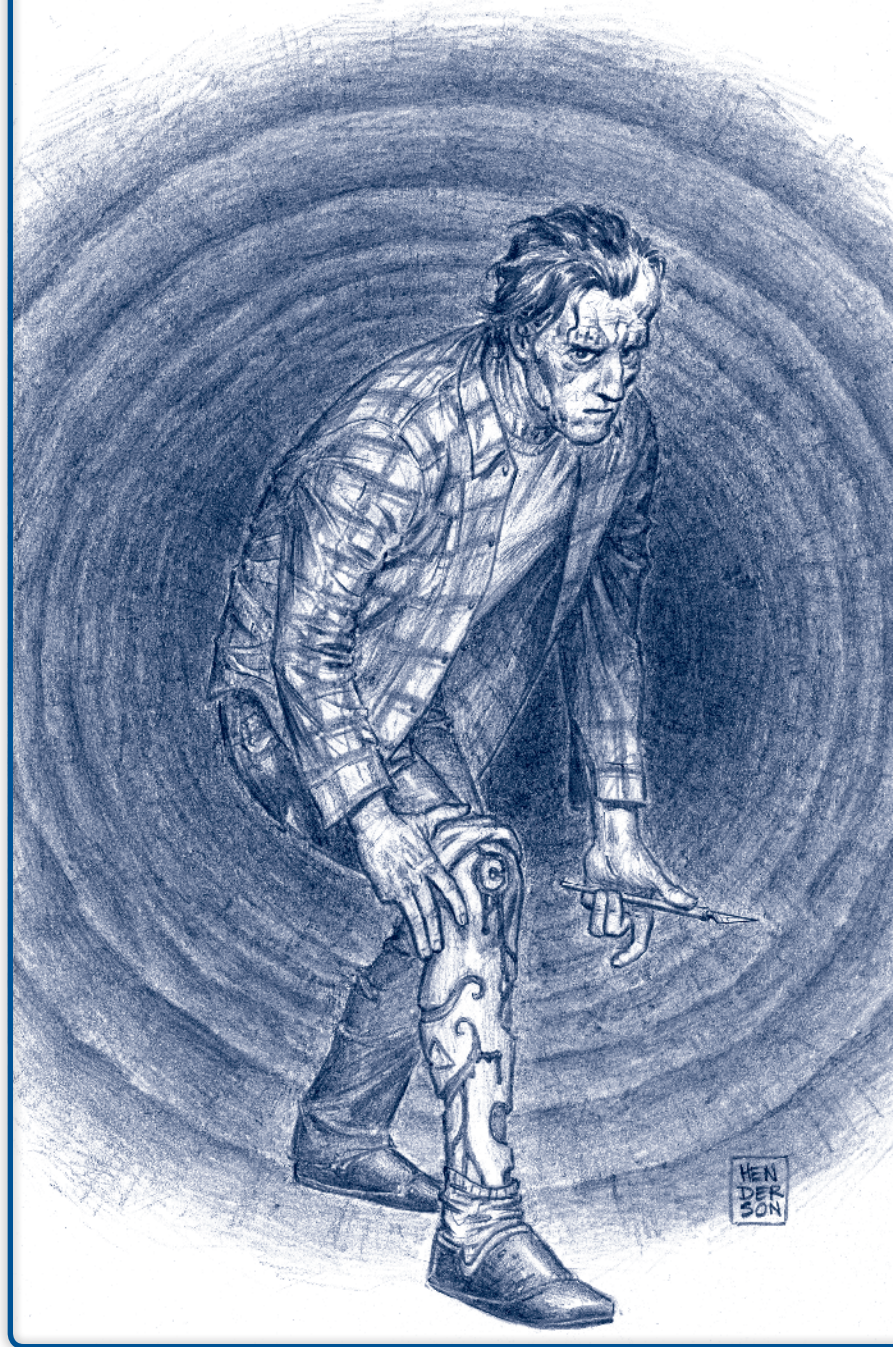
Archetype: Reaper/Vacant

Threshold: The Stricken

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 1



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Mental Skills: Academics (Specialty: Anthropology) 2, Computer 1, Investigation 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Knock Out) 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 2, Survival (Urban) 2, Weaponry (Scalpels) 3

Social Skills: Intimidation 4, Persuasion 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Encyclopedic Knowledge 4, Fighting Style: Boxing 4, Iron Stamina 3

Willpower: 5

Synergy: 0

Virtue: Fortitude

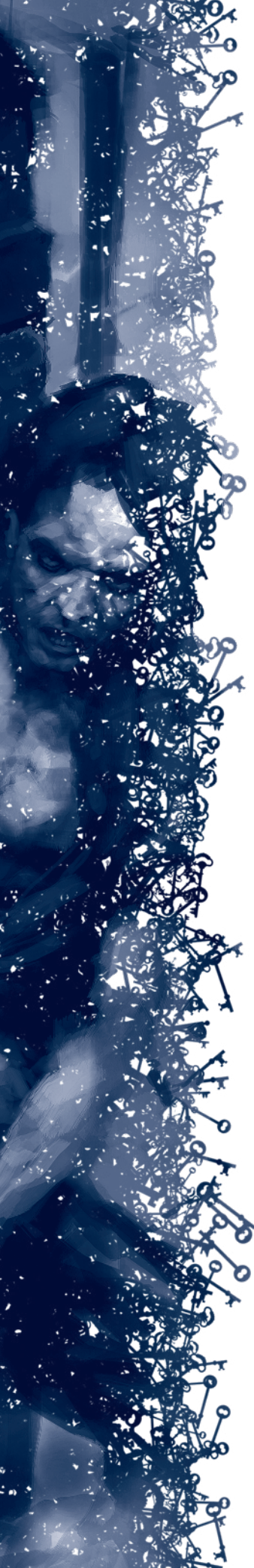
Vice: Envy

Initiative: 4

Speed: 11

Defense: 3

Health: 9



Psyche: 1
Manifestations: None
Keys: None
Ceremonies: Finding, Lifting the Scales, Reverse Bargain, UnBinding*
Plasm/Per Turn: 14/1
Weapons/Attacks:

| Type | Damage | Range/Shots | Dice Pool |
|--------|--------|-------------|-----------|
| Scapel | 2(L) | N/A | 9 |

*As one of the Vacant, Burchaell cannot use any ceremonies other than Reverse Bargain and UnBinding without binding a new geist to himself.

Sacrosanct Sin-Eaters

Krewes that don't like each other usually keep a healthy distance away from each other. They rely on the Twilight Network to know where their enemies are and only make contact when it's time to contest a resource or oppose their actions. Sacrosanct krewes are more troublesome because of their beliefs. Each one believes its channel is the one true way. The members are fanatics who think other krewes are dangerous, deluded cults. This drives them to interfere in the affairs of other Sin-Eaters. Many Sacrosanct krewes are evangelists who want enemies to convert or die. Everyone else's geists are demons in disguise.

One thing that truly enrages the Sacrosanct is when other krewes believe in a channel similar to their own. There can only be one Odin or Uriel, or only one

group of people destined to liberate the dead from the weight of karma. Sacrosanct krewes routinely hunt down and kill Sin-Eaters with similar beliefs.

Michael ben Michael

Quote: *I'm the sword in his hand, conducting souls with a cut. You're just confused.*

Background: Michael ben Michael was originally Mike Vanderwooten, a college dropout who only got the chance for higher education after being scouted for football. That was okay, though, because Mike was too busy getting high. Freebasing coke and making up for missed practice with a heavy steroid cycle didn't produce the most gentle, mentally balanced personality, so even though his grades sucked, he was eventually kicked out of college for misconduct: beating a coach into a coma.

The college didn't press charges because the situation (which happened to reveal lax drug screening within the football program) was embarrassing for the school. The coach happened to double as the Army ROTC instructor; his cadets wanted payback. They lured Mike into the coach's office with a fake invitation to help get him back into school. Once he arrived, they locked the door, beat the shit out of him, and tied him up, aiming to dump him on the outskirts of town. Unfortunately, Mike broke the tape they used and grabbed the antique sword on the coach's mantle. He stabbed one of the cadets, but another grabbed a heavy trophy, swung and caved in Mike's skull.



The cadets thought he was dead and got scared. They dumped Mike and the sword in the reservoir. That's where Mike met Michael, and became Michael ben Michael, son of the angel. Only son of the angel. He wasn't sure of the latter until he met three more Sin-Eaters with similar leanings through the Twilight Network and founded his krew. That's when his geist blazed into full glory, and when he realized that all the other Sin-Eaters with similar stories were liars — maybe out of self-interest, or maybe for the cause of the Evil One. The true angels only have four children: him, and his krew mates.

Appearance: Michael ben Michael is a huge, ripped man — six feet eight and 290 pounds. He's tanned. His curly hair is blond from the sun, and sloppily dreadlocked from years of inattention. He usually wears a white bandanna to hold it back. He goes without a shirt whenever the weather lets him get away with it, letting onlookers see a mishmash of tattoos with religious themes. On his back, a beautiful set of wings erupts from a jumble of smaller pieces. One of Michael's eyes is the blue of an angel on a Renaissance fresco, but the other is red-brown, thanks to the injury that caused his Threshold. That also makes his face a bit lopsided.

His Keystone memento is an authentic Union Civil War cavalry saber with the first name "Michael" engraved on its blade; the surname has been obliterated by rust. Michael is convinced the memento is the archangel's sword, and its true form has been hidden to protect it from profane eyes.

Michael's geist carries the Aspect of the Archangel: winged, radiant, and armed for battle against Satan and his hosts.

Storytelling Hints: Michael's killed three Sin-Eaters he considered to be blasphemers so far, including one who also claimed he channeled the archangel Michael. He knows he's easy to spot so he lays low, out of the Twilight Network's view. When he can make connections discreetly he looks for concentrations of ghosts to convert or destroy and more heretics to hunt. His other hobbies include working out and drug use; for all he pretends to holiness, he's still addicted to cocaine and the feel of unnaturally supported muscle mass. Riding multiple steroid cycles has made him "pure" in one sense: he's been impotent for years, and can't distinguish between sexual desire and any of the other irritants that make him an extremely violent man.

Michael's krew is called, simply, the Archangels. Members believe they're also the living tools of angels. Aside from Michael, there are followers of Uriel, Gabriel, and Raphael. The krew is widely dispersed; members fight "evil" across the Eastern Seaboard, coming together every month or so to compare notes or strike at a threat too big for them to handle. The "crusade" mostly consists of converting ghosts to Christianity or destroying them if they won't (or in most cases, can't, given many ghosts' inflexible natures). The Archangels believe the Underworld is Purgatory. Ghosts on Earth have somehow escaped, but might be permitted to become "guardian angels" if they acknowledge Jesus as their savior. The krew's ethos forbids them from spilling blood in a holy place and hints that one

day they'll have the chance to dispatch the Antichrist in the midst of his false resurrection, while his demon-ghost waits in Twilight.

Archetype: Pilgrim

Threshold: The Torn

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Investigation 3, Medicine 2 Occult 3 (Specialty: Ghosts).

Physical Skills: Athletics 3 (Specialty: Football), Brawl 3, Weaponry 3 (Specialty: Swords)

Social Skills: Intimidation 4, Socialize 2 (Religious Communities), Streetwise 3

Merits: Contacts 1 (Drug Dealers), Mythic Aspect (Haunted

Skill: Weaponry), Weaponry Dodge

Willpower: 7

Synergy: 4

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 5

Speed: 12

Defense: 2

Health: 8

Psyche: 3

Manifestations: Rage 3, Oracle 2, Shroud 2

Keys: Pyre-Flame, Stigmata

Ceremonies: Krew Binding, Distant Vision

Weapons/Attacks:

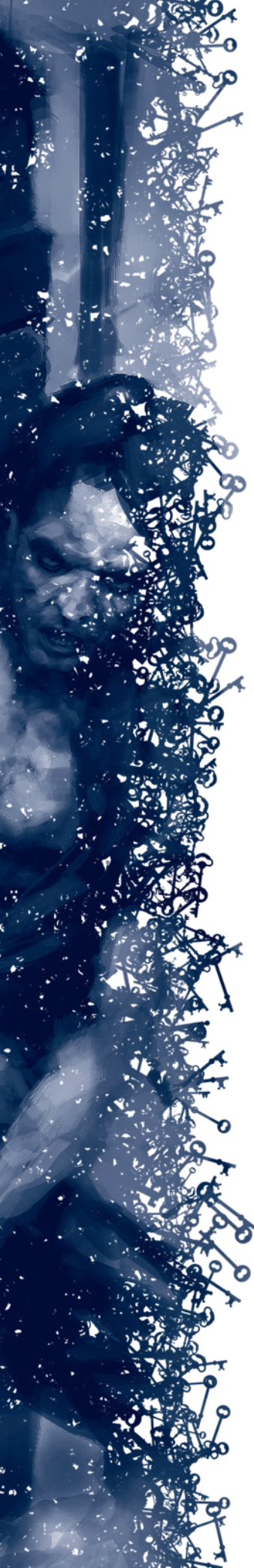
| Type | Dmg | Range/Shots | Dice Pool |
|---------------|------|-------------|-----------|
| Cavalry Saber | 2(L) | N/A | 11 |

Abmortals

Immortality is an almost universal human dream. Sin-Eaters have a wide array of opinions about this. There are always rumors flying around about true immortals: enlightened sages, people who remember past lives, demigods — once you've seen the Great Below, anything's possible. The legends fly thick and fast, but proof is nonexistent. Nobody's seen a genuine immortal, but Sin-Eaters have seen plenty of what the intellectuals among them call abmortals: people who've used a number of strange and disgusting tricks to keep death away.

Abmortals are usually one of a kind. Occasionally, one technique works on a small group or can be used by someone with the right spiritual makeup, but the average abmortal discovers unique death-defying magic or some kind of rare psychic power. That's the conjecture, anyway. The truth is that Sin-Eaters don't know much about what turns someone into an abmortal. Some of them believe that vampirism is an abmortality technique that got out of hand and one can't discount rumors of soul-stealing necromancers.

Abmortals are obsessed with survival above all else. The old ones don't want to age to death; the young ones want to avoid accidents. A few of them become uncommonly brave after discovering a way to bend the rules of death but might change their tune as soon as they encounter unfamiliar supernatural phenomena; anything strange might



be able to hurt them. Older abmortals often draw on considerable resources, earned through several lifetimes of effort.

Sin-Eaters wouldn't normally care about abmortals but they invariably have needs that harm humans or ghosts. Some of them have traits that can even threaten a powerful geist. They eat ghosts. They birth hideous offspring in Twilight and drain the will to live from lovers. The one constant is that to enjoy unnatural vitality, they need to take something from others, or inflict some horror upon them. An abmortal's needs are apparently some hideous manifestation of balance.

Storytellers should see abmortals as an opportunity to design unique antagonists. Behind the scenes, they're part of the overall mystery of the World of Darkness. They aren't bound to Geist's great supernatural secrets unless you decide they are. Design your abmortal based on the challenges you want to introduce, the themes you want to emphasize, and the mystery you want to present. In most cases, part of your story will focus on uncovering why the abmortal is what she is, and how that reveals her weaknesses.

Abmortal Traits

Abmortal abilities vary greatly based on their origins, but most of them possess the following characteristics:

Regeneration: An abmortal recovers one point of bashing damage per turn, one point of lethal damage per hour, and one point of aggravated damage per day. This even occurs if the abmortal's body is beheaded, or it's burned or reduced to a powder. Tissue knits together or regrows. Some abmortals require an approximation of their entire body mass to come together to completely regenerate, so putting pieces in multiple boxes might work — but some of them have no such vulnerability.

Unaging: Abmortals don't suffer the effects of aging. They might only cosmetically age, have the ability to consciously alter their apparent age, or only revert to the age they should be when they're wounded.

Unkillable: Unless a threat incorporates the abmortal's weakness (see below), she can't be killed. Typically, each point of damage over that which should kill them imposes a -1 penalty to non-supernatural Mental, Physical, and Social dice pools due to raw destruction of the body. Scoring an exceptional success (5 or more) to injure an abmortal that should have died from injury normally severs, burns, or otherwise destroys a body part — but the rest of the abmortal keeps coming.

Weakness: All abmortals have some flaw or weakness in the method they use to stave off death. They may need some exotic substance, or they might be vulnerable to certain people, objects, or substances. When these conditions are invoked, any damage inflicted under them becomes *resistant*; the abmortal cannot heal it with supernatural abilities. If the abmortal suffers resistant damage that would kill a human, he's killed too.

Angelo Morales, the Hungry Exorcist

Quote: *Oh, I want him — I mean, I want him to go away as much as you do.*

Background: Angelo Morales doesn't have a soul. About 150 years ago the Nicaraguan was an interpreter for the American "adventurer" William Walker during his short-lived conquest of the country. He readily helped Walker because his own background left him in a difficult position. His poor family saved everything they had to buy him a Jesuit education and a future in the clergy but despite his intelligence, his superiors made it clear to him that a back-country *mestizo* like him would most likely just be returned to his community.

FIVE QUICK ABMORTALS

Every abmortal has its own special supernatural nature. Here are five quick ideas for your own abmortal antagonists:

A woman is linked to her descendants' life force. As long as she eats a pound of flesh belonging to one of them every year she doesn't age.

In mid-air after jumping from a bridge, a suicide has second thoughts. He makes a deal with something before he hits. As long as someone jumps in his place every year, he'll stay alive — but another fall from that bridge will truly kill him.

In the Middle Ages she contracted a strange version of the bubonic plague. It left her unmarked and ageless, but she can manifest buboes (pus-filled swellings) with concentration. People who drink the pus from them get sick and die, but their ghosts serve her forever.

He could have become a Sin-Eater, but he heard another voice in the darkness: a Kerberos. He let it take the geist, starting a strange pact. If he hunts down those who should have died, the Kerberos will give him a trickle of power. Destroy the Kerberos to kill the man.

She doesn't bleed to death, feel pain, or get rejection symptoms from foreign tissue. Surgery for new organs, muscle, and bone is simple, provided she has a steady supply of donors. The ghosts arrive missing the harvested parts and are anchored to her body.

Angelo was a polyglot with a head for figures. That made him a useful asset in Walker's regime, but to others, he was a traitor. After a rigged election in 1856, Walker's government sent him home to deliver the news and reorganize the local administration. He walked by the local church and was surprised to meet himself – or at least, someone who looked exactly like him. The doppelganger grabbed Angelo, knocked him out and over the next three days, performed a strange rite on him: a parody of exorcism. In the end, the double let Angelo go, explaining he only took "... something you weren't using."

After the ritual Angelo felt listless and empty, but also drawn to morbid locales: cemeteries, reputed haunted houses, places his family said had once been sacred sites, before the Spanish came. The first time he saw a ghost he wasn't frightened, but spiritually hungry. He concentrated on the feeling and felt the ghost tear apart, as if being pulled to him by sheer will.

In the century and a half since then, Angelo has set himself up as either a real priest or a rogue exorcist as he's made his way from Honduras to Los Angeles. He's come to understand that he has no soul. His body should be dead, but when he eats ghosts it serves as an effective substitute, giving him unnatural health. His spirit is practically a "black hole" in Twilight and he doesn't even need to work hard to devour ghosts now; if he gets close enough, the thing that replaced his soul sucks them down.

If someone suffering a haunting and has the right connections, they'll get his number and hear that he's a defrocked priest. Exorcisms start at \$10,000. Angelo can get by tracking ghosts by himself but he performs exorcisms for the money and because sometimes the spirits he meets are especially strong, and seem to keep him healthy for much longer. Over the past half century, he's also noticed that servants and other long-time acquaintances always become ghosts when they die. He was embarrassed the first time he ate one of them but he eventually got over it.

Appearance: Thanks to a period of isolation in the wild (and slim pickings for ghosts) Angelo's picked up a few signs of aging: gray hair and some crow's feet. Otherwise, he looks like a slender *mestizo* man with a weird, ageless quality. His skin seems a bit too tight, and his facial expressions are muted. Nowadays, someone might suspect him of having had plastic surgery to keep his looks up. He's fond of Catholic clerical garb.

Storytelling Hints: It's up to the Storyteller to determine what took Angelo Morales' soul, but the secret to defeating him is to give him an ordinary human soul. Perhaps only his own soul will do, or maybe it will require the sacrifice of someone pure of heart – again, the exact solution is up to the Storyteller.

Angelo eats ghosts in two ways:

- If he's near a ghost (within 100 yards or so) and can perceive it, the spiritual void inside him automatically starts draining it. Make a reflexive Composure roll on Angelo's behalf, resisted by subtracting the ghost's Resistance. If Angelo succeeds, subtract successes from the ghost's Corpus, and when that runs out, the ghost

has been destroyed. Ghosts cannot leave Angelo's presence while being drained in this fashion; his anti-soul drags the ghost a bit closer while tearing off chunks of the ghost's form.

- He can also consciously use a variant of the Abjuration ritual (see the **World of Darkness** core rulebook, p. 213-214). This doesn't require a high Morality and isn't designed to send a ghost away, but draw him in. Characters who understand Latin can make out references to the "gates of Limbo." This requires his concentration. It increases his dice pool to Resolve + Composure, contested by the ghosts Power + Resistance. Exceptional success annihilates the ghost, devouring it utterly. Standard success inflicts Corpus damage equal to Angelo's successes and roots the ghost in place.

If Angelo Morales completely devours a ghost, he can use its Numina for the remainder of that scene and the next. He occasionally also remembers things the ghost knew, but this isn't a consistent ability.

These abilities also work on geists and Sin-Eaters, but aren't as effective. Add their Psyche traits to the traits to contest or resist attempts. If Angelo succeeds, he simply drains one point of plasm per success and prevents the target from leaving his presence. It's not known if Angelo can drain memories or special powers from geists or Sin-Eaters, since he's never done it – that's for the Storyteller to decide.

Eating a single ghost or 10 Corpus from multiple ghosts staves off Morales' aging for a month. Plasm is even richer "food;" one point keeps him going for a week. After this time he ages about a year for every month he "starves." This will eventually erode his Attributes but won't kill him – only getting a soul will let that happen. If he manages to feed after that, his appearance only improves slightly, but the effects of degeneration go away. Angelo's learned that anyone who stays in regular contact with him for at least a year becomes a ghost, and also tends to die early of illnesses and accidents. He keeps a full household staff to ensure a regular supply of victims.

Angelo Morales doesn't consider himself to be a bad person. He protects people from the dead and benefits in return, in an entirely fair transaction.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 4 (Specialty: Theology), Investigation 3, Occult 4 (Specialty: Ghosts), Politics 3.

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Weaponry 2, Survival 1

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize 3 (Specialty: Superstitious People), Streetwise 3 (Specialty: Money Laundering), Subterfuge 3.

Merits: Contacts 3, Retainers 3, Resources 4, Unseen Sense (Ghosts)

Willpower: 8

Morality: 5

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Gluttony



Initiative: 7
Speed: 10
Defense: 3
Health: 8
Weapons/Attacks:

| Type | Damage | Range/Shots | Dice Pool |
|--------------|--------|---------------|-----------|
| Knife | 1(L) | N/A | 5 |
| Light Pistol | 2(L) | 20/40/80/17+1 | 8 |

Kerberoi

Every Dominion of the Lower Mysteries has at its heart a Kerberos, one of the guardians of the Underworld. It — for few exist in a form that could be said to have any notion of gender — does not rule the Dominion, but it knows every single one of the Old Laws governing the land. Some Sin-Eaters posit that the Kerberoi are a natural outgrowth of the Dead Dominions, part of the region given physical form to punish infractions of an area's laws. That certainly would make sense, and explain why even in those Dominions where the Kerberos is an object of worship it doesn't seem to register the presence of ghosts or Sin-Eaters until someone breaks one of its Old Laws.

Others posit that it's the Kerberoi who first divided the Lower Mysteries up into separate areas governed by increasingly Byzantine laws. Perhaps they were the remains of the first people to die, or strange creatures that lurked in the Underworld even before death. Each one obsessed with finding their eternal reward, these beings carved the Old Laws on the very firmament of the Underworld in the hope that this new land would become theirs. Over time, the law became the only thing that mattered. Divorced by centuries from even the oldest ghosts, the Kerberoi now exist as little more than slaves to their own laws.

A third theory, whispered among krewes who end up on the wrong side of the Old Laws once too often, is that the Kerberoi are all that remains of Sin-Eaters who tried to find — or create — a new Dominion. Not fully dead, the Underworld couldn't hold them fast, but instead created strange laws to hold them fast for eternity. Those who only cross one or two rivers find themselves bound with loose chains, while those who quest for the nadir are held tight by hundreds or even thousands of laws, their punishment for soiling the land of the dead with the spark of life being an eternity of enforcing the very laws that they once broke.

Perhaps the most common understanding of the Kerberoi is that they're strange beasts who were either born in the Underworld or who crawled in from some more disturbing place. Their role as guardians and enforcers of the Dominions and the Old Laws are no more than shackles to tie them to one place and ensure that their terrible wrath does not lash

out against every ghost to pass on. Their forms are set by the expectations and the fears of those ghosts who reside in their Dominion. Certainly, the form of a Kerberos isn't utterly random — spider-legged pocket watches that spit spiked chains and feathered serpents with eight eyes and ten wings are close to images from human myth and nightmare, whereas formless chaos doesn't inspire the same fear.

There's one truism about the Kerberoi: every krewé has its own idea about where they come from and why they enforce the Old Laws, and any, many, or none of them may be the real answer. Most Kerberoi can't communicate beyond raspy heavy breathing, metallic clanking noises, or the roar of an angry mob. Even if it could understand a Sin-Eater's questions, it couldn't answer — and questioning a Dominion's Kerberos is dangerously close to questioning the Old Laws, and questioning the Old Laws is very close to breaking the Old Laws. Many Kerberoi thus display a kind of animal suspicion of anyone who just wants to ask them questions. They don't look kindly on people trying to game the system.

While Kerberoi enforce the Old Laws of the Lower Mysteries, they don't have any ties to the ghosts who call their Dominions home. A Kerberos knows when the Old Laws have been broken. A spectral warlord might rule his Dominion with an iron fist, but any laws that aren't written into the fabric of the world won't have the backing of a Kerberos. Indeed, when a ghost dares break one of the Old Laws — perhaps desperate for the thrill of transgression — the Kerberos punishes him without regard for his standing. For this reason, a Sin-Eater may not know or even care who the ghostly residents of a Dominion pay fealty to. Ghosts are transient, but Kerberoi are forever.

Unlike other ghosts, Kerberoi have no free agency. They're slaves to the Old Laws. Each one knows both the letter and the spirit of the laws governing its Dominion. Worse, a Kerberos has a natural sense of those laws. It knows instinctively when someone breaks one of those Laws, and it knows where they are. But for all that knowledge, a Kerberos is only one being and Dominions are large places. A Sin-Eater who breaks the Old Laws is taking a risk — is the Kerberos nearby? Will it show up soon, or does he have a chance to get the hell out of Dodge? Is it chasing after a different infraction, whether that's a ghost who's finally had enough, or another member of the Sin-Eater's krewé acting as a distraction?

A Kerberos knows its Dominion instinctively, but outside of that space it hasn't got an internal map. It still knows where a lawbreaker is, but only in relation to itself and its Dominion. A canny Sin-Eater who finds a hiding-place in another Dominion may stand a chance of hiding until some other infraction calls the Kerberos away from the chase. Of course, in Dominions with lots of laws, one of them might be

“Bring not troubles from outwith this Dominion.” If that’s the case, a Sin-Eater on the lam suddenly has two Kerberoi wanting his head. That’s one thing to remember: when you’re on the run, know where you’re running to.

Sometimes, even being caught isn’t bad. Kerberoi aren’t rational per se; they don’t think in a way that humans can understand. The punishment fits the crime, but only in the eyes of the Kerberos itself. To anyone else, whatever the Kerberos imposes makes little sense. The only real rule is that the Kerberoi don’t kill if they can avoid it. Beyond that, they can do whatever they like, and no authority – save a more powerful Kerberos – can stop them. One might recruit a Sin-Eater as an agent in the living world, or request a living soul be brought to the Lower Mysteries for whatever nefarious purpose. A few deal mere physical damage to their victim, but that’s a rarity. Far more likely is a Kerberos requiring some task of its victim.

For all that they enforce the Old Laws and mete out punishments, the Kerberoi aren’t some sort of Underworld police force. Each Kerberos embodies a number of Old Laws. These Old Laws are written on its soul just as they’re written on the Underworld itself. Kerberoi *can’t* interpret the law. They’re physically unable to. Once a Kerberos knows the law’s been broken, no amount of talking can sway it. Likewise, they can’t negotiate on punishments. Kerberoi are the Old Laws embodied, and it’s a rare Sin-Eater who can even communicate with one without risking its ire.

Systems

Kerberoi cannot leave the Underworld. For that reason, they use the same traits as ghosts rather than human characters. The most notable change is that Kerberoi have just three Attributes: Power, Finesse, and Resistance, and no Skills. Unlike other ghosts, Kerberoi can possess Manifestations and Keys like geists, in addition to Numina.

When in their home Dominion, a Kerberos recovers one point of Corpus each hour, healing even aggravated damage in this fashion. It cannot be bound, controlled, or abjured – the Kerberos is an embodiment of that Dominion, and controlling it is impossible.

In other parts of the Lower Mysteries, a Kerberos still heals very rapidly, but can’t heal aggravated damage. If it loses all its Corpus to aggravated damage, it dissolves into a sickly greenish sludge that sinks into the ground. The

stain lasts forever; a constant reminder of where someone defeated a Kerberos. One even requires that Sin-Eaters who break one of his laws must collect the stained dirt from the last time someone defeated it.

Kerberoi can follow their prey to the Autochthonous Depths, though every river they cross takes them further from the Dominion that defines them. A Kerberos loses one point of Power for every river it crosses, and cannot cross a river that would take its last point of Power. Most can reach the Autochthonous Depths, though the proximity to the living world limits it. In addition to reduced Power and limitations on healing, a Kerberos cannot use Manifestations rated higher than its adjusted Power.

A Kerberos can’t exist without Old Laws to enforce. When creating a Kerberos, make a note of all the Dominion’s laws. Storytellers may find it useful to come up with a few idiosyncratic punishments – perhaps one per law – to mete out to those Sin-Eaters who cross the Kerberos and don’t live to get away with it. In addition to informing its behavior, the Laws indicate the general power of a Kerberos: how many points the Kerberos has for Attributes, Manifestations, Numina, and Essence, according to the following table.

Many Kerberoi have powers equivalent to Manifestations. For ease of use, they possess Keys and Manifestations, but roll the relevant Attribute + Manifestation in place of the normal Attribute + Key Skill + Manifestation used for Manifestations – using the Industrial Rage is normally Strength + Crafts + Manifestation, for a Kerberos that would instead be Power + Manifestation. Where a Manifestation calls for an expenditure of plasm, a Kerberos instead uses Essence. Note that because a Kerberos isn’t bonded with a geist and cannot change its form, it cannot use most powers of the Caul and Shroud Manifestations. Likewise, any subsidiary powers that change its appearance or form have no effect. The boundaries of all uses of the Boneyard can’t extend beyond the edges of the Kerberos’ Dominion.

A Kerberos can possess and use ghostly Numina in addition to Manifestations. In addition to the Dominion Sense and Enforcement Numina presented in this section, a Kerberos can possess most of the powers available to ghosts, though not Clairvoyance or Possession, given that Kerberoi cannot leave the Underworld. When creating a Kerberos, additional Numina can be bought using the dots available

KERBEROS RANKS

| Rivers | Laws | Trait Limits* | Att. Dots | Manifestation Dots | Keys | Max. Manifestations | Max Keys | Max. Essence |
|--------|-------|---------------|-----------|--------------------|------|---------------------|----------|--------------|
| 1 | 1-3 | 5 dots | 5-8 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 10 |
| 2 | 3-5 | 7 dots | 9-14 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 15 |
| 3 | 4-9 | 9 dots | 15-25 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 20 |
| 4 | 8-14 | 12 dots | 26-35 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 25 |
| 5 | 12-20 | 15 dots | 36-45 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 50 |
| 6+ | 18+ | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |

* These represent permanent dots, not temporarily boosted traits

** Kerberoi from Dominions past the sixth river don’t have traits. Their abilities are near godlike, and should be handled through Storyteller fiat.





to either Keys or Manifestations. Note that a Kerberos without the Ghost Speech Numen must make Finesse rolls to communicate with Sin-Eaters.

In addition to Numina and Manifestations, a Kerberos may have additional unusual abilities derived from its form or nature. One, a walking mass of clockwork and wax, builds miniature replicas to capture those who break its laws. Another has wings made of ripping blades that allow it to fly and leave terrible wounds on those who transgress against the laws of its Dominion. These are only examples of the strange abilities that serve to differentiate one Kerberos from another.

All Kerberoi possess the following Numina:

Dominion Sense

The Kerberos has an intimate understanding of the laws of his Dominion, in both letter and spirit. Further, he knows when someone's broken those laws, and where they are. If a Sin-Eater's using a Manifestation or other ability to mask his presence, the Kerberos rolls Power + Finesse. If it gets more successes than were rolled for the Manifestation, it pierces the veil of secrecy and knows precisely where the Sin-Eater is. Outside the Kerberos' Dominion, it only knows direction and range.

Enforcement

When a Kerberos catches its prey, it can use this Numen to bind the prey to a specific course of action – it could want a living being brought back to its Domain, or command her to shatter the anchors of those killed in a certain fashion. To enforce the punishment, spend one point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse, resisted by the victim's Resolve + Psyche. If the Kerberos succeeds, its victim has to abide by the issued punishment for the next month. Attempting to dodge the punishment costs the victim a point of Willpower. If the punishment hasn't been met by the end of the month, the Kerberos is well aware – and is likely going to be *pissed*.

The Clockwork Hive

Quote: *[A loud ticking sound, like wound clockwork and spiders crawling on a tile floor]*

Background: The Clockwork Hive is the guardian of the Dominion of Seloï, a strange place two rivers deep into the Lower Mysteries where rusty catwalks extend over precarious drops, flames leap from nowhere, and the only entertainment comes from jagged saw-blades. A gang of shades has taken up residence, claiming that Seloï is where ghosts can go to have their memories stripped away so they can move on. Their claims are lies; the shades that make Seloï their home just enjoy the opportunities for torture that the Dominion offers. But each one knows they act under the watchful eye of the Clockwork Hive.

You can see them all over, if you think to look; small, skittering things maybe two inches across. A single eye – often, but not always, human – hooked up to a brass harness. All they do is watch. A number of travelers have mistaken them for mutant psychopomps, or the twisted remains of ghosts when the resident shades have finished with them. Neither of those is true. Each one is part of the Swarm; a construct of the Kerberos that enforces the Old Laws of Seloï. Deep within one of the Dominion's edifices of rusted metal, the Hive Queen is the real Kerberos. Her Swarm, each one little more than a drone, observes and records and even punishes minor infringements, but those who deliberately break the Old Laws of Seloï earn the Hive Queen's attention.

Seloï's laws haven't always been enforced by the Clockwork Hive. Up until just 20 years ago, it was the duty of a shambling mess of a Kerberos that some Sin-Eaters had dubbed the Scissorman – a roughly human figure forged from muscle and black iron, with four arms, each possessing a giant pair of scissors in place of a forearm. But something happened; something tore the Scissorman right out of reality. Since then, the Clockwork Hive has embodied the laws of the Dominion of Seloï, but is the Hive just a creation of the Old Laws? Or do some Kerberoi evolve personalities – and ambition?

Description: The Clockwork Hive is distinctive for being more than one creature. The majority, the Swarm, are small brass frames, with intricate clockwork mechanisms inside and eight limbs of tarnished brass. One limb ends in a naked eyeball – anyone who gets a chance to examine one up close will see that the leg impales the eye right where the optic nerve would attach. Another limb, at the opposite end, bears some sort of stinger; be that a sharp blade or a rusty syringe full of a sickly green substance. The remaining legs look like brass casts of spider- or scorpion-legs, with hooks to facilitate hanging from the bare stone. The Swarm doesn't have a voice, or any means to speak. They communicate by a combination of movement and the ticking sound as the cogs and gears within keep turning. Close inspection reveals a hole on the underside, where a clockwork winder might fit.

The Clockwork Hive itself is a nightmarish creature to behold. Innumerable legs of wickedly sharp black iron carry her around. The majority of her torso is given over to a cage of bone, where arms of brass and unfleshed muscle assemble each new drone from parts grown in exposed organs. One side of the cage rises higher than the others in a mockery of a human torso, crowned with a head bearing many eyes. When a new drone nears completion, the Hive plucks an eye from its head so that the drone may see. Empty sockets still gape, new eyes only growing in the sockets once the drone

it's been given has been destroyed. The hands of the Hive are made of the same wicked implements as the tails of the Swarm, but they are far more than a mere nuisance.

Storytelling Hints: The Old Laws of Seloi inform every action that the Clockwork Hive takes. If only it didn't appear to enjoy doing it, then it might not be so bad. If there's a spot in the whole Dominion where one of the Swarm can't see you, no Sin-Eater knows of it. Rumor has that the shades who call the Dominion of Seloi home have a few ways to avoid detection, but they demand a memory in return. If one of the Swarm witnesses a breach of the Old Laws, it first follows the victim. If the breach was minor, then one or two of the Swarm attack the lawbreaker. They're not looking to kill, usually dealing a point or two of lethal damage is enough. If the breach was a major one, or the lawbreaker is likely to carry on ignoring the laws, the Swarm drags the victim with the venom on their blades and brings her before the Clockwork Hive.

In person, the Clockwork Hive does not understand mercy, and pleas for it to go easy fall on deaf ears — were it to have ears, that is. In the presence of the Clockwork Hive, a Sin-Eater can only hope for a punishment that she can deal with. One was charged with bringing the Hive an antique pocket watch, while another spent a week on the walls of the Hive's cavern, her body used as an incubator for the strange components of the drones. The Hive delights in issuing punishments that sound easy, but soon take over most of a Sin-Eater's life.

The Old Laws of Seloi, carved into rock and attached to the catwalks like safety notices, are as follows:

- No Sin-Eater may harm a shade in this Dominion.
- Upon entering this Dominion, you must announce your presence to all.
- To cross one of the rivers from this Dominion, you must leave a memory behind.
- No ghost shall start violence against a Sin-Eater in this Dominion.
- A ghost who enters this Dominion must remain within its boundaries for a year.

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 6, Resistance 3

Willpower: 8

Virtue: Temperance. The Old Laws apply to everyone equally, as do the punishments.

Vice: Envy. The Clockwork Hive can't bear the thought of someone else keeping a secret, and uses the swarm to ferret out those who hide things from it.

Initiative: 9

Defense: 6

Speed: 21

Corpus: 9

Essence/per Turn: 15/2

Keys: Industrial, Stillness

Manifestations: Boneyard 1



john WIGLEY

Numina: Create Swarm (11 dice), Dominion Sense (11 dice), Enforcement (11 dice), Telekinesis (11 dice)

- **Create Swarm:** It takes a week for the Clockwork Hive to produce another drone to join the swarm. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse. If successful, the drone has Power 1, Finesse 3, Resistance 2, and derived traits appropriate for a ghost. It can attack using Power + Finesse, dealing lethal damage. The real use of the Swarm is to bring lawbreakers to the Clockwork Hive's presence.

Attacks:

| Type | Damage | Dice Pool |
|------------------|--------|-----------|
| Talons | 0 (L) | 11 |
| Toxin Injection* | -1 (L) | 10 |

*+2 bonus to Enforcement Numen against target

The Triptych

Quote: *You. Will. Not. Continue. Into. My. Domain. Your. Friends. Are. Already. Doomed.*

Background: Since before anyone can remember, the Dominion of An-Shot-Ka has had its laws enforced by the Triptych. A deep cavern five rivers into the Lower Mysteries, An-Shot-Ka is a place of ancient buildings, long abandoned and falling into ruin. Some shades travel to the Dominion in search of the secrets said to be hidden deep within the lowest levels of the buildings. That's no easy task; something about the structures doesn't seem right; there's not a single right-angle in any of the buildings and long corridors seem to pass through one another. The shades that inhabit An-Shot-Ka have set up shanty-towns in some of the larger halls, but others press on in search of their final reward — or endless oblivion. They all shy from the Triptych's gaze when it patrols the Dominion.

The Three-in-One has enforced the Old Laws for as long as anyone can remember. It's a stern, implacable foe, for within its Dominion it is seemingly all-powerful. Sin-Eaters often need the secrets hidden within An-Shot-Ka. One krewé believes that somewhere deep within the ruins is a set of stone

tablets known as the Black Codex that describes a way to open a pathway between the Underworld and the lands beyond. Other Sin-Eaters may have darker motives behind their search for the secrets, including punishment from other Kerberoi who are jealous of the Triptych's store of knowledge — as much as any primordial embodiment of laws can be considered “jealous.”

An old ghost in An-Shot-Ka claims to have seen the Triptych smile. Normally, that wouldn't be anything notable — some shades will claim anything to convince a Sin-Eater to break one of the laws — but he swears blind that five hundred years ago, it smiled and it let a krewé of Sin-Eaters go. He can't remember why or how or what happened; he was too busy running in fear. Needless to say, that hasn't happened since. The shades that call An-Shot-Ka home cower whenever someone says the Triptych's name, and in its presence they all can't wait to leave. Unfortunately, the Old Laws prevent them from leaving; once someone's in the Kerberos' domain, they either stay there or face it's wrath.

While originally it only enforced the Old Laws, time has shifted the Triptych's priorities. Now, it



conceives of itself as the guardian of the secrets of An-Shot-Ka. It doesn't know what those secrets are, only that they have to remain within the boundaries of the Dominion. Unlike other Kerberoi, the Triptych has set itself up as the lord of An-Shot-Ka, a tyrant who punishes those who break the Old Laws in such a way as to set an example.

Description: The Triptych is a rarity among Kerberoi: its form shows obvious human influences. Three human bodies, each over eight feet tall and thin but not malnourished, stand facing each other. Their arms blend into each other, forming a rough triangle between the three. The three heads are normally bowed, with eyes closed and deep purple robes in place of hair. Its skin is the purple of an old bruise, fading to black where its bones press against the surface. The Triptych doesn't walk. It hovers about five inches above the ground, and can glide faster than most men can run. Its legs hang useless beneath it, bound tight by black chains that bite deep into the useless flesh. The ends of each chain dangle limp on the floor, until the Triptych wants to reach out and touch something – the chains are its limbs, the human forms no more than a distraction to house the bizarre creature's torso.

When the Triptych wants to speak, each head rises and turns around until it faces out, accompanied by the sound of tearing muscle and cracking bones. All six eyes blaze with a sickly yellow light. It's voice sounds like thick blocks of lead slamming together, each word spoken from one mouth in turn giving a disjointed sound to its pronouncements. As it speaks, sparks crackle across the chains wrapped around its legs and the air smells of ozone. Only when something has really angered it – perhaps by desecrating the Old Laws of An-Shot-Ka – the chains grow terribly hot, burning the flesh underneath. Within minutes, the Triptych's body starts to blister and burn as the air superheats. The ends of each chain snake out, looking to drag the transgressor into the inner-space. A ghost who is caught bursts into flame, and burns for all eternity. Some of the corpse-lights that litter the Underworld are the remains of ghosts (and rumor has, at least one Sin-Eater) who crossed the Triptych.

Storytelling Hints: The Triptych is an oddity in the Lower Mysteries, something that should challenge assumptions about the role a Kerberos plays in its realm. Most don't pay any attention to the inhabitants of their Dominions – as long as they don't break the laws, at least. In stark contrast to those Kerberoi, the Triptych takes an active role somewhere between an uncaring lord and an attentive god. It cares what shades and Sin-Eaters do in An-Shot-Ka. Mostly, it disapproves of those delving into the strange edifices looking for secrets, but it doesn't actively stop them. Only when one tries to export what she's found does it take an interest, and it displays something else that most Kerberoi don't have time for: real, powerful anger. Breaking the Old Laws isn't just a crime, the Triptych seems to take it as a personal slight.

Anyone might see the Triptych. It glides through its Dominion almost at random, chains dragging on the ground. Sometimes, it follows someone. Nobody quite knows why, but just occasionally a ghost will admit that he had considered breaking the rules. Others who have attracted the Kerberos' attentions have later gone on to discover terrible secrets. It's the mysterious watcher, the lord peering over the shoulders of his peasants without ever knowing what they're doing or why. Sometimes, it hovers at the banks of one of the rivers, seemingly dreaming of other Dominions. Nobody's yet been brave enough to try to engage it in conversation; if it did respond then the pronouncements might reveal a truth about the nature of Kerberoi – or at least about the nature of the Triptych itself.

Fully 20 Old Laws govern the Dominion of An-Shot-Ka, the only recognizable words among the hieroglyphs and strange inscriptions carved on the walls of every building. Only a few are detailed below, the others are left for the Storyteller to define.

- Secrets discovered within this Dominion cannot be removed.
- You may not carry anything of this Dominion with you if you wish to leave.
- The buildings are sacred. Nobody may use violence within their walls.
- Only flames lit by the Triptych may burn in this Dominion.
- You must memorize what you find if you search for secrets.

Attributes: Power 15, Finesse 12, Resistance 13

Willpower: 28

Virtue: Hope. For all it punishes those who break the law, the Triptych really does believe that there's something else to existence, possibly even a chance to leave An-Shot-Ka.

Vice: Wrath. Those within its Dominion don't understand the freedom they have, and must be punished for squandering it.

Initiative: 25

Defense: 15

Speed: 37

Corpus: 18

Essence/per Turn: 50/5

Keys: Pyre-Flame, Phantasmal

Manifestations: Rage 3, Boneyard 2, Oracle 2, Curse 1

Numina: Compulsion (27 dice), Dominion Sense (27 dice), Enforcement (27 dice), Ghost Speech

• **Sinuous Chains:** The Triptych's chains allow it to strike at two foes at once, without any penalty. The chains can grapple using the Kerberos' Power. Due to their tangling and insubstantial nature, the chains cannot be overpowered (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook* p. 157 for more information).

Attacks:

| Type | Damage | Dice Pool |
|------------|--------|-----------|
| Chain Lash | 2 (L) | 29 |

We broke the rules.

I knew the law. I found it on a gold plate screwed awkwardly into a marble slab, a tomb ringed with marigolds and amaranth. Above our heads, the stalactites dripped a kind of slick mucus, a blood-colored goo that stank of rust and disease. Sounds echoed down the tangled tunnels as I read the plate off to the others.

I told Cassie, I said, we can't do this. The law is clear.

But she said, "We have to do what we have to do. We are what we are, just as the Old Laws are the Old Laws. Besides, what's the worst that can happen? We do the work. Then we hightail it to the surface with a fire lit under our asses."

Cassie's the boss.

We did what Cassie said.

We found the ghost — an unquiet thing standing in a ruined doorway, wailing and gnashing his teeth. In the air, the acrid tang of bitter incense. Somewhere, I could hear the quiet susurrations of river water rushing.

Cassie spoke to the specter. She said it had names, names of others it wanted dead. That was something she could help with. She bit open her thumb and drizzled blood on the soft earthen floor. She opened her pockets and pulled out a handful of dried chilies, which she tossed beneath her heel to crush (and when she did, I could smell the sharp tang, making my eyes water). She whispered the name of the ghost's mother, his father, his wife. His jaw unhinged, and he moaned — but in those moans were names, a list of dozens. A list of jobs for us, the reapers.

But the law was clear, wasn't it?

Speak not to the shades of the Dominion of Copal.

We broke that law by talking to the weeping ghost.

And now, as we hurry to the surface, making our ascent, we can hear the Kerberos coming. We caught a glimpse of it back at the river: a terrible thing with a head like a black pillar, and a thousand wings tugging at its reptilian back.

It's coming for us because we broke the rules, and it won't stop.

APPENDIX ONE: DESCENT TO THE UNDERWORLD





This, then, is the Underworld: a land both beneath our feet and outside the material realm, a dead place where lost souls collect, a vast tangle of catacombs where shades and specters conspire to find just one more taste of life. It goes by many names: Hades, Sheol, Xibalba, the Deadlands, and the Great Below. This is not a safe place for the living. Its catacombs are labyrinthine and of an uncertain cartography. Its denizens range from the grief-struck to the vengeful to the howling mad, with mindless shades and eldritch wraith-gods sharing the same skull-lined halls. The Underworld is a haven for hate and sorrow, but it is also a place mired in the endless cycles of repeated sin — some whisper that the Great Below is not just the uttermost nadir to all things metaphysical, but it is a glorious *Grand Guignol* of delicious vice; a true bottom of the barrel, a quicksand of tireless pleasure.

What follows are the things that Sin-Eaters know of the Underworld — these things have largely been true for an approximation of eternity, since the Great Below's hollow birth. But every character should be wary, for while this place has its truths, it also has many fictions — as a metaphysical realm, its laws are not always certain.

Neither Heaven, Nor Hell

The Underworld is not necessarily a ghost's "final resting place." It is most certainly not the tormenting channels and lakes of Hell, or the blissful rewards and golden halls of Heaven... if such places even exist. No, the Underworld is a place between. The ghosts of this place are not here for punishment or recompense for sins and triumphs. They are not endlessly tormented on burning pyres. This is a purgatorial place without judgment, an eternal waiting room for unquiet shades.

We Belong to the Halls of Death

So, who then are these unquiet shades? Who names the Underworld home? The ghosts that lurk in the Great Below are kept in this place because they no longer have a grip on the living world. For the most part, that means the specters dwelling here were cast into the shadows because their anchors holding them to the material world have been destroyed.

In some cases, this might have been a proactive thing, the result of character intervention: a krew of Sin-Eaters finds that a friend's house is wracked by a terrible haunting, and they seek to "exorcise" the ghost by hunting down its anchors within the manse walls and eradicating them, one by one. In other cases, it's just a thing that happens with time and circumstance. Lovers die. Gravestones crumble. Houses burn. A ghost's anchors are rarely permanent, and time is not kind to them. When a shade's last anchor is lost, the ghost can only go one place: screaming into the dark recesses of the Great Below.

The destruction of a ghost's anchors resolves nothing for the lingering shade, you see. A ghost's purpose for enduring as an ephemeral creature goes far deeper than objects or physical connections. A ghost's purpose is bound up with that person's story, whoever she was when she was a living, breathing soul. Purpose is tied to emotion: love, hate, revenge,

I too have been in the Underworld, as was Odysseus, and I will often be there again; not only sheep have I sacrificed so as to be able to speak with a few dead souls, but neither have I spared my own blood as well.

— Friedrich Nietzsche

desire, joy, sorrow. Deep passions and unresolved issues keep the ghosts lingering, but destroying their anchors doesn't change any of that. It only unfetters them from the living world while keeping their unfinished stories and untended passions firmly in place. And so, a ghost goes tumbling into the darkness, still wanting to know that her ex-lover is happy or praying that nobody ever moves into her ancestral home. It's enough to make the dead go mad.

And so, this means that the shades of the Underworld are truly desperate: they have unanswered questions and persistent passions, but they are unable to return to the material world. They cannot visit their families. They cannot prevent their fears from becoming true. They have no perspective and kept in eternal ignorance. They can only exercise their passions in the mad tunnels and rooms of the Great Below. This, of course, gives Sin-Eaters some amount of leverage over the despairing dead, as a Sin-Eater can offer a ghost many things to satisfy her needs. Perhaps he offers the specter a body in which to tromp around the material world anew, even if only temporarily. Maybe he has news of the ghost's own relatives and enemies. It could be that he will create a new anchor so that the ghost can claw her way back from the land of the dead to the land of the quick, or that he will instead offer the ghost a *genuine* path to a final reward by resolving her story. More information on the "Denizens of the Underworld" will be found on p. 272.

A Chthonic Place

The Underworld is wholly subterranean. It is chthonic, of the deep earth. The ghosts here never see the sky, for that is a privilege reserved only for the living (or for those ghosts who cling to their material anchors). The only wind that rushes through the tunnels is a dead and dire breath. Some parts of the Great Below are claustrophobic and mazelike: knotted catacombs, dusty tombs, and half-collapsed access tunnels. Other parts might be broader and more open, with vacant caverns offering stalactites that

drip with fresh blood, or vast antechambers whose walls are lined with torches lit by burning ghosts (ghosts who betrayed the laws of this place, punished perhaps by the Kerberoi... but more on them, later). You'll find more information on navigating the chthonic halls and caverns of the Great Below under "Navigating Dark Passages," p. 267.

Deeper and Deeper

The subterranean nature of the Underworld is such that it goes forever deeper. Some Sin-Eaters speculate that the depths of this realm are truly infinite, whole underground kingdoms kept beyond oily rivers and rotting bridges, playing host to endless dances of old dead gods and massive palaces made of crystal and bone. For the most part, the Sin-Eaters avoid going this deep; for the deeper the realm, the deeper the peril. Even on a simple, non-metaphysical level, going deep means having more trouble finding one's way back to the land of the living. On a metaphysical level, the dangers to one's sanity and soul grow exponentially as geist and Sin-Eater travel down, down, down. More can be found regarding this subject on p. 266, "Dead Cartography."

Mockery of Life

It's easy to assume that this is a gray and blasted realm, a wasteland of bleak death. That might have been true once, and it might still be true in the deepest recesses. But ghosts, they were once alive. And it is life — or, at least, the desire to once more be touched by life, to see and feel the blush of the living — that drives them still. The cold irony is of course that ghosts are *not* alive despite their most prevalent desires, and they are a hollow mockery of the living. The look and feel of the Underworld mirrors this mockery.

For the most part, the hues of the Underworld are dreadfully neutral: the browns of moldering skulls still masked in withered flesh, the grays of a curtain of bones draped in sallow cloth, the blacks of deepest shadow, and the whites of polished teeth.

But, color punctuates this bleak façade. Color is life: the blush of a girl's cheeks or the green of a tree. These are things that the dead love so dearly because it is so antithetical to who they are, and it is so emblematic of what they once *were*. Of course, the ghosts cannot achieve these colors naturally. No trees grow in the caverns. No young girls with pink cheeks run down the crumbling

halls (a rare-few Sin-Eaters aside). The ghosts must make do however they can.

The colors a Sin-Eater might see in the Underworld are then not precisely natural. A tunnel whose walls are skulls might have red candles glowing in the eyes, or be stuffed with marbles, done to give the impression of blue eyes (the marbles) or hazel eyes (the flickering candles). A stone throne might be draped in colorful silks or even draped in Christmas lights (the bulbs made to glow by stuffing them with the occasional luminescent fungi found in the corners and elbows of the realm). The shades themselves even attempt to adorn their gray and sallow bodies with swatches of color: one ghost smears blood across her mouth to give the intimation of lipstick, while another pierces her spectral flesh with glittering gold jewelry affixed with chipped precious stones.

The Bound may find that items of color brought from the living world can serve as bargaining chips for the unquiet shades of the Underworld. Ghosts desperate to see anything other than black walls or marbled ivory might be very helpful to a character that can give them a handful of glittery gold teeth, a handkerchief the color of the sea, or even a rich red pomegranate. This is emblemized, of course, in many death rituals around the world. Many dress their loved ones in colorful dresses, applying makeup to their faces even as they lay still in the casket. The Mexican Day of the Dead certainly does not want for color, appeasing the dead with great colorful feasts and brightly-hued decorations — bright pinks, deep reds, and lush oranges. (More can be found on brokering such deals later in the chapter, under "Dealing with Ghosts," p. 276.)

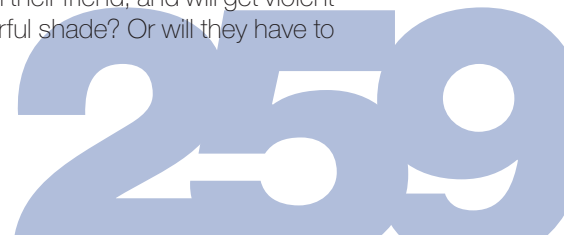
Sin-Eaters in the Underworld

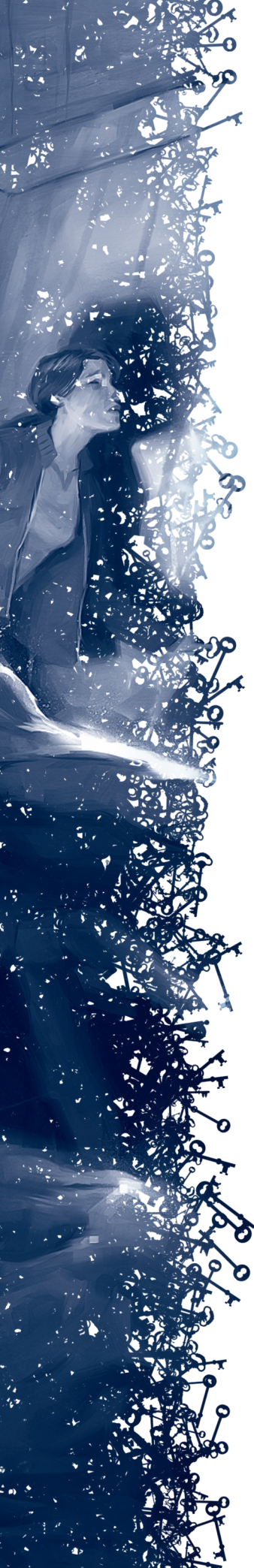
Before we get into the geography of the Great Below or discuss the denizens of the land, it's probably good to talk about exactly what Sin-Eaters might do in the Underworld. Why set foot into a tangled subterranean labyrinth that plays host to hungry ghosts, obscure laws, and other perils to soul and sanity? What can a character achieve by entering the Underworld? Ultimately, a Sin-Eater should always look at the Great Below as if it is a perpetual "gain/lose" situation. For everything a character can gain in the Under-

STORY HOOK: THE GHOST'S PRECIOUS DOLL

The characters learn a disturbing truth: one of their allies, another Sin-Eater, descended into the Great Below and has yet to return. Many Bound are life junkies — being so close to death fuels these types with an almost obsessive need to live life to its lunatic fullest, and the krew's now-missing ally just so happens to be one of these types. So, why'd she go into the Underworld? Worse, why hasn't she yet come back out?

The krew must make their own descent, and there they discover a disturbing truth: a particularly powerful shade has claimed their friend as a "doll." She's a colorful sort with bright make-up, wild and unkempt clothes, and hair dyed the color of heartsblood, and the ghost has claimed her because she reminds him so deeply of life and the world above. He's not cruel to her, not exactly, but let's be clear — a handful of lifetimes in this blasted dead realm hasn't done wonders for his demeanor. He's unwilling to relinquish his grip on their friend, and will get violent when they try to rescue her. Can they make a trade? Must they destroy this powerful shade? Or will they have to leave their friend in the ghost's mad grip?





world, something can always be lost. It is a land of great reward, yes, but also of great risk. The deeper one goes, the more potent those rewards become, but the risks become all the more perilous, too.

What Can Be Gained

Below is an exploration of what most Sin-Eaters have to gain within the tortuous tunnels of the Underworld. Storytellers are encouraged to come up with their own rewards for entering such a place, of course, but these elements should represent a good start.

Dead Knowledge

It's not just living things that die — knowledge dies, too. A grandmother with a long-cherished recipe kept firmly in mind (but never on paper) perishes suddenly, and that recipe perishes along with her. The victim of an unsolved murder goes to the grave very likely being the only person beyond the killer to know who slit her throat. This goes beyond the contemporary and into the ancient, too — think of what the librarians of Alexandria must've known, and what they could tell people now about history.

Point is, if any one of these individuals lurks in the Underworld, a Sin-Eater can find them and attempt to wrest that knowledge from their dead minds, whether by entreaty or by force. Few specters will give up such information freely — every unquiet shade wants something. One wants her murderer executed (or wants that murderer dragged into the Underworld so she can get her own revenge), while another just wants a snippet or colored ribbon or an hour's worth of conversation. Every ghost was once a person, and every person wants something different.

Rescue

The descent to the Underworld in mythology is often one of rescue, and Sin-Eaters will find that this has certain parity with the truth. Who might a Sin-Eater rescue? For one, other Bound. The Great Below offers endless hazards, and if an ally ends up trapped somewhere down in the depths, it may be necessary for the krew to brave the darkness and mount a rescue. It's also possible that the Sin-Eater's activities have drawn unwanted attention to other mortals — friends, family, or loved ones might end up as the target of a vengeful ghost or geist and end up dragged through an Avernian Gate. Such abductees might be meant to serve as a plaything or even a hostage (a ghost who knows a Sin-Eater can give her what she wants may use such a victim as leverage).

Of course, it's also possible that the Sin-Eaters will want to rescue the dead. Just as Orpheus descended to the Underworld to save his wife, Eurydice, it's possible that a Sin-Eater might hope to rescue a

loved one who could not cling to the mortal realm as a ghost and was lost in the depths of the Great Below as a result. Maybe the Sin-Eater wants to simply provide a new anchor for the lost shade, or maybe he aims to go one step further and actually provide the ghost with a new body to inhabit (or even a long line of bodies to inhabit, if need be).

Sweet Sin

The Underworld is not Hell. It is not a purgatorial, punishing place. That being said, death often strips the virtue from the living, leaving them with their foulest and most reptilian urges exposed. As a result, the Underworld is not a place that punishes sin, but it most certainly remains a place that *showcases* sin. This isn't universal, of course — not every ghost is a sin-addicted shade, but many attempt to fill their hollow and possibly eternal existences by engaging in those activities that comforted and thrilled them when they were alive. A fat wraith gorges himself on a crooked table that endlessly refills with succulent dishes and too-sweet treats. A serial adulteress lurks in a grotto off the path, endlessly luring others into her open arms, her mouth wet and waiting. A vengeful shade tears through the half-collapsed halls, ripping anything he finds asunder, satisfying his anger in violent (and swiftly-forgotten) moments.

Some Sin-Eaters who visit the Underworld believe it to be a palace of untold pleasures. And, in a way, it is. Those who engage in sinful activities when possible find that it's far better than what they feel in the world of the living, which initially seems a stark irony. The food tastes richer. Sex with a seductress shade is mind-blowing. Indolence feels deeply rewarding, as if one is accomplishing much by doing so little.

A character that engages in his Vice whilst in the Underworld can regain all lost Willpower as if he were fulfilling the needs of his Virtue, instead. In addition, any time this happens, the character also gains a point of plasm as a result.

This has a downside, however. Consumption of sins within the Underworld is immensely satisfying in the immediate, but only serves to aggravate one's dissatisfaction in the long term. The powerful potency of sex feels hollow an hour later; the meal a character consumed to awaken his taste buds now leaves an ashen aftertaste upon his dry tongue.

Any time the character engages in her Vice while in the Underworld, she runs the risk of becoming addicted to it. The character's player should roll Resolve + Composure, with a penalty equal to the number of times that character has acted upon her Vice while in the Great Below (maximum -5 penalty). Failure means that for the remainder of the story, the character can no longer regain Willpower through her Vice *unless* she's in the Underworld (she can end this restriction prematurely by spending a

full Willpower dot, however). A dramatic failure is worse: the character cannot leave the Underworld of her own volition. She is trapped by her own desire, unwilling and unable to leave the source of pleasure so damningly short-lived. She can be dragged out by others, or can spend a full Willpower dot to shake herself of the fetters of addiction. Success allows her to engage in her Vice without the fear of addiction, and an exceptional success actually grants her a point of Willpower as a result.

Plasm

Plasm is the residue of the dead, and the Underworld is the land of the dead. Suffice to say, then, the Great Below is an easy place for a character to regain lost plasm. Consuming anything within this realm (provided that it *can* be consumed) grants a character one point of plasm. Blood, for instance, often drips from stalactites. The corners of the realm are home to pockets of odd (often glowing) fungus. The many feasts of the Day of the Dead can be found here if one looks hard enough — bananas, bread, edible flowers, bottles of rum, and so forth. Consuming any of these will provide the character with one point of plasm (more than one point cannot be gained in this way per scene, however); even sucking the plasmic saliva from a succubus ghost's eager mouth can do the trick.

Yet again, this has a downside. Taking on the plasm of the Great Below grants one a kind of sympathy with the Underworld, and that's not always a good thing. For each point gained in this way on a single trip into the Underworld, ghosts gain +1 to any rolls made to affect the character. Again, this is only what one consumes on a single trip, and likewise, the bonus to affect that character lasts only for that journey (a single trip is plainly defined as the time it takes for one to enter and exit the Underworld via an Avernian Gate).

Memento Mori

Some ghosts enter the Underworld with naught but one thing: a memento held near and dear to the specter's unliving heart. A street racer dies with a black leather jacket that's warm to the touch, or a wife walks the endless passages still clutching her husband's pocket watch. Sin-Eaters may come to the Underworld seeking specific mementos. In fact, the Underworld is home to a number of particularly powerful (four- and five-dot) mementos — the deeper one goes, the likelier it is that a Sin-Eater can find such a powerful tool to include in her arsenal.

Manifestations and Ceremonies

Geists lurk within the dark recesses of the Underworld. These geists are unfettered to any Sin-Eaters, and represent one of the realm's many dangers. But, they also represent an opportunity: geists can consume other geists, as noted on p. 176 of this book. Upon consuming another geist, the Sin-Eater may gain access to new Manifestations.

In addition, the ghosts and geists of the Great Below may also be able to teach a character new ceremonies. This, of course, is never free.

Lost Treasures

The depth and breadth of history is home to many treasures both ancient and modern. And, a good majority of these treasures are dead and gone. Think about the books in the aforementioned Library of Alexandria. Or the *thousands* of artifacts obliterated in the Iraq War, or frankly in any war that's ever happened. A coin collection melts in an accidental house fire. Emily Dickenson throws away some of her most brilliant poetry and it will never be seen again (or one of Elvis' lost recordings ends up smashed by a vindictive relative of Colonel Tom Parker). An indigenous temple — and its many relics — is smashed to bits by the Taliban or tribal invaders or pissed-off Christians or whoever.

What happens to all of these things? Are they dead and gone forever? Possibly. But many Sin-Eaters have discovered a curious truth: within the Lower Mysteries (p. 271), sometimes these lost and dead treasures can be reclaimed. It's as if their destruction isn't always permanent, like the "ghosts" of these objects drift down into the sloping catacombs of the Great Below. These aren't mementos, and they have their own value (or lack of value, as value is often relative). But it can provide another impetus for Sin-Eaters to traverse the deep passages of the netherworld. Some krewes reportedly make a living this way, as the deepest, darkest grave-robbers in the modern world. Sadly, this is once more a "gain/lose" situation, as most of the truly potent treasures are guarded by vigilant specters and mad geists.

What Can Be Lost

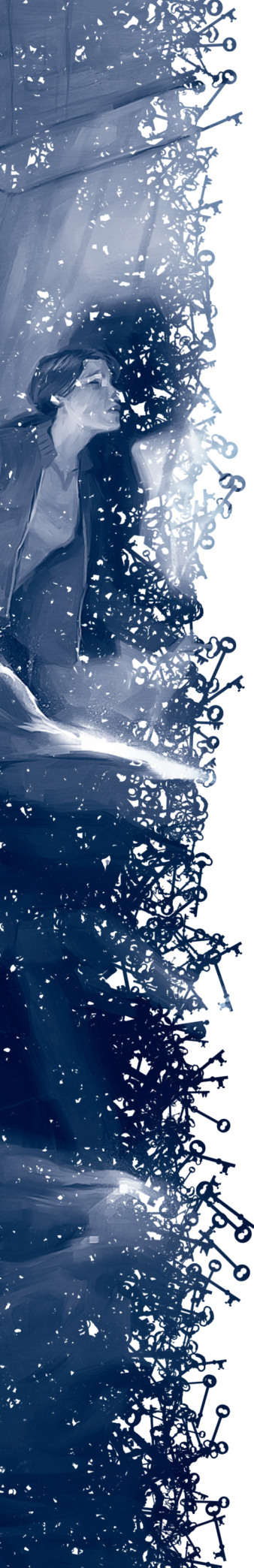
The Underworld can be a cruel place: what it gives, it can also take away. Below you'll find a handful of examples of what a character could lose within the Great Below.

Life

A Sin-Eater can die, even though death is not always a straightforward process for these characters (see "Damage and Health," p. 172). Dying or suffering near-fatal wounds has its complications wherever it occurs, but suffering so in the Underworld is doubly damning.

A character who perishes within the Underworld returns to the Avernian Gate from where she entered, appearing on the side of the living world. She is often staggered, gasping for air. She not only loses one Synergy (and one from her Synergy cap), but she also loses all plasm and all Willpower, to boot.

Prolonged exposure can actually negate this "returning process," however. If a character spends a number of nights in the Underworld equal to her Synergy score, she runs the risk of never being able to leave. If she spends that requisite number of nights and *then* dies, she doesn't come back like other Sin-Eaters can. Instead, she becomes part of the Underworld — her flesh fades as her very form becomes spectral. She may not leave the Underworld of her own volition. The only way she can leave the Underworld at this point is if she's rescued by another of her kind. Another Sin-Eater can once more give "life" to such a lost individual



by sacrificing her own life-blood and allowing the target to sup from it. The sacrificing Sin-Eater must take a number of lethal points of damage equal to 10 minus the target's Synergy. Once the target has consumed the proper quantity of blood, she can once more make her exit from the Underworld.

Sanity

Think about it. You're down deep. Walls on both sides, dripping rock above your head, slippery stone beneath your feet. It's dark, though the room ahead has a chandelier made of ribcages and burning hearts, so that's nice. You've seen all manner of unquiet shade down here: the drowned woman weeping for the babies she killed, the pack of mindless specters supping on puddles of blood, and the massive geist whose mouth is a crushing millstone and whose eyes are searing coals. Something is howling in the distance ahead, and behind, another something is laughing.

It's not a sane place; that's what we're getting at. It's damn frightening, as a matter of fact. Sure, Sin-Eaters have a sympathetic connection with All Things Death, and the Underworld needn't intimidate them overmuch. But that doesn't stop it from being dark, strange, and perilous. It can break one's mind, and so a character's sanity is in danger here in the Underworld.

Any time a character encounters something she's never before seen, it may shock her mind. The player should roll the character's Resolve + Composure score. This roll should offer bonuses or penalties depending on the severity of the encounter or scene — a geist with burned flesh that seems intent on doing the character no harm might actually grant a +1 or +2 to the roll. But the first time a character is witness to a sulfurous lake whose surface is home to a miasma of howling specters, this can be a bit jarring — and a -1 or -2 penalty wouldn't be inappropriate.

Failure means the character loses a point of Willpower and must flee the scene or encounter. Success indicates that the character loses no Willpower and can persevere.

Any time a Sin-Eater reaches zero Willpower while within the Underworld (regardless of how those points were lost), she gains a phobia based on whatever terrors she encountered during this trip. Of the above examples, the burning geist might incur a phobia of fire, while the sulfurous lake might cause a phobia of water, lakes, or even open spaces. The Storyteller is the ultimate arbiter of what phobia the character gains. This phobia lasts until the end of the current story.

The Way

One of the perils most often encountered is when a Sin-Eater loses her way within the Underworld. It's easy enough to do. People in the living world can get lost driving to a new restaurant, and traversing

the Underworld can't be helped with a handheld GPS device, can it? Take a wrong turn (perhaps fleeing a monstrous and hungry wraith) and it might be hard getting back to known ground. More than one Sin-Eater has lost his way and ended up a semi-permanent resident of the Underworld.

Other Perils

What other perils might a Sin-Eater encounter within the depths?

Environmental

Environmental dangers abound. It's like caving, but caving in a dark realm full of mad specters. Consider the following:

- The descent necessitates crossing a chasm, or worse, climbing down the chasm. Maybe the Sin-Eaters brought ropes and caving gear, but maybe they didn't (or couldn't). Climbing rolls will be necessary, and failure might mean tumbling down into the darkness or simply getting stuck half-way. (See "Falling," p. 179, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).
- One of the tunnels is slick with ice, or filled with water. Either the characters have to skate across without breaking an ankle, or swim into the murkiest depths imaginable in the hopes that they'll be able to resurface. (Remember, Sin-Eaters may *feel* dead in the depths, but they still need to breathe.) Plus, who knows what ghosts or other spectral abnormalities lurk in those waters?
- Constrictions are common. Sometimes, a passage will tighten to the point that a character has to slide his body past, or where he has to crawl through on belly or back. Characters encountering such a constricted passage will probably have to succeed on a Dexterity + Athletics roll to get through, with penalties of -1 to -5 depending on how constricted the passage is. Failure means they don't get through, but dramatic failure means they get *stuck*.
- The air isn't always safe to breathe. This is particularly true down in the Lower Mysteries (p. 271). Sometimes, the air is toxic (inhalation Toxicity between 1 and 7), but other times, it might cause a resurgence of an old dead disease (yellow fever) or even have narcotic effects (going on an acid trip down within the Great Below is a good way to do irreparable damage to one's mental state).
- The temperature can vary wildly — from glacier-freezes to hot thermal vents. While this doesn't usually translate to damage or other consequences, the deeper one goes, the likelier it is that a living character will have to deal with temperature extremes (p. 181, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Inaccessibility

This isn't the living world, and the deeper one goes, the farther one gets from the comforts and necessities of that place.

- What happens if a character breaks his ankle and has too little plasm to heal it? He can't get to the hospital because the Underworld doesn't *have* any hospitals (well, the Lower Mysteries might, but those aren't hospitals a character wants to go to).
- Did we mention no cell reception? It should be obvious, but the Underworld doesn't have cell towers. However, Sin-Eaters *have* reported turning on their cell phones only to hear strange whispers and mumbled ciphers coming in over the device...
- Little food and potable water is present. Some food might be found in the form of *ofrendas* that have made their way down into the depths, but it's not always safe to eat. The lack of safety might stem from ghosts who have "claimed" that food of their own, and who view the pilfering of such offerings as a breach of territory. Similarly, water isn't necessarily accessible, and when it is, it's not always safe to drink. One can sometimes gain sustenance from the waters of Underworld rivers, but those all have their own... side-effects (p. 268). Those who linger too long in the Great Below may have to deal with the consequences of deprivation.
- Sleep is difficult, even when a bed can be found. Characters must actually succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll just to get to sleep. Those who fail to sleep for too long might end up suffering from fatigue (pp. 179-180, **World of Darkness Rulebook**), which is a problem that can spiral out of control. Lack of sleep causes penalties, and these penalties affect the roll necessary to *get* to sleep, making it harder to sleep, which then increases the penalties, which then... well, you get the point.

Getting There

The Sin-Eater is no longer entirely human. Her life continues by the grace of the geist that is now a part of her flesh, mind and soul — while she is still something resembling a mortal being, the truth is now far stranger. She is part death. She is part plasmic residue. The geist is not a presiding spirit, not merely a loa riding her like a horse. She is her geist, as much as the geist is now her.

Entrance to the Underworld is open to all Sin-Eaters for just such a reason. As a place embodying death itself, only those who are stained with death are granted access (though normal mortals and other supernaturals may be able to convince the Underworld to open to them by staining themselves with death). Finding a doorway into the Underworld is all that's technically required of a Sin-Eater to gain entrance, though certainly she can do things that both improve and harm her chances of convincing the netherworld to open itself to her. The geist is the key, same as any — its spectral fingers undo the lock and open the door.

Avernian Gates: The Low Places

In some places, the wall between life and death is eroded and thin. The formal term for such a place is a cenote, and an even more formal term for any cenote actively used to enter the Underworld is the "Avernian Gate." Others don't bother with such pomp and circumstance, though, referring to the many potential Underworld entrances as "the low places."

Low places are just as the name suggests — places below the normal topography and geography of an area. It's a relative definition. A silver mine high up in the Rocky Mountains

richard PELLEGRINO





is technically at a higher “sea level” than a skyscraper in New York City. The very top of a NYC skyscraper might sit at about 1,500 feet above sea level, whereas the silver mine in the Rockies sits at above 6,000 feet above sea level. That doesn’t stop the silver mine from being a low place, however, and it may very well serve as an Avernian Gate. Low places needn’t always be subterranean — Death Valley, for instance, is the lowest valley on American soil, and is home to more than a few Underworld entrances across its 3,000 square miles, but not all of those gates are beneath the surface. Most of the Underworld gates, however, are subterranean.

An area generally has a number of known, pre-existing Avernian Gates. New York City, for instance, is home to a surprising underground, with more square miles existing beneath the city than you’ll find above it — and, as a result, you can find a sampling of its dozens of low places in Appendix Two. Alternately, a small town might only have one or two predetermined gates into the Underworld (one in the boiler room in the elementary school subbasement, and the other perhaps at the very bottom of the old “Hermit’s Cave” just outside the town proper). Certainly, many are places marked unerringly by death — tombs, funerary catacombs, mass graves — but that’s by no means a prerequisite. Generally speaking, most Avernian Gates lie away from prying eyes, meaning they are not places frequented by human visitors (though “other” visitors represent a whole different possibility). Entrances to the Deadlands do not survive continued exposure to the living... of course, sometimes the living don’t survive continued exposure to an Avernian Gate, either.

The majority of gates are known by local Sin-Eaters (the Twilight Network helps on this front, as do the basic connections and alliances between krewes), and as a result are often named. One of the Avernian Gates found beneath New York City is known as the Sandhog Gate, or the “Local 147” due to its discovery by local Sin-Eater sandhogs (i.e. the urban miners who built most of the Big Apple’s subterranean infrastructure). A cave not far from the Dambulla Temple in Sri Lanka holds the Valagam

Bahu Door, a low place named after the king who reportedly hand-dug many of the tunnels in and around the temple. Often, the krewes that discover the gate (and many exist as yet unknown or undisturbed) gets the privilege of naming the doorway: Dead Eddie of the P38 krewes found a doorway beneath Sacramento in the flooded “old town” tunnels, and appropriately enough declared the gate to be the “Dead Eddie Door,” or the “D.E.D.”

Note that some krewes know old ceremonies that allow them to forge new Avernian Gates both temporary and lasting. Ceremonies can be found on p. 150 of this book.

Doors That Are Not Doors

Despite the terminology, not all Avernian Gates *appear* to be doors. In fact, very few do. Most are actually dead ends and sealed-up walls. They are blocked to all but those who know how to open them. Rarely, though, do these low places go unmarked. Different krewes mark them with different sigils: one carves into the cistern wall a crude glyph of a three-headed dog or an overflowing cornucopia, while another spray-paints a collapsed sewer tunnel with nothing more than a big pronounced “X,” symbolizing the crossroads marking the road from the living world crossing the road to the world of the dead. Certainly not every Avernian Gate is marked; some krewes hope to keep them secret, aiming to either use it only for their own access or to instead prevent access entirely. Alternately, some doors may have been marked long ago, either by human worshippers and necromantic priests, or by the ghosts and geists that once walked freely between worlds.

Opening an Avernian Gate

Cost: 1 plasm

Dice Pool: Psyche

Action: Instant

Opening an Avernian Gate is technically as simple as reaching out and touching the door. That’s in theory, of course, but in practice it isn’t always so easy. Powerful Sin-Eaters with high Psyche scores will have an easier time with this, as their connection

LOW PLACES: ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

What kinds of places might count as low places serving as Avernian Gates? What follows is just a smattering, but even this meager sampling should give you enough of a clue that the possibilities are truly endless:

Access tunnels (such as those next to waterways or beneath college campuses), bomb shelters, bootlegger tunnels, burial barrows, catacombs (like those of Paris or Rome), caves, caverns, champagne grottoes, deep cellars, mass grave pits, mines (coal, salt, silver, etc.), sewer systems, stormwater drains, subway tunnels, subterranean temples (like the Dambulla Temple in Sri Lanka), swimming holes, tombs, unearthed archaeological digs, underground prisons (like those found in Basra), war trenches, waste storage, wine cellars, wells, and cisterns.

In fact, all of those places similarly serve as good visuals when considering how the Underworld might look in certain places.

to the geist within is rich and vibrant: the Underworld recognizes such power and is likelier to open without any kind of cajoling. Those who are not so powerful, however, can do things to coerce the Underworld into recognizing their morbid natures (“morbid” meaning the character’s intimate connection to death energy, not the character’s demeanor). Sacrifices in particular go a long way toward helping open an Avernian Gate; sacrifices of varying degrees can be found under “Suggested Modifiers,” below.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Failing to open a gate is a rejection of the character’s intimate ties to death and his geist. He becomes marked by this failure: he may suffer death marks (gray or red striations like those sometimes found on a corpse), stigmata, deep bruising, or other forms of apparent morbidity. In addition, the character may not attempt to enter the Underworld again for 24 hours.

Failure: The door fails to open, and the Underworld remains shut. The character may make repeated attempts, but each successive attempt suffers a cumulative -1 penalty.

Success: The gate opens, and access to the Underworld is granted. Most often, this appears to occur as the pieces of the blocked path slide silently out of place — bricks tumble away with nary a sound, mortar fizzes to dust and whispers to the ground, concrete cracks and parts with only a faint cough. Once inside the door, the Underworld is initially clouded entirely in impenetrable darkness, and characters must feel their way along the rough-hewn tunnels or skull-laden walls for a minute or two — after that, the Great Below reveals itself in its melancholic splendor.

Exceptional Success: The character’s expenditure of plasm gives him an intimate connection on this trip into the dark recesses of the Great Below. As a result, he is blessed for a time, gaining +2 to all Perception-based rolls made within the Underworld. This bonus lasts until he leaves the realm; upon returning to the living world, the bonus ends.

Suggested Modifiers*

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +5 | Sacrifice of a human life (this is potentially a violation of Synergy, however, found on p. 84) |
| +3 | Sacrifice of a living animal (must be bigger than a rat, and be able to bleed) |
| +2 | Spilling the character’s own blood (incurring one point of lethal damage) |

- +1 For each memento the character possesses on his person
- +1 For each personal item the character destroys at the site of the Avernian Gate (item must be irreplaceable and beloved; an old teddy bear, a love letter, a unique picture of a lost mother, etc.)
- +1 Character is of Synergy 8 or above
- +1 For every time the character has died (capping his Synergy as found on p. 174)
- 1 Character possesses no mementos
- 1 Character is of Synergy 4 or 5
- 3 Character is of Synergy 3 or below
- 5 After expending the 1 plasm as part of the cost, the character has no plasm left in her pool

* Note: A player cannot expend the character’s Willpower to gain bonuses on this roll.

The Laws of Ingress

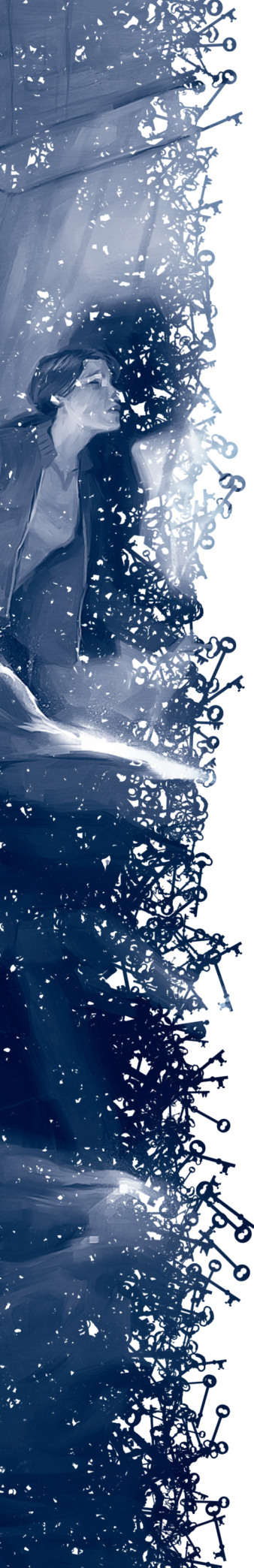
When entering the Underworld, a Sin-Eater should be aware of the following permutations:

- Entrance into the Underworld acts as a violation of the character’s Synergy. It’s only a violation at Synergy 10, but it’s a violation nevertheless. Why is this? Nobody knows for certain, but speculation puts forth the idea that the Underworld operates as a prison of sorts for the remnants of the living, which includes both ghosts and geists. Geists, therefore, may have some primal and unspoken desire to remain as far away from the Underworld as humanly (or, inhumanly, as it were) possible.
- An Avernian Gate remains open for one full minute per dot of Psyche possessed by the character that opened the doorway. During this time, anybody can set foot through the door and enter the Underworld — and, in many cases, other “things” can come back *out* of the Underworld, too (more on this can be found under “Denizens of the Underworld,” p. 272). Once the time is up, the gate closes. It cannot be closed prematurely, which means an open gate presents some danger — some krewes leave a member behind to guard the yawning doorway to ensure its mates are the only dark passengers.
- Any Sin-Eater that sets foot into the breach can bring items from the world of the living into the Underworld. However, as they pass the various rivers of the Underworld, they must sacrifice their worldly possessions. This “sacrifice” is not necessarily a deliberate giving-up

THE DEAD KEYS

A rumor exists amongst the Sin-Eaters and, more particularly, amongst mortal necromancers, that each Avernian Gate has a specific key that will open it. These keys, the stories say, are wildly variable from door to door: the Denborough Gate found in a Brisbane culvert is said to open to anyone who brings the doors seven skulls of seven fathers. The Black Nine Door beneath the garbage dumps of Jersey City, however, will supposedly unlock for any character that comes to it within 24 hours of killing a woman in cold blood. Each key is different — some demand certain genuine emotions to be felt, others ask for odd objects to be sacrificed or strange prayers to be said over the shuttered gate. Those who bring the gate the proper key can enter without fail, and moreover can bring as many objects in from the living world as they so choose, giving Sin-Eaters especial cause to discover the truth about such keys. Then again, maybe it’s all just misinformation bounced across the Twilight Network...





of the item: rather, the items become their Underworld counterparts. Clothes eventually devolve into funerary shrouds. Weapons become ancient analogues. Electronic devices may break down, change form or simply disintegrate. Mementos are not affected by this process, however, and retain their form no matter what.

Destroying a Gate

It is possible for Sin-Eaters to destroy an Avernian Gate. Why do so? Some krewes make it clear that the world of the dead should be irrevocably separated from the land of the living, and many of these krewes put forth an idea that the Underworld is an unnatural, poisoned place. Nobody should go in, and nothing should damn well come out.

Of course, many Sin-Eaters choose to eradicate an Underworld entrance for more selfish reasons. Krewes serve as competition for other krewes, and by closing down a doorway, it prevents other Sin-Eaters from exploiting that access into the Great Below. Certainly it's a sacrifice, too, for the krewes that does the destructing, but sometimes the ends justify the means (and other times, it's like a child with a ball — if nobody plays the way he wants, he'll take his ball and go home, or worse, stab the ball with a knife and now nobody can play).

Destroying an Avernian Gate is no easy task, and requires more than just an armful of dynamite. Remember: many low places are already walled away, appearing to most as blocked passages or collapsed tunnels. A doorway between worlds doesn't rely on its physical structure — more than one Sin-Eater has found that detonating a gate (or going at it with krewemates and sledgehammers) stops nothing. The gate still opens; the debris parts, forming a crooked-but-functional arch.

What's needed is a makeshift ceremony. Sin-Eaters might know this ceremony through making an Intelligence + Occult roll, or by soliciting information over the Twilight Network. The ceremony is straightforward, but its components are not necessarily easy to accumulate: the Sin-Eater requires three separate cups (technically *cyathus*, an

old Roman measurement) of fluids that represent life. Only certain human fluids actually function in this ceremony: amniotic fluid, birth blood (as in the blood created from birthing a child, not a child's blood), sweat, tears, menstrual blood, saliva, and sexual fluids. Each cup must feature a different fluid, which is then spattered upon the closed Avernian Gate. No roll is necessary at this point, but to seal the deal the character must expend a full dot of Willpower: the human will expressed by this sacrifice invokes an aura of life, said to triumph over death. The gate becomes barren, and will no longer open accordingly (unless a krewes performs the Create Deathly Passage ceremony upon it to recreate the doorway).

Note that closing an Avernian Gate is a violation of Synergy at Synergy 8.

Dead Cartography

The dead do not deal well with change. Death is a static thing, an unchanging and unyielding condition. Ghosts lie trapped in repeating patterns. Geists, too, are often ineluctably bound to their emotions and their ideas, so much so that their original names and lives are long-forgotten, submerged beneath persona and archetype. The Underworld reflects this unchanging nature, and is not a place in flux. Its tunnels do not shift. The maze doesn't change.

This makes it possible to map the Underworld, but not with any ease. It's not hard to imagine why: while it's not physically analogous to the living world, it's easy enough to picture the Underworld as a place beneath the surface of the earth, offering millions of square miles of tombs and catacombs, tunnels and antechambers, forgotten temples and dead gardens. Think of how difficult it was to map the planet's surface (and how some parts of this world still remain uncharted, despite having *six billion people* on it), and recognize how few Sin-Eaters exist in comparison. The best a krewes can hope

DEEP DOORS

Here's a rumor. Maybe it's true. Maybe it isn't.

Stories say that the world is home to a rare handful of Avernian Gates that do not open into the Autochthonous Depths, but instead open directly into the Lower Mysteries (p. 271). They access not the top of the Underworld, but somewhere way, way down. These doors, though, aren't so good at keeping things in or out of the Great Below. They're places of free passage for whatever feels the need to go through, be it a human wandering in, or some ancient entity wandering out. Naturally, ghosts seek these doors from within the Underworld, and Sin-Eaters seek these gates from the living world.

One such rumored door is down deep in the Hoover Dam outside Las Vegas. The plumbing of the massive man-made structure goes deep, thousands of feet down. For the most part, these tunnels are flooded. But, once in a blue moon someone drains them — and when this happens, the gate is revealed. Where does it go? Well, that's for the characters to find out... if the stories are even true.

for is to purchase or create a map whose area is purely local: they enter a nearby Avernian Gate and chart the Underworld they find there. If they create the map starting from the Worm Apple Gate in New York City, then that map is useless for any Sin-Eater entering the Underworld from the Seven Death Door near the temples at Cobán in Guatemala. It's the same way that a Jersey City street map isn't useful for anyone trying to find a restaurant in Mexico City. It's only functional on a local level, for the most part: the New York City krewes might find that map valuable, as would anyone coming to town hoping to use the nearby Avernian Gates. But that's it. It's for this reason that very few krewes chart maps that go far beyond the upper echelons of the Underworld, and when they do, they only diagram a few key pathways.

(Note that having a map of a certain area provides a Sin-Eater a +1 to +3 bonus on any roll made to navigate the depths of the Great Below, with the benefit contingent upon the usefulness of that map. More information can be found on p. 272 of this Appendix.)

So, once a Sin-Eater steps beyond the veil of shadow that lurks near the Underworld side of an open Avernian Gate, what then? The first thing any character will notice upon stepping foot into the Great Below is the faint downward slope, a persistent decline that never ceases. It's the one true way to know whether one is going deeper into the Deadlands or whether one slowly approaches the living world. That doesn't necessarily diminish the labyrinthine nature of the Underworld's limitless catacombs, of course (a tunnel may twist and turn many times, and each bend may shift from decline to incline, offering confusion). But it at least serves as an immediate, if imperfect, guide.

What does the Sin-Eater see? How does she get to where she wants to go? What can a Sin-Eater find here, exactly, beyond the unquiet shades? This section discusses the geography of the Underworld, and how Sin-Eaters might traverse its perilous depths.

The Autochthonous Depths

It's a lofty name, "Autochthonous Depths" (pronounced *aw-TOCK-thon-us*), but what it means is that the upper echelons of the Underworld (also called the Upper Reaches) are infused with the indigenous culture present in the nearby living world. "Culture," of course, is a bit of a sticky wicket, and here serves as a heady syncretism of local religious practice and geographical appearance.

For example, the Underworld local to New York City will look very different from the Underworld regional to Cobán in Guatemala (which is where Mayan myth puts the entrance to their Underworld, Xibalba).

New York City's netherworld offers tunnels and pathways that sometimes mirror those found in the living world of the Big Apple: sandhog access-ways, subway tunnels, old Prohibition-era bootleg passages. The stains and marks of death are forever present, however. The tile on the subway walls is cracked, mottled with fungus, and may run with tiny rivulets of fresh blood, while looking closely at the bootleg tunnels might show a character that the network of "pipes" above his head is really just a maze of bones fitted together with lead elbow-joints. The way the local living world deals with death is sure to affect the view of the Underworld, too – for the most part, New York City residents offer the standard Western funeral practices, which means the walls are sometimes home to embedded gravestones, cremation urns, and tomb markers. The Big Apple also serves as a major cultural mish-mash, though, a slumgullion of a thousand cultures, and some of this will certainly bleed over into the Underworld, too – amidst the gray tombs, one might find a cornucopia spilling out dead (but colorful) fruits, or a tunnel lined with Chinese paper lanterns, the ground blowing with Joss paper and prayer money.

From the Cobán gate, though, Sin-Eaters will discover a whole different Underworld: there, the passages are far more cave-like (though some mud-walled or stone-brick temples aren't uncommon), and the Day of the Dead colors and *ofrendas* (offerings) will be present. The Mayan Underworld, Xibalba, manifests, too – the walls are lined with the "houses" of the dead, Sin-Eaters find that every passage takes them to a new crossroads (thought to be a trial of test of the Xibalban gods), and skeletons sit in various poses throughout (the lords of Xibalba used such skeletons to confuse the inhabitants of their kingdom).

Navigating Dark Passages

Dice Pool: Wits + Survival

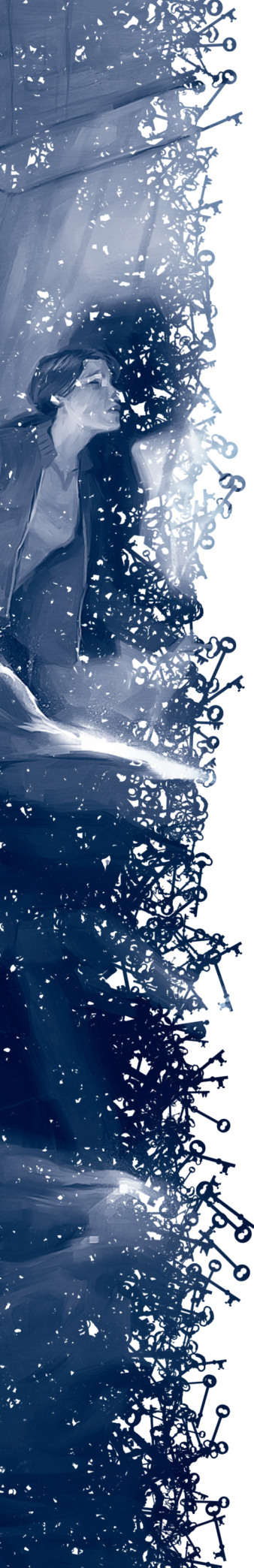
Action: Instant or extended (if extended, assume that each roll is equal to a half-hour worth of wandering, with a target number set by the Storyteller based on the difficulty of the journey; see below for more information)

Most of the passageways through the Underworld are not linear – it is a tangle of branching walkways and tunnels, of old crumbling stairways and ladders forged of lead and bone. Some passages are dark, unlit but for the occasional

ANALOGOUS?

The Underworld is not physically analogous to the living world, not exactly. It's a metaphysical place: a drill digging deep through the planet's crust will never find the Great Below (though it may find ancient access tunnels used to gain entrance to the Underworld).

That said, the Underworld does seem to brush up against the world of the living in a few ways. Outside the autochthonous manifestations that mimic a region's local culture and appearance, sometimes those wandering the halls of the dead find other creepy reminders of the world above, too. They might hear cars passing overhead for just a moment, or maybe they hear a jackhammer off in the distance. These sounds are passing, but as reminders of the living world they can be both comforting and disturbing.



pocket of glowing fungus or for a lost wandering specter (as ghosts often give off a faint luminescence here in the Great Below). Other passages are well-lit, featuring skulls whose eye sockets glow with candle-flame or searing coals, a crooked procession of lanterns, or even buzzing neon. Traversing these passages is not easy. It's possible to get turned around or even entirely lost, and losing one's way in a subterranean netherworld full of hungry ghosts has obvious consequences. Moreover, feeling one's way through pitch darkness can have a psychological effect, too. A Storyteller may ask for a Resolve + Composure roll at some point to see if the character can continue on. Those with phobias against night or darkness are especially vulnerable.

This roll can be instant or extended depending on its purpose. If the character is looking for something relatively close to the Avernian Gate or is traveling a path she has already traveled in the past, an instant roll is all that's required. Alternately, protracted journeys may necessitate an extended roll. A large collection of successes may be necessary, depending on exactly how "deep" the character needs to go. If the journey is still within the Autochthonous Depths, it's likely that the successes necessary is between five and 15, but assume that each river that needs to be crossed (see "Rivers of the Underworld," below) adds a minimum of five successes to the total. The deeper one goes, the more rivers one must cross, which means all the more successes end up being required. Storytellers, remember that extended rolls don't just need to be a dull dice-rolling exercise. Each roll can be punctuated by encounters with ghosts, character drama, or other events that bring suspense to the action. If the character fails two rolls in a row, assume that the character is now lost in the Underworld.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character stumbles across some manner of Underworld hazard: a hungry specter on the hunt for plasm, a misstep that leads to a twisted or broken ankle, the character succumbs to intense fear, and so forth. This hazard causes one hour's worth of lost time in addition to any other effects the Storyteller deems appropriate.

Failure: The character fails to accumulate successes. Two failures in a row means the character is now lost.

Success: The character accumulates successes. Once the target number is achieved, the character reaches his intended destination within the Underworld. This doesn't necessarily mean the character

finds what he's looking for, but it at least gets him to his destination.

Exceptional Success: The character gains an intuitive understanding of the Underworld. Her next roll made to navigate the dark passages gains +2 dice.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|--|
| +2 | Passage is well-lit |
| +2 | Character possesses the Direction Sense Merit |
| +1 to +3 | Character is using a map |
| -1 to -3 | Character suffers distractions (penalty based on severity) |
| -3 | Passage is utterly dark |

Houses of the Dead

Throughout the Great Below, characters may come across small pockets of "houses." Usually, they're just one-room grottoes carved out of rock or stone, but some have many rooms and a rare few are even manse-like labyrinths unto themselves (a maze within a maze, if you will). Most have doorways, but rarely do they actually have doors — they're just frames and arches formed of dripping rock, bleached skulls, dried and rotting fruit, or other strange materials one might find in the Underworld. The rooms themselves are often barren and hollow, full of dust and stale air. One might feature a black stove whose top is as cold as ice, and whose belly cannot hold a flame. Another might offer a bed whose meager mattress is stuffed with mouse bones or moldy down.

Ultimately, it depends on whether or not an unquiet shade counts the house as residence. Most sit empty and abandoned, with few if any remnants suggesting who carved these rooms out of the rock, or why, or even when. When a house does sit claimed by a specter within the Great Below, the ghost can often be found near the place, seemingly unwilling (though not necessarily unable) to stray far from the door. Those houses tend to have swatches of color amidst the bleak walls and decrepit furniture — a string of colored glass across the archway, a few red ribbons tied around a bolt-hole in the rock, or even a couple of masks or sugar skulls dangling.

The Rivers of the Underworld

The Autochthonous Depths end, but that is not the end of the Underworld (many Sin-Eaters posit that the Underworld never ends, and that its "bottom" is nothing more than the "top" of another afterlife, be it Heaven or Hell or something altogether stranger). It is just the end of one of the Underworld's limitless

EREBUS AND TARTARUS

In the language of classical antiquity, some Sin-Eaters still think of the Autochthonous Depths (i.e. the upper, or regional geography of the Underworld) as "Erebus." Naturally, then, those same Sin-Eaters think of the Lower Mysteries (i.e. everything that lurks beyond the first river crossing upon leaving the Autochthonous Depths) as "Tartarus."



joel BISKE

realms, and each realm is separated by a very clear boundary marker: a river.

The rivers of the Underworld always signify a change. Crossing the river — not always an easy task — means crossing a threshold. Different regions are not necessarily marked by the same river. Leaving the Autochthonous Depths local to New York City, the Sin-Eaters may find a river different from what those would find leaving the depths local to Denver, or London, or Philadelphia. The rivers wind in strange ways, though — leaving Denver, one might find the Phlegethon, the River of Fire. But those who cross out of Barcelona's Autochthonous Depths may find the same perilous river awaits, its searing waters carving a glowing line through black rock.

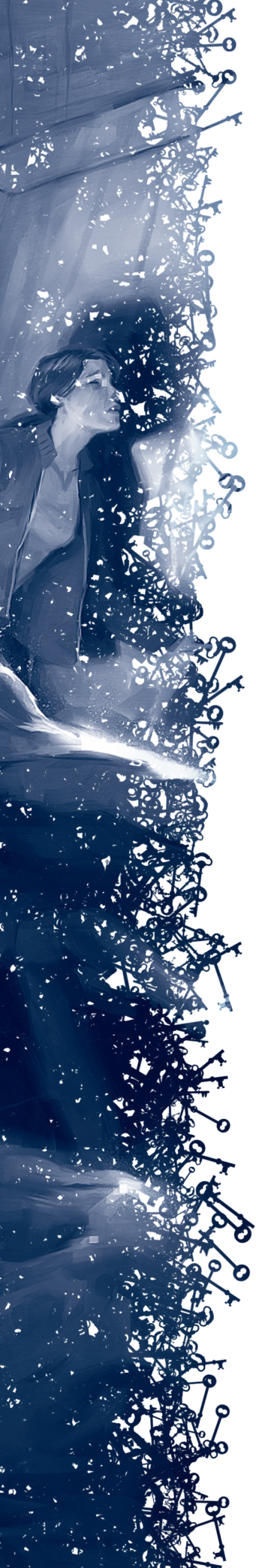
Each river-crossing features a Psyche requirement. Each river crossed *after the first* necessitates a Psyche score greater by one. So, the second river demands Psyche 2, the third river demands Psyche 3, the fourth demands Psyche 4, and so forth. If a Sin-Eater does not possess the proper Psyche to cross the river on foot, she must solicit the aid of a boatman to carry her across the boundary (and each boatman is sure to exact his own unique price — see the “Denizens of the Underworld,” p. 277).

Of course, the rivers of the Great Below are not only for crossing. Characters may choose to drink from them, as well. What follows is a list of the Underworld's many rivers. This is not an exhaustive list, and Storytellers are sure to have ideas for other accursed tributaries. A drink from each river offers different effects — each has a positive and negative effect associated with it. Bonuses and penalties are not cumulative; a character may gain such effects only once per trip to the Great Below.

The River of Blood (Qiq-ol-Mal): It is as described — a slow-moving river of almost-coagulated blood. A drink from this clotted tributary creates an intense passion and verve for violence within the character, granting him +2 to all attacks for the next 12 hours. Unfortunately, the hot blood confuses the mind, and the character suffers a -2 penalty to all Mental rolls for the same duration.

The River of Bone Dust (Hun Hunahpu): This ancient god was said to have his body intertwined with a cacao tree, and so this river that floats with a grimy veneer of frothing bone dust is actually alarmingly pleasant to taste, as if one is drinking cold, bittersweet chocolate. The river is nourishing, said to be consumed by the Gods of Paradise before the river winds its way into the Underworld. Characters that drink from it may heal four points of bashing damage, or two points of lethal damage. However, the drink is so sweet, it's intoxicating: for the next hour, the character acts as if drunk, suffering -1 to Dexterity, Wits, and Intelligence (both Defense and Initiative are affected accordingly).

The River of Consumption (Id-Kura): Some call this the “man-eating river,” not because it cannot help but swallow man, but because he cannot help to swallow it. Taking a gulp of this river's water puts one more in tune with the ghosts she will encounter, granting her a +2 to all Social rolls made against the shades of the Underworld. It does this, however, by causing the Sin-Eater's great thirst (which stirs a sympathy between character and shade, for it is said that all shades suffer great thirst). The water is hollow and offers no refreshment, causing the character to immediately enter thirst deprivation as if she has failed to drink water for a number of days equal to her Stamina (see “Deprivation,” p. 175, *World of Darkness Rulebook*).



The River of Dead Seed (Eresh-ki-gala): This is a river of brackish bog water whose brown waters are choked with a slurry of barren plant seeds. Myth suggests that this river flows up to feed the harvest, but then also flows back down to carry the dead plants away once the harvest is done. Drinking from this river (which actually necessitates chewing the dead seeds) is bitter and unpleasant, but it guarantees that the next time the character has sex, the coupling will result in a pregnancy, even if the partners are infertile. (An obvious exception to this rule is if the sex does not feature a heterosexual coupling.) The child born as a result of this coupling will have the Unseen Sense Merit as geared toward ghosts.

The River of Fire (Phlegethon): Also called the “boiling river,” this channel is not actually aflame, though it does glow with a faint orange pulse like that of a flickering brazier. (The dead shades often gather upon the banks just to stare into its lit depths, making this river both fortuitous and dangerous.) Drinking boiling water isn’t safe, and it incurs one point of lethal damage as it sears the esophagus. However, it causes the character to be largely immune to fire damage for the next eight hours — any damage caused by fire during this time is downgraded to bashing.

The River of Hate (Styx): This river appears as nothing more than a swiftly-moving river with churning rapids. A drink from it, though, is altogether telling — it attacks the mind with visions of hate, revenge, and anger. For the next 24 hours, the character’s Vice is changed to Wrath, and his Virtue changes to Justice. He also gains a point of Willpower. The river waters can have another effect for those who exploit them: oaths sworn on the banks of the Styx between two parties are binding. Those who break the sworn oath lose a full dot of Willpower.

The River of Lamentation (Cocytus): Also thought of as the “river of regret,” the warm waters of this river appear almost translucent, almost as if unreal. Consuming these waters allows a character to go back and revisit the last instance in his story that caused him degeneration of Synergy (or another Morality-related stat). Drinking from this river allows him to reattempt that roll. Success means he can regain a lost point of Synergy for free. Failure, though, can be truly damning: the character loses yet another dot of Synergy.

The River of Memory (Lethé): This river flows at a drowsy pace, its waters bubbling and burbling in

a way that brings a kind of solace and numbness to those who listen (shades included). Upon drinking from these waters, the character may ask the river a question to which she cannot know the answer (“Who tried to kill me?” or “Why does Dead Eddie hate me?” are valid queries), and will have that question answered in her own mind. Such answers exact a high price, though. The character feels numb and confused afterward, forgetting details of her own life. She loses a dot of Intelligence. It’s a high price, but the ability to have a potentially unknowable mystery answered is a high reward for those who are driven to know as a last resort. Too many drinks from this river may result in the Amnesia Flow (pp. 218-219, **World of Darkness Rulebook**), at the Storyteller’s discretion.

The River of Pus (Kohan-II): This sluggish river — a serpentine band of sluggish pus whose banks are home to sickly mushrooms that flicker and hiss — is a diseased strip of fluid that even the vilest specters of the dead find foul. As such, a drink from this river means that ghosts have a difficult time attacking the character for the next seven days, suffering a -3 to any rolls made against the character. However, the pus affects the body’s ability to regenerate: the character does not heal during that same period (once the period is over, however, the healing can begin as normal, as if the damage was just suffered).

The River of Scorpions (Sinaan): One does not drink from this river so much as pluck a scorpion from this parade of arachnids and consume it. This causes an automatic three points of lethal damage (eating an Underworld scorpion is toxic, no surprise). This damage cannot be avoided. This also has the benefit of giving the character intense hallucinogenic visions that assail him for the next minute. These visions are foretelling. While they do not clearly spell out future danger, they do provide many hints as to what may be coming later in the story. The Storyteller is encouraged to make these visions vibrant and strange. A character may attempt to decipher such symbolic visions with a Wits + Occult roll.

The River of Woe (Acheron): These waters are gray, greasy, and slow-moving. They travel with a low susurrantion that sounds like whispers of those you once knew, those who are now dead. A drink from these waters allows the character a +5 bonus on any roll to remember any painful or unpleasant details or memories (see “Memorizing and Remembering,” pp.44-45, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

STORY HOOK: COLLECT FOR ME THESE DEAD WATERS

Characters are able to take a draught (no more than a cup) of river water back to the world of the living, where it retains its properties only for a number of days equal to the Sin-Eater’s Synergy dots. An ally of theirs is willing to pay handsomely for them to bring him back a draught of water from one particular river. Is it a genuine offer? Why does he need to sup from such a place, and why won’t he go himself? Is it a trap? Do the Kerberoi have it in mind to punish him as a transgressor for breaking the strange laws of the Great Below?

This bonus lasts for 12 hours. Doing so, however, incurs the mild depression derangement, which remains for an equal period.

The Lower Mysteries

Beyond the first river crossing, the Underworld changes. Not drastically, of course — it remains a subterranean kingdom of twisting passages and tortuous tunnels. Many Sin-Eaters might not even notice it at first. But over time, the shifts become clear, and Sin-Eaters will come to discover the following:

- The ghosts here are older, more powerful, and often stranger than their counterparts within the Autochthonous Depths. In fact, the deeper one goes, the older the ghosts that can be found in that region of the Great Below. Why this is, nobody really knows, but some of the more cogent shades have described a kind of *pull*, as if a kind of morbid gravity draws them deeper into the netherworld as their endless nights tumble ineluctably forward. (More information on this subject can be found under the “Denizens of the Underworld,” p. 273.)
- In the Autochthonous Depths, the ghosts seem to have no organization, no hierarchy. They are all equal in death. Not so in the Lower Mysteries. Down deep, the ghosts are often given over to various hierarchies, none of which are necessarily consistent from one river crossing to the next. Sin-Eaters may find an old specter who calls himself king, lordling over a court of worshipful wraiths, but they’re just as likely to discover a band of ghosts who have given themselves over to some furious, obsessive labor union that demands all its members toil endlessly within the dark passages. The deeper one goes, the more Byzantine — and more incomprehensible — these hierarchies become, potentially ruled by the mythic deathlords.
- Just as the hierarchies grow more complex, so do the laws of the land. Different kingdoms and regions within the Lower Mysteries are given over to laws that have been chiseled into the very rock, and the deeper one goes, the more laws a visitor or resident must contend with. After the first river crossing, it’s likely that only one or two laws are manifest, but deeper realms offer a growing list of laws and bylaws. (One Sin-Eater claims to have been abducted by a pack of howling shades, and later woke up floating on a broken boat in the middle of a mephitic lake — next to him, he found three long sheets of slate, and on each slate was scratched 100 laws that he must follow. At that point, he knew he was far deeper than he had ever hoped to go.) The laws of the land in any region are enforced by the Underworld’s guardians, the Kerberoi (p. 279).
- The passages in the Lower Mysteries are less restrictive (and as a result, less claustrophobic). It remains wholly subterranean, but the deeper a character goes, the more open the realm becomes. Initially, this might manifest in wide antechambers or deep cavernous bowels, but

over time, Sin-Eaters may find whole blasted plains or small seas, many whose limestone or crystalline roofs lay a thousand feet or more above one’s head.

The Dead Dominions

The Lower Mysteries is carved up into smaller regions, mini-kingdoms lorded over by their respective masters: the bizarre spectral hierarchies that run the caverns and antechambers down deep. Those who lurk in the Great Below call these tiny fiefdoms and “ghost states” by one name: the Dead Dominions.

How they set their borders remains unclear — some speculate that the borders are already set, that the map has been written since the earliest nights in these dark spaces. Other Sin-Eaters, however, claim to have witnessed awful shadow wars between armies of ghosts, a terrible clash of wailing shades — a battlefield not unlike what might’ve been found in the Civil War or in the trenches of World War I.

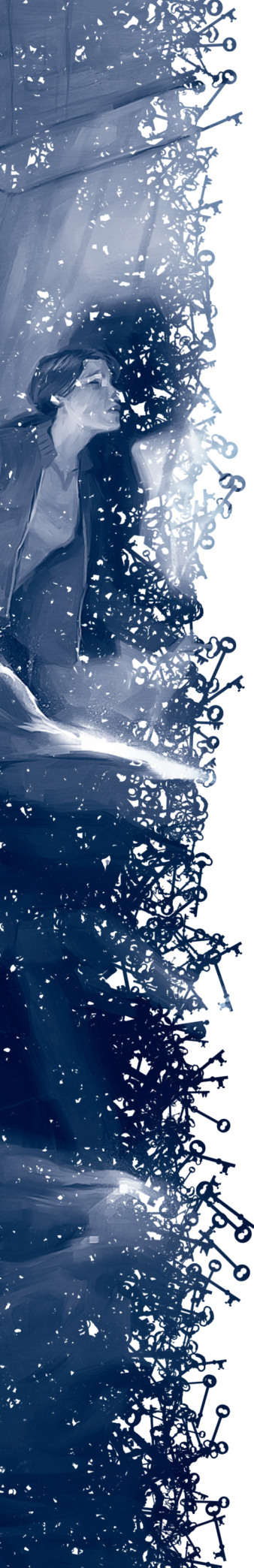
However it is that these regions are determined, the fact is this: each is different, flavored not necessarily by any cultural mythology (though this does happen), but more by the ghosts and geists that preside over that place. One Dominion might be lorded over by the vengeful shade of a Siberian shaman, a hollow sorcerer who believes his murder has kept him out of the cycle of reincarnation (as old Siberian religion believes a fulfilled soul at death becomes smoke that enters the womb upon a child’s birth). His then is a wretched chthonic realm, an earthen barrow centered on an ancient dead tree — and the old shaman binds the souls of his enemies and lets them hang from the branches of that dead tree. Another Dominion is held under the sway of the Underworld equivalent of a brutal street gang. The gang, comprising thirteen violent killers, has carved a kingdom of crooked streets and broken brick buildings in the wide antechambers of their Dominion, a place that looks a bit like bombed-out Warsaw. A third Dominion is home only to geists, a Byzantine hierarchy whose rules and relationships are inscrutable to all but the most insane individuals.

The Old Laws

The Lower Mysteries are beholden to the so-called “Old Laws,” a code of rules said to have been set in stone on the first night the Underworld was birthed out of shadow, inscribed into the very fundament of the realm by the Kerberoi. As guardians of the Underworld, the Kerberoi were not only the makers of these laws according to legend, but are most certainly the ones who enforce them.

Sin-Eaters might have an easier time down in the Underworld if they knew the laws up-front. One problem, though, is that the laws are not *consistent* across the Lower Mysteries. The deeper one goes, the more laws end up on the books. Crossing over from Dead Dominion to Dead Dominion means encountering new laws, laws that even the ghosts of those regions do not determine or enforce.

The good news is that all the Old Laws must be inscribed into the Underworld itself. It’s in this way that one can always learn what laws govern which area — of course, this



isn't necessarily easy. How the laws are inscribed is an effort determined by that Kerberos that enforces them. So, in one Dominion, the Sin-Eaters might be able to make an extended Wits + Investigation roll to find all the places where the laws have been carved into patches of blood-red sandstone — find the sandstone, find the laws. In another, though, the laws have been carved across the pale flesh of the wandering shades, meaning that the krewes must deal with potentially insane ghosts just to learn the lay of the land.

What follows is a list of sample laws that might be found throughout the Underworld. This list is by no means comprehensive, as some of the more profound kingdoms within the Great Below are subject to dozens, if not hundreds, of Old Laws. When a Storyteller creates a new Dominion for use within his story, he's encouraged to either pick from this list or create his own. These sample Old Laws below change from Dominion to Dominion; they are *not* commandments that pass for the breadth and depth of the entire netherworld. (More information on the Old Laws can be found under the discussion on the Kerberoi, p. 280.)

- None shall let a shade pass from the Underworld to the living world.
- None shall let a shade pass from the Underworld to beyond these worlds and to a final reward.
- No harm shall be brought to a shade.
- None shall speak to a shade.

- You must eat and drink what is put before you.
- You may bring nothing from the living world into this Dominion.
- You must perform three favors for the Kerberos before entering this Dominion.
- You may not carry any mementos into or out of this Dominion.
- If you are confronted by a shade, you must destroy it or be destroyed by it.
- No Sin-Eater shall invoke his Manifestations in this Dominion.
- Do not drink from the rivers or take from their waters.

Denizens of the Underworld

The Underworld is a vast realm, practically infinite at least from the perspective of Sin-Eaters, who will likely never see the bottom of the Great Below — if it even *has* a nadir. It is surprising, then, to most Sin-Eaters that despite the realm's vastness, despite its infinite snarl of tunnels, the Underworld seems eerily empty. It's not a bustling necropolis. No great ghost cities rise up out of the salt-dead seas, home to millions or billions of gauzy specters. For the most part, the passages appear empty. The doors and homes and fallen temples are quiet, still, cast in unmoving shadow.

ENVISIONING THE MAP: UNDERWORLD TRAVEL

It's ultimately too simplistic to think of the Underworld as an onion with layers, because that fails to capture the complexity of what waits in the darkness. Better to think of it as an apple whose fleshy meats have been bored through with a knot-work of worm tunnels. It's for this reason that the map isn't so easily defined as, "Once you've crossed the River Styx, now you're in the Dominion of Ghouls," because that assumes everybody travels a linear path from the Avernian Gate. They don't.

Say two krewes enter the Great Below from the same gate found in an underground canava (subterranean winery) on the island of Santorini in Greece. Both will experience the Autochthonous Depths, which here reflect a regional Underworld — here, it's the misty and gloomy catacombs of Hades, the tunnels lined with silvery pillars buried in the rock, each wound with a spiral of dead laurel. The path through this place is not linear, nor is it really one path at all — at the first crossroads, one krewes turns left, another turns right. This single deviation defines a very different trip for both — it's not so easy to say that they both descend from the same gate so soon they'll cross the same river and enter the same area of the Lower Mysteries. Rather, by going their separate ways, they choose wildly different paths. The first krewes crosses Styx, and enters the aforementioned Dominion of Ghouls. The second krewes finds itself confronted by a bend in the River of Scorpions, and if those Sin-Eaters manage to cross they might end up in the Elysian Well, or in the Hell of Many Pleasures.

This calls to mind a question: can Sin-Eaters use the Underworld to travel to other Avernian Gates? A krewes that enters from a low place in New York City — can they emerge from a gate in Atlanta? Sure. It's important to note that, for the most part, the Autochthonous Depths aren't necessarily all connected, so this journey probably necessitates descending (crossing a river or three) and then making another ascent to the surface. This doesn't cut down any travel time, and those attempting such a trip will likely face far greater dangers than what they'd find in the living world. Usually, if such a trip happens, it happens by accident: a krewes enters the Great Below, gets lost, and resurfaces in an Avernian Gate tens or hundreds of miles away. Still, some might choose to travel this way if they're hoping to stay way off the grid.

And yet, ghosts and other things *do* populate this place. Just because they're not easily seen doesn't mean they aren't there. Where are they? *Who* are they?

The Sundered: Ghosts of the Great Below

The ghosts that populate the Underworld are those who can no longer cling to the living world above. Their anchors have been broken, and this is why many think of the ghosts within the Great Below as the Sundered, for they have been rent asunder from the land of the living. Equally important, though, is that these ghosts are restless. They are unquiet shades. They died with unfinished missions, uncertain questions, or untended passions. This is why the souls of the dead linger, after all, because they are not *complete*. The gross dissatisfaction with the way they lived carries on into death. But, the Sundered have no anchors, and so this makes them doubly cursed. They wish to fulfill their lives within the world above; an already difficult task for one existing as a twilight specter. Being locked away from the one place where some meager hope can be found is eternally troubling (and it is therefore little surprise that many old ghosts are deeply unsettled and unstable, so long have they been kept from the satisfaction necessary to allow them to move on to a better, or at least different, state of being).

Appearance

The Underworld can be cruelly unifying. The ghosts that lurk in the Great Below, especially those within the Autochthonous Depths, are ultimately equalized in appearance. Nearly all are robed in gauzy gray, white or black threads — clothes that appear ancient or rat-eaten with no shoes to speak of. Many attempt to differentiate themselves by the swatches of color mentioned earlier (“Mockery of Life,” p. 259): a swipe of blood or glowing fungus across the eyes to form a mask, a gleaming golden pin tucked into the flesh of the collarbone, a bouquet of eternal marigolds held in quivering hands.

Most ghosts — at least, those who are under 200 years dead — appear as they did when they were living, for the most part. Same face, same height, same hair. All of it lies beneath a veneer of decay, however. The face might be jaundiced or dotted with pockmarks of rot. The hair might be dusty, or given over to cobwebs, or have lost all color and become just a tangle of white the color of bleached bone.

What's jarring to many Sin-Eaters who enter the Underworld for the first time (or even on their tenth trip) is that the ghosts in the Great Below seem just as real as anybody. They are all manifest. They all have bodies and are tangible to the touch. Nothing in the Underworld exists in the non-corporeal state of Twilight (Twilight can be found in greater discussion on p. 175 of this book). Why this is, Sin-Eaters can't precisely say. Is it because the Underworld is itself a non-corporeal, ephemeral realm? Are the unquiet shades here more real? Less real? Does it matter? (This isn't to say that the shades and specters of the Underworld cannot hide from prying eyes; many have Numina that allow them to hide in plain sight, but this is

not the same as literally fading from a physical existence into a non-corporeal state.)

Age, Potency, and Depth

As mentioned earlier, a ghost's age is defined by how long the shade has been dead. The Underworld is home to specters that have been dead only a year (or even a few days), to those that have lurked in these dark halls for millennia. It is almost as if a shade's age lends the ghost a kind of metaphysical gravity, as if its many sins grow leaden as the decades pass. The longer a ghost lingers, the greater this pull becomes. It's for this reason that the Upper Reaches are home only to ghosts dead for a century or so. A ghost may literally be prevented from crawling to the upper regions if its age prevents it.

Also as a ghost gets on in years, it may change. Time molds a ghost's Corpus. The older the specter, the less human it appears. Shades a few centuries dead may still have humanoid appearances, but may be taller or smaller, or may have big broad eyes or no eyes at all. Truly ancient specters are often entirely inhuman. Some appear as strange beasts, wretched demons, or even ghastly angels. One ghost might manifest as a churning smoke-belching machine with gnashing gears, while another might appear as a dead tree... or even as a whole *forest* of dead trees, the branches replete with other ghosts hanging by rotten nooses. Then again, maybe some of these things aren't ghosts at all...

Anguished Toil and Empty Pleasure

Ghosts are often creatures of pattern. The restless dead in the living world may seem almost automated: manifest, appear up the steps carrying a candle, weep at the doorway to a bedroom that once featured the ghost's children (children she murdered in a fit of postpartum depression), move to the attic, drag a spectral knife across the throat, and... end scene. Repeat the next night. And the night after that. And forever anon as long as the ghost's anchors linger in that house.

The Underworld frees them of this somewhat, but not entirely. They don't necessarily repeat the same mindless patterns, but many *do* still find patterned behavior in which they engage. This behavior is often reflective of what they did when they were alive, as well as whatever unfinished business keeps them around as ghosts.

A father whose drunken car accident killed him and his wife might, once every hour, emerge from a doorway within the Great Below and call out his wife's name. Or maybe he punishes himself, beating his head against the rock until his pallid face is ruined.

An old librarian that accidentally burned her home library down with a knocked-over candle might spend endless hours shelving books (real or imagined) on the crooked stone shelves of an Underworld tomb.

A man who died without having experienced much of what life has to offer (to the point where his spectral self is mired in regret for all that he missed) may engage in the ceaseless hollow pleasures that the Underworld allows: he guzzles rum and cachaça, he attempts to couple with other



ghosts (or Sin-Eaters, should he find them), and he greedily collects any tiny item of value he can find (gold teeth, silverware, costume jewelry).

A young girl who was poisoned by her mother might, like clockwork, wake up every few hours to throw up plasmic residue.

Sin-Eaters may come across the unquiet shades of the Autochthonous Depths (where such behavior is common) performing their endless toil or engaging in the myriad of hollow pleasures. Interrupting them is not always a wise idea; it's like waking a sleepwalker. Disturbing the pattern disturbs the ghost. And disturbing the ghost can make them very angry, indeed.

The older and more potent a ghost becomes, the less beholden that ghost is to these patterns. The Lower Mysteries are home to ghosts who seem more capable of independent thought, which is how hierarchies and roles form amongst the restless dead. Of course, some ghosts just find new patterns, patterns unique to the Great Below: they toil or find pleasure in different contexts. One hunts or thieves for a spectral master. Another offers endless worship to one of the deathlords or Kerberoi. A third is a cunning succubus, luring ghosts or Sin-Eaters from the Upper Reaches.

Systems

While in the Great Below, the rules regarding ghosts are essentially the same as those found in this book as well as the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Some notable exceptions do exist, however, and those are detailed here:

- Ghost traits are calculated as normal. However, the older and/or more powerful a ghost is, the more traits that specter is likely to possess. (See below for more information regarding general guidelines on ghosts, age, potency, and traits.)
- Ghosts in the Underworld have no anchors. If a ghost has anchors, it cannot enter the Underworld (though every rule has its exceptions).
- Ghosts do not need to manifest in the Underworld. Twilight is not a viable state of being within the Great Below. Ghosts are already manifest, for all intents and purposes.
- In the Underworld, a ghost doesn't necessarily have the same difficulty communicating with the living as it would in the living world. That being said, some ghosts are still lost in their own minds, or are subject to such intense habit and ritual that communication is still difficult. Those Underworld ghosts without any manner



of communication Numina (such as Ghost Speech) still might have a difficult time communicating properly with a Sin-Eater. Communication may still necessitate a Finesse roll on the part of the ghost, with a -1 penalty per decade the specter has been dead (as per p. 210, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

- Some Numina do not work according to design within the bowels of the Underworld. Animal Control doesn't work in the Autochthonous Depths, but it *does* work on the psychopomp "spirits" in the Lower Mysteries (p. 281). Clairvoyance and Possession do not function in the Underworld, as the ghost needn't speak through or possess a living being (and the Great Below is home to few, if any, living beings). Compulsion operates as normal. A ghost can still use Ghost Sign to imprint clandestine messages on forms of media or on objects a Sin-Eater brings into the Underworld. Ghost Speech allows a ghost to communicate freely without a Finesse roll. Magnetic Disruption still functions to affect any appropriate items a character brings into the depths. Phantasm, Telekinesis, and Terrify all work as normal.
- If a Sin-Eater fulfills the unfinished business of a ghost trapped in the Underworld, the ghost is free to leave the Underworld, and actually does so immediately. The ghost literally discorporates — her flesh unspools from dead bones, her blood spills and turns to dust, her bones become chalk, which then sweep away on a warm wind. This doesn't appear to be painful, and in fact those who witness such a thing claim the ghosts seem to appear happy or reverent. At this point, the ghost is gone. Without potent and blasphemous magic, the soul may not return to the living world *or* the Underworld. It has moved on to some unknown reward (which may be Heaven, Hell, or even a serene oblivion).
- Abjurations (pp. 213-214, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) still work on ghosts within the Underworld in that it forces them to flee — they do not, however, discorporate.
- Exorcisms only work in the physical world. They have no place in the Underworld. (In fact, many ghosts exorcised from possession attempts in the living world are sent to, you guessed it, the Underworld.)
- Blessed items work on ghosts in the Underworld just as they do in the living world (p. 214, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).
- Ghosts regain one point of Corpus per day in the Underworld. Even mundane attacks can damage a ghost's Corpus in the Underworld. A ghost who loses all Corpus due to bashing or lethal damage acts as if dead — the ghost "dies" and becomes an unmoving corpse. When a day passes and the ghost regains a point of Corpus, however, it returns to the hollow mockery of life it normally possesses. However, doing aggravated damage to the ghost (such as using blessed items, as noted above) can present a far more permanent solution in regards to handling the ghost. If the ghost loses all its Corpus to aggravated damage while in the Underworld, the ghost is utterly destroyed. The shade discorporates in a howling fit of anguish. This

is akin to murder or manslaughter, however, and is a violation of a Sin-Eater's Synergy 4.

- If a ghost spends or loses all of its Essence within the Underworld, it becomes insubstantial. One can still see the ghost, but its body becomes translucent and physically untouchable. The ghost, however, cannot touch anyone else, nor can it make use of Numina or make any rolls at all. This causes the ghost agony. It cannot again become a substantial creature until it regains Essence.

Summoning Ghosts in the Great Below

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult

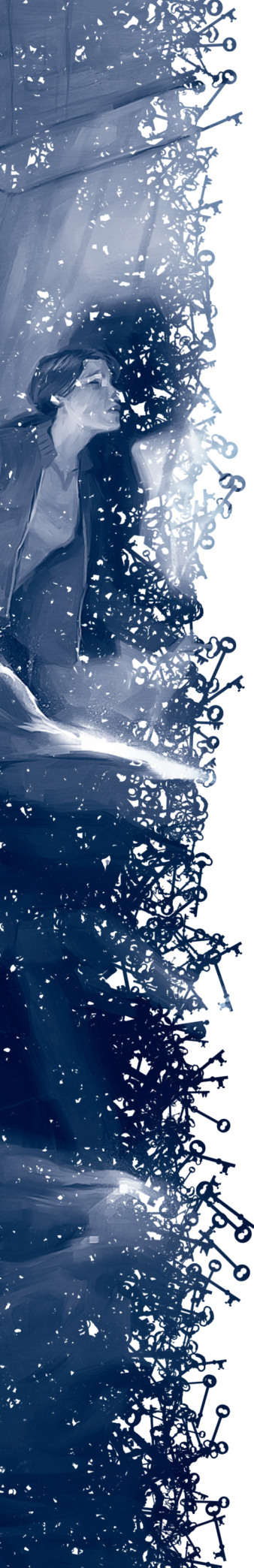
Action: Extended (each roll is equivalent to one minute; the number of successes needed is equal to half of the time the ghost has been dead, so if the ghost is dead 10 years, a total of five successes are necessary)

Many Sin-Eaters come to the Underworld in the hopes of finding a particular specter. Perhaps they hope to ask the ghost a specific question, rescue the ghost from the Underworld, resolve its unfulfilled desires, or even punish the unquiet shade for transgressions real or perceived. Whatever the goal, a Sin-Eater might hope to interface with only a single ghost — problem is, the Underworld is home to countless restless phantoms, so what's a poor Sin-Eater to do?

Some ghosts can be summoned from the depths, which doesn't require the Sin-Eater go very far past the inside of the Avernian Gate (and in fact, the character can perform this summoning from within that initial period of shadow encountered after first setting foot in the Underworld). A Sin-Eater can only summon those ghosts that lurk within the Autochthonous Depths, however — i.e. those dead less than a century or so. Older ghosts are relegated to the Lower Mysteries, and cannot freely come back to the Upper Reaches without special provisions from Sin-Eaters or Kerberoi (or even the deathlords, if they even exist). If the Sin-Eater wants to find an Underworld shade more than a century dead, she'll have to go on the hunt herself down in the deep.

Summoning a ghost is tricky, because it ultimately necessitates that the Sin-Eater tailor the ritual to the individual ghost. Certainly a character can attempt to summon a ghost without shaping the ritual at all or without knowing much about the targeted specter, but doing so isn't easy. Better if the character knows enough about the ghost and can customize the ritual and the appropriate *ofrendas* (offerings) to the shade in question. The Sin-Eater is encouraged to get creative with what's offered. A long-dead poet may not want to have a physical offering at all, but may find that a lyric recitation of one of his forgotten verses draws him ineluctably closer. (More information on this can be found below, under Suggested Modifiers.)

As an extended roll, once the character begins the summoning process, it has a limit on how long it can be performed before it automatically fails. The player can only roll a number of times equal to the character's Resolve + Psyche. Failure to complete the ritual during that time causes the



summoning to automatically fail — that character may not attempt to summon the same ghost again.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character summons something, all right. It's the wrong ghost. And it's not happy. Expect it to be violent and dangerous.

Failure: The character fails to accumulate successes toward the total.

Success: The character accumulates successes toward the total. Each success draws the ghost nearer through the channels and catacombs of the Autochthonous Depths. Once the target number has been achieved, the ghost appears before the Sin-Eater. The ghost acts as the ghost chooses, and is not preternaturally fixed to the area. It may be friendly, it may be hostile. That said, if food or blood is present, the specter will likely remain for as many turns as it takes for the ghost to consume the food or blood (usually between one and 10 turns).

Exceptional Success: The ghost appears, and it is not hostile. It will remain long enough to hear whatever it is that the Sin-Eater wants. The ghost might be *made* hostile, however, if the Sin-Eater acts accordingly.

Suggested Modifiers

| Modifier | Situation |
|----------|---|
| +5 | The Sin-Eater actually has a part (fist-sized or larger) of the ghost's original corpse. A cup of the ghost's ashes can work if the body had been destroyed. |
| +2 | Per each pint of blood offered to the ghost as <i>ofrenda</i> (pints can be from characters or anybody else, even an animal — each pint drained incurs one point of lethal damage to the subject from which the blood is taken) |
| +2 | The Sin-Eater's own Threshold is in line with how the ghost died |
| +1 | Per each item of personal significance from the ghost's former life (driver's license, diary, Polaroid, etc.) |
| +1 | Per each type of food offered to the ghost as <i>ofrenda</i> |
| +1 | The Sin-Eater knows the ghost's full true name |
| +1 | The ghost is less than one year dead |
| -1 | The Sin-Eater only knows some of the ghost's true name |
| -1 | The targeted ghost is 50+ years dead |
| -2 | The Sin-Eater offers something that the ghost does not like (the ghost loathes the sound of singing, or finds bread unpalatable) |

| | |
|----|---|
| -3 | The Sin-Eater doesn't know any part of the ghost's name |
| -3 | The Sin-Eater offers no <i>ofrendas</i> |
| -5 | The Sin-Eater knows very little about the ghost |

Dealing with Ghosts

The dead aren't like the living... or, perhaps more appropriately, they are the best and worst elements of the living stripped to the bone and exposed. A ghost who left a living daughter behind is now consumed by her concern for her daughter, arguably a positive trait but for the fact she's obsessed by it and driven mad *and* will do whatever it takes to get even the quickest glimpse of her daughter. A ghost who was once a serial killer is now without whatever meager compassion the living human once maintained, and is now driven keenly by the focus to harm and to kill.

In the Underworld, this is all amped up. The volume is cranked. In the living world, the ghosts can at least have their obsessions mitigated by the fact they're operating amongst the "quick," and can actually witness life in action. In the catacombs of the Great Below, they have no such reflection. Many have gone years — decades, even centuries for some — without seeing a living being.

This makes dealing with ghosts a tricky proposition for Sin-Eaters when they're traversing the dark passages. Whether the krewé has summoned a specter or has encountered one in the Lower Mysteries, the danger is the same. It's easy to set a ghost off. It's easy to misinterpret the shade's mad gestures or schizoid babble. Yes, some ghosts are clearer and more "human" than others, but all of them remain a bit off-kilter, which makes every conversation a minefield. Step poorly, boom. The ghost is angry. Or the ghost flees. Or it breaks down and weeps, the desperate sound calling other more desperate shades to feed (like a wailing dinner bell!).

Sin-Eaters can help to improve their chances, however. Taking a look at the suggested modifiers above, under the "Summoning Ghosts in the Great Below" action, you'll find a few different tricks that can help soothe the savage specter. Offering a taste of blood, providing *ofrendas*, or appealing to the ghost with personal items or tailored pleas can offer increasing bonuses to any Social rolls the Sin-Eater's player must make in regards to that unquiet shade. The more effort the character puts into that, the higher the bonus should be (maximum +5).

Ghosts are also keen to make deals. Ghosts want. They are stripped of much, but their desires always remain. They desire love. They seek sin. They want to see loved ones safe or enemies punished. Sin-Eaters can often turn a bad encounter to something more positive (or at least something *safer*) by offer-

ing some kind of deal. No mechanical rules necessarily enforce these deals, but generally speaking, a ghost will demand something, and once it's completed, he'll usually pony up. And if he doesn't? Then the Sin-Eater will need to find a new way to force the specter to pay.

Boatmen (or "Ferryman")

Ghosts do not need to guard the rivers of the Underworld (though that doesn't mean some Kerberoi do not patrol their sodden or craggy banks), as a Sin-Eater without the requisite Psyche is simply unable to set foot within the water — an unknowable force that seems to stir from within the character's own mind won't even let the action commence.

Hence, the ghostly boatmen. Each river crossing is home to a boatman (or "ferryman"). The boatmen exist to help those who cannot normally cross (as per a Psyche restriction, for example) reach the other side, thus moving onto some other stratum of the Great Below. Each boatman has a boat of some type — one might have a rusty old dinghy with a guttering engine, another might have a raft strung together with barnacle-encrusted rope, and a third might offer a wooden longboat whose motion is engineered by pushing a long pole into the murky waters.

Boatmen have varied appearances. One might appear as a briny old sailor with a rotting beard, while another might reveal himself as a cowed demon in a greasy gray robe and eyes burning like charcoals. Sin-Eaters have reported seeing one that wears a crisp white suit and is nothing but sharp, toothy smiles — and, to boot, he calls himself a "travel agent" for the living and the dead.

Gaining passage from one side of a river to the other via a ferryman is not free. In fact, for each dot of Psyche necessary to cross the river, the ferryman is likely to request one *ofrenda* or favor from those who seek to cross (each, not collectively). Such requests might include:

- A favor regarding the living world or another ghost. Boatmen, remember, were once living beings and, like all ghosts, have unfinished business. The ferryman will never ask for a favor that will remove him from his post, but may ask for information regarding a loved one, or may ask for a rival specter to be punished and/or destroyed.
- A pint of blood (incurring one point of lethal damage).
- A point of plasm or Willpower "gifted" to the boatman
- A request to destroy the ghosts gathering on the banks of the river (for some reason, the ferrymen seem to despise the desperate creatures that gather at the river to sup on the waters).
- A secret. Unfortunately, this has side effects: giving the boatman a secret is said to carry the secret on the dark waters of the river channel. Inevitably, the secret will get out no matter how much damage control the character does. Telling a ferryman a secret means the secret will soon be exposed.
- Something that the Sin-Eater is carrying (a wedding ring, his shoes, a pair of eyeglasses). The item that is demanded is something that would cause at *least* an inconvenience for the character to go without.
- Something that the Sin-Eater must bring down from the living world (a new pair of gloves for the boatman, a silver earring, a specific meal *ofrenda*).

THE TRUTH, WHICH IS FOREVER UNCERTAIN

This is what some Sin-Eaters believe: they believe that every specter, creature, and demon that populates the dark bowels of the Great Below was once ostensibly a human being. Yes, that means the yowling beast that burst from the bloated burrow. It means the lithe, pale thing with a mouth overflowing with hungry grubs and a tangle of many arms always reaching. It means geists. It means Kerberoi. It means deathlords. All human, all ghosts.

The thing is this — time is not kind to the dead. The Underworld is not kind to them, and frankly, they're not kind to each other, either. Those specters that are particularly old often change. As they are drawn deeper into the Great Below, their Corpus forms shift. Some distend and bloat. Others grow sallow and thin. Anything can happen. Eyes become yellowjackets. Fingers become serpents. Heads become black pyramids. Geists are emblems of this already: they lose their identities and become archetypes, personifying ideas and emotions, concepts and passions. They were once human but have become something either inhuman or beyond-human. Ultimately, while within the terrible boundaries of the Underworld, ghosts can change in this way, too, molded by time — or, worse, molded by other ghosts into monsters made to serve.

Who, then, are the Kerberoi? Or the deathlords? Both, some Sin-Eaters claim, are truly old wraiths. They are ghosts that have lingered within the deepest bowels of the Underworld since time immemorial — since Gilgamesh found Enkidu, since Ereshkigal bedded Nergal, since life and light was born out of chaos and dark water. The Kerberoi in particular are said to be profoundly old, and some suspect they are the ghosts who have been in the Underworld the longest — the first entrants into this dead realm, first to set claim to its endless passages, first to carve the ancient laws into its walls.

Of course, it might all be bullshit. Sin-Eaters don't really know. Asking a Kerberos anything isn't the safest or sanest of propositions, and expecting a clear and truthful answer is an open door to failure (oh, and terrible castigation). It's certainly possible that one other rumor about the Underworld is true: that its very nadir is the end of one place and the beginning of another, serving as an open pit leading to the blackest Abyss out in space, a grotesque fontanelle through which all manner of empty-souled demons (like the Kerberoi, perhaps) can crawl. With things this old and this strange, truth is hard to grasp.



Deathlords

Deathlords are said to be the old gods of the Underworld – Nergal, Ereshkigal, Hades, Sokar, and Osiris. Or maybe they're just the ancient lords of the land – old Hittites who have claimed the deepest passages, the twelve lords of the Mayan Xibalba, or the first Siberian shamans to have conquered the dark. Or maybe, just maybe, they're nothing more than really old ghosts and geists.

Whatever they are, they're mostly myth and fable. Certainly some evidence can be found that supports their existence: old messages scrawled on walls, or the jabbering of a mad geist found wandering the tombs of the realm. Some old ghosts have set themselves up as false deathlords, but may or may not be servants of *actual* deathlords.

What is true is that whether or not the deathlords exist, their servants surely do. The Lower Mysteries are home to many shades that have been suckered into or enslaved by cults bound to the deathlords, legions of sycophants who devote themselves utterly to the worship of these mystical wraith-kings or specter-gods. Such cults are dangerous because they act *en masse*, beholden to potentially imaginary (and certainly crazy) tenets of some lost mythology.

One rumor persists that Sin-Eaters can attune their krewes to the worship of certain deathlords, much as the ghostly cults of the Underworld do. Of course, while doing so may potentially open the Sin-Eaters up to potential reward, it surely opens them up to new peril, as well.

Shadows: Geists of the Deep

Geists lurk in the dark passages of the Great Below. They are far less numerous than ghosts – no accurate proportion exists, but it's at least a 1:100 ratio. Why is this, exactly? Ghosts *must* come here when their anchors are ripped asunder. Their grip on the living world is pried back, their bodiless forms tossed into the depths. Geists, though, do not end up here – if they're in the Underworld at all, it's because they have chosen to be.

Why would a geist choose to enter the Underworld? Most would prefer to merge with the living, becoming part of a Sin-Eater, but that's not the choice of every geist, nor is it an *option* for every geist. In the Underworld, a geist may seek:

- **Power.** Geists are better equipped to survive the Great Below than ghosts. Most ghosts are



at least, in part, automatons. They're given over to patterns. Geists are somewhat free of that. They are no longer concerned with anchors. They have lost their identities to some degree, unfettered by history (or so they'd hope; that's not always true in practice, as a Sin-Eater can still harm a geist or persuade it by uncovering the geist's past). They are free operators, rogue agents. Their powers eclipse those possessed by most shades, and they can use these abilities freely down in the depths. Geists may rule over their own Dominions. They might enslave legions of mad wraiths. They might hunt one another down, cannibalizing each other to consume their abilities. Many of the things a Sin-Eater might seek in the Underworld, a lone geist may also seek. Power both nascent and ancient lurks in the depths of the deadlands, and an opportunistic geist may seize it.

- **Safety.** Geists are not always predators; sometimes, they serve as prey. A vicious krewé or even another geist might make a target of one — even a callous necromancer may get it in his head that he *must* shackle a particular geist and bind it to service. As it stands, the Underworld can actually be a place of refuge for a hunted geist — odd that such a dangerous place could be considered safe, but the Great Below is home to thousands of nooks and crannies, a wide-ranging labyrinth of hiding places. A geist can disappear into the dark for months, years, even centuries.
- **Knowledge.** Just as a Sin-Eater might enter the Underworld seeking information, so too might a geist pursue similar information. In fact, some geists hope to uncover information about themselves and their own pasts; for some, this great lapse of understanding haunts them. Sometimes, a geist has very little information regarding its own past — perhaps it has a name, a date, or it's seen an old burned-up photograph with the faces only barely recognizable. Going to the Underworld allows the geist to plumb the depths for more information. Alternately, it's possible that the geist wants to claim a memento or learn new Manifestations (perhaps by cannibalizing other geists, as noted above).
- **Solace.** The grave is, in its own way, peaceful. The Underworld is a representation of the grave, a series of tombs and catacombs that lay mostly silent and still. The living world — the so-called world of the “quick” — is boisterous and chaotic, full of sound and color and movement. It can be horrifying or confusing for some creatures bound to the stasis of death, and this can be true for geists, as well. A geist may flee to the Underworld just to find a measure of peace.

Systems

In the Underworld, geists are beholden to the following rules:

- Geists are not disembodied down in the depths. Twilight is not a viable state of being. All geists are fully manifested — a geist that appears as a dark coachman with an equine face or a geist that is a “white lady” with flowing gown and empty eyes that forever weep both appear fully corporeal.
- Geists have full access to their Manifestations (and Keys) in the Underworld. Furthermore, any roll necessary to conjure such abilities in the Great Below gains a +3 bonus.
- Geists are free to roam in both the Autochthonous Depths and the Lower Mysteries. They have no restrictions on crossing rivers or passing into new Dead Dominions. They *are*, however, beholden to the Old Laws unless the laws of a region say otherwise.
- A Sin-Eater may not summon a geist within the Upper Reaches the way he might a ghost (p. 275).
- Geists regain one point of Corpus per day in the Underworld. Even mundane attacks can damage a ghost's Corpus in the Underworld. Destroying a geist in the Underworld does not permanently destroy it — regardless of the source of the damage, destroying it simply ejects it from the Underworld. The geist reenters the living world near to the closest Avernian Gate. However, the geist *must* bond with a human and create a Sin-Eater before the next sunrise. Failure to do so in such a damaged state *does* destroy the geist permanently.
- Abjurations (pp. 213-214, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) still work on geists within the Underworld in that it forces them to flee—they do not, however, disincorporate.
- Blessed items work on geists in the Underworld just as they do in the living world (p. 214, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Kerberoi: Underworld Guardians

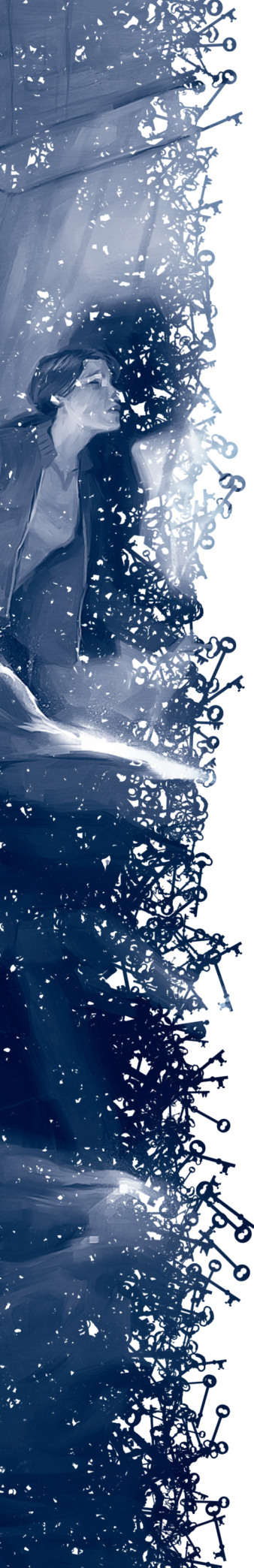
Every Dead Dominion in the Lower Mysteries plays host to a Kerberos, an Underworld guardian. Like the Humbaba of the forest or the three-headed dog after which the guardians are named, these inhuman entities enforce the Byzantine rules (see “Old Laws,” p. 271) that govern the Great Below. Note that more information on the Kerberoi can be found on p. 250 of the Storytelling chapter.

Appearance

The Kerberoi have set appearances. They do not change their flesh — like the laws they protect and enforce, they are immutable. They are also rarely, if ever, human in appearance. The massive three-headed hellhound is an apt

REMINDER: TWILIGHT

Just a quick reminder that Twilight is not considered a “realm” — the Underworld is a realm, and so too is the Shadow, or the Hedge or Arcadia from *Changeling: The Lost*. Twilight is instead a state of being where the subject in question exists as both invisible and bodiless. (A good example is how a liquid or a solid — both visible things — can become an invisible and non-corporeal gaseous state. Not to say that creatures in Twilight are gaseous, not at all — but the example shows that things that can exist in different “states of being.” Twilight is a spiritual state of being, not a physical one, but the metaphor is apt enough.)



enough image, but even still, some Kerberos are far stranger in appearance: a Biblical-style angel (many wings, many mouths, a body like a fiery disk), a giant serpent made only of shadow, a rushing tide of insects, a grandfather clock with gnashing teeth and centipede legs, and so forth.

Of course, if you believe the stories (as per the sidebar on p. 277), some Sin-Eaters believe that despite their inhuman appearances, the Kerberoi are actually ancient ghosts or geists—very possibly the progenitors of the Underworld, or at least its first “guests.”

Enforcers of the Old Laws

Thing about the Old Laws is, they are not supernaturally enforced. If the law demands that one never harms an unquiet shade, nothing generally prevents a Sin-Eater from doing so. Much as the laws of the living world don’t prevent the transgression and instead seek to punish the lawbreaker, the Kerberoi do not usually stand in the way of a law being broken and instead only punish those who do dare to break them.

That’s not universally true, of course. If an Old Law demands that a pint of blood be spilled on the ground before gaining entry, that Dominion’s governing Kerberos might actually stand guard in the lone passage that serves as the point of entry. The entity ensures that only those who bleed on the cracked marble floor will be allowed entrance.

Who can serve as a lawbreaker? Sin-Eaters, for one, are always in danger of breaking the law. But, for the most part, the Old Laws also apply to ghosts and geists, too—if the law demands that no shade be harmed, then that law applies to *any* entity (beyond the Kerberos itself) that would dare to hurt one of the unquiet shades.

Agents of the Old Laws

The Kerberoi are omniscient when it comes to the breaking of a law—as soon as the transgression occurs, the Kerberos knows. That being said, the Kerberoi are not *omnipotent*, in that they do not have limitless powers with which to pursue all transgressors. Transgressors can still hide. More importantly, transgressors can still flee. That’s okay if they flee to other parts of the Underworld—a Kerberos can track them anywhere within the Great Below.

And what happens when a transgressor flees to the living world? The Kerberos cannot leave the depths. They must remain in the Underworld. So how do they get to those who have escaped to the world of the quick?

They have agents that operate for them. A Kerberos generally prevents ghosts from leaving the Underworld, but in occasions where the ghost will serve the Old Laws, the Kerberos might grant that specter a “free pass” to re-enter the world of the living in order to hunt down escaped transgressors. Similarly, a Kerberos can actually have mortal agents, or even agents among the Sin-Eaters. Those who enter the

Underworld and break a law might not discover that their punishment is actually to serve the Kerberos as one of its agents in the living world.

Corrective Action Must Be Taken

If the Kerberos catches up with a transgressor, what then? What’s the punishment? Death?

Rarely. Death only seems to be a viable punishment for those who have broken the Old Laws time and time again, or wantonly contravene a particularly brutal law (if the law demands that one not hurt an unquiet shade and the transgressor wipes out *dozens* of unquiet shades, that’s an extreme transgression that may demand extreme punishment).

Punishment is wide-ranging, and depends on the Kerberos administering it. Remember: the Kerberoi are no longer human, if they ever were. They are the governing bodies of ancient dead laws, and are beholden to very curious, even insane behaviors. Punishment may make little sense to the transgressor. One Kerberos demands the Sin-Eater serve as its agent in the living world, punishing lawbreakers and helping to bring more ghosts into the Underworld by shattering their anchors (hell, maybe the Sin-Eater even gets a *quota*). Another Kerberos, though, might simply appear behind the transgressor and run a vicious talon across the transgressor’s back—leaving behind a brutal scar that always burns. A third demands a tithing of blood, or a period of indentured service (or even slavery).

Systems

The rules governing the Kerberoi can be found on p. 250 of the Storytelling chapter. Given that the Kerberoi are largely bound to the Underworld with few exceptions, these rules apply across the board.

Anomalies: The Unknown Entities

Cavers in the living world often discover strange wonders and horrors down in the darkest depths of the Earth’s belly: eyeless lizards, massive centipedes that eat bats, goeey chandeliers made of suppurating mucus. The Underworld is like this, only worse, because it’s a dead realm full of dead things.

Sin-Eaters tell stories of the many horrors (and occasionally, wonders) they’ve encountered down in the depths: slithering sentient puddles of plasm, giant stone cubes that float soundlessly down the dark passages, things that look more like demons and angels than anything spectral. Debate rages on amongst Sin-Eaters—could these things possibly have been human? What’s human about a sulfurous miasma that pulses with wisp-like light? Then again, ghosts change over time, and some suffer particularly dramatic shifts in Corpus. Maybe the anomalies really were ghosts once upon a time, or maybe they’re something far worse and far weirder—ghosts come from above, but maybe these things are crawling up from *below*.

For the most part, any anomalies a character might find in the Underworld won't be found in the Autochthonous Depths. The Lower Mysteries, on the other hand, is home to many such curiosities and terrors.

Psychopomps

The so-called psychopomps are one form of anomaly found within the Lower Mysteries. In mythology, a psychopomp is a creature or entity that shuttles souls into the Underworld, or from one part of the Underworld to another. Psychopomps in mythology are frequently animals — dogs, cats, sparrows, whippoorwills, crows, owls, stags, horses. In the Underworld, psychopomps are *always* animals, usually black of fur or feather and with red glowing eyes. They seem harmless enough. Rarely do they attack unless provoked. Often, many can be found together — a murder of shadowy crows, a pair of stallions, or a parliament of owls. They don't act like they do in the real world, however. They watch. They wait. Most are still and silent.

The question is, what are they waiting for? Do they help usher unquiet shades deeper into the Great Below? Some Sin-Eaters have reported that the psychopomps follow them as they cross a river or enter a new Dominion. Why? Are they some ancient form of Kerberos? Are they something far stranger?

One thing that Sin-Eaters *do* know: any ceremony or Manifestation that can be used to affect an animal can be used to affect a psychopomp, which begs the question — are psychopomps not the ghosts of humans, but the ghosts of deceased beasts? That one black dog fleeing down the dark passage... was that a collar around his neck, a glittering tag catching light from a nearby lantern?

New Numina

The following Numina are generally Underworld-specific, and are available to any ghost, geist, Kerberos, or anomaly one might encounter in the dark passages of the Great Below.

Consume Offering

The ghost can regain sustenance from consuming food and drink brought down into the Underworld, whether

by a Sin-Eater directly, or through a Day of the Dead-style of ceremony. Similarly, the ghost can sup on the blood that sometimes trickles down from stalactites, or from the waters of the Underworld's myriad of rivers. When the ghost consumes any of these, roll Power + Finesse. Each success translates to one point of regained Essence. The ghost may only perform this once per day (a day being a 24-hour period within the Underworld, given that no sun ever rises on this subterranean realm).

Manacles

The ghost is able to enslave another shade and force it to perform whatever acts the lording ghost so desires. A specter can only use shades when *its* Power score is higher than the *target's* Power score. If this is the case, spend one point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse in a contested roll versus the target ghost's Power + Resistance. Success indicates that the ghost is able to enslave the victim shade, seizing control of the target. The ghost can force the victim to perform any command, however menial, contradictory, or dangerous. The ghost can enslave a number of ghosts equal to its Finesse score. The ghost must reattempt this Numen once per year if it aims to continue enslavement. This Numen isn't necessarily restricted to use only within the Underworld, but that is where its effects are most commonly felt.

Sin Feeder

When the ghost engages in its Vice, it may choose to not regain Willpower. Roll Power + Finesse, instead. Each success translates to one point of regained Essence instead of Willpower. The ghost may only perform this Numen once per 24-hour period.

Storytelling the Underworld

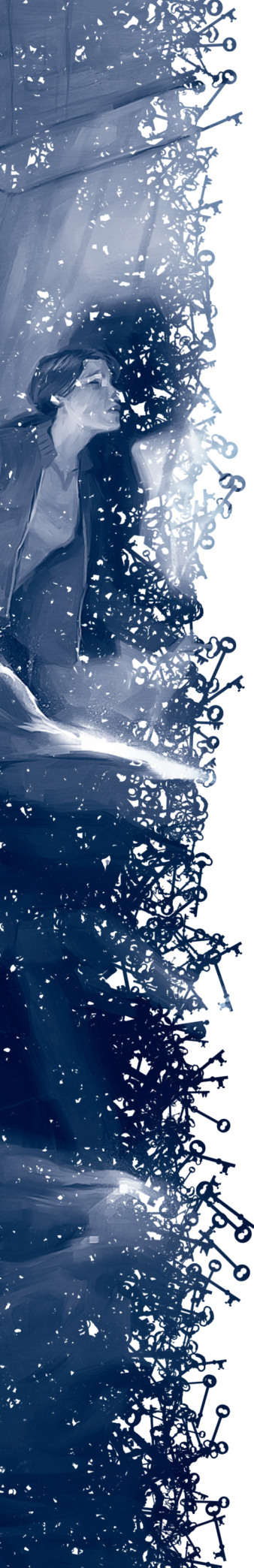
The Underworld, obviously, is wholly different and wholly separate from the living world. What a Sin-Eater experiences in the Great Below — what he sees, feels, what

DWELLERS IN THE DARK: THE LIVING?

Here's a story hook for you: the krewe encounters what they believe to be a ghost. The ghost seems like many of the others — pale, confused, in threadbare rags, wandering the tunnels and maybe stuck in some sort of pattern. But in other ways, the "specter" doesn't follow the normal rules. He seems uninterested in ofrendas. He cannot be bargained with. When they stick him with a knife, he doesn't leak plasmic residue — he bleeds.

Truth is, he's actually a human being. Maybe he's another Sin-Eater, maybe a necromancer, or maybe just an unlikely dude who wandered in through one of the world's "low places." Technically, it's possible for a human being to survive down there for untold months, even years. One might be able to find food in the form of ofrendas. (Heck, it's even possible that the poor fool stumbled upon some curious trick of the realm like Persephone: he ate of the food and now cannot leave.) He can drink from the rivers. Survival is tenuous, but not impossible.

Of course, he's probably bugshit nuts. He hasn't slept well, if at all. As the nights go on, the wanderer probably becomes convinced he is dead — after all, he's in a subterranean kingdom surrounded by pale shades that claim to be dead themselves, so? It's an easy enough conclusion. As such, the human might even start to manifest ghostly habits, which makes it all the more confusing when a Sin-Eater krewe finds him. What do they do with him? Show him the path to the living world? Help him reintegrate? Or do they kill him for real? Perhaps they just allow the illusion to continue, using him in the process.



he can accomplish, what perils await him – are unique to this realm. As such, dealing with the Underworld in your **Geist** game requires some special consideration. This section deals with how you as Storyteller might approach the Underworld in your story.

Theme

The “descent to the Underworld” motif is present in much of the world’s mythology. Ishtar goes to find her sister, Ereshkigal (and later, Nergal will make this same trip, and become trapped there). The princess Savitri follows Yama, the Lord of the Dead, into the Underworld so as to prevent her husband’s soul from settling there. Izanagi enters the Yomi, the Japanese Underworld, so as to claim his wife Izanami – but he fails, and she grows to hate him. Orpheus, Osiris, Aeneas, Odysseus, and the Algonquin Spirit Bride; they all represent mythic figures and heroes who crossed the border between life and death for some purpose. This is the *katabasis*, the descent motif.

In **Geist**, this motif is not altogether different from what one might find in mythology. The descent is performed by a character seeking something beyond the world of the living, something likely banished to the world of the dead – a perished lover, a cherished memento, a necessary sin. It is not a trip without peril. In fact, one of themes could easily be, “The deeper you go, the more danger you’ll find.” Or, put another way, “The greater the reward desired, the greater the risk will be to claim it.”

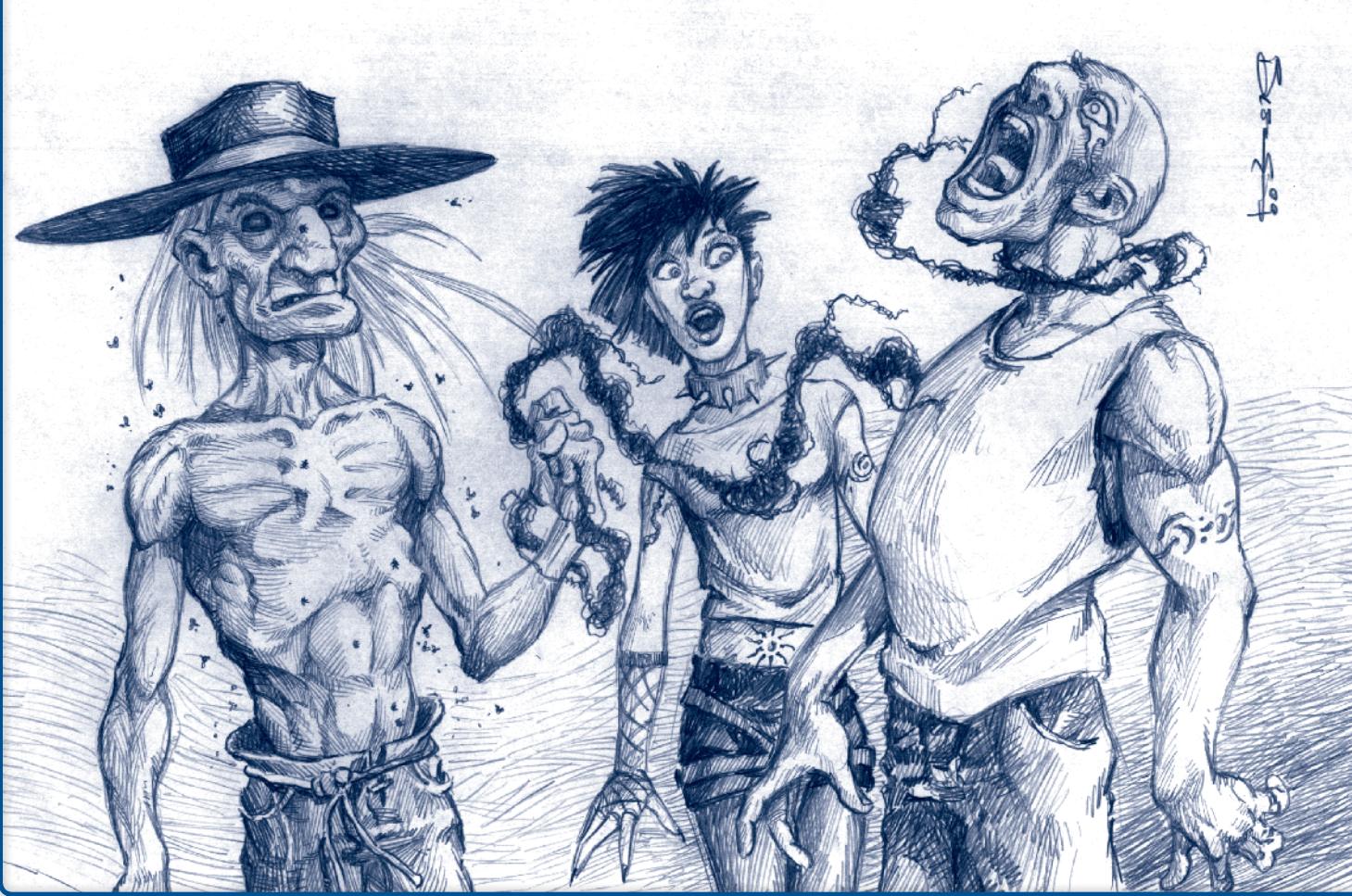
So it is in mythology, and so it is in **Geist**. A Sin-Eater that hopes to have a simple question answered by a ghost only recently banished to the Underworld doesn’t have an epic journey ahead of him, though he must still cross the threshold and face the shadows that await. A Sin-Eater that hopes to find an ancient memento, ask a favor of a potent old ghost, or return a lost love to life (or some semblance of life, at least) will have a far more turbulent and troubling journey ahead.

One might suggest, however, that the Underworld offers a secondary theme, as well, a theme covered earlier: this land represents a mockery of life. This mockery is not intentional, not for most. Ghosts want to live. They are dead but lingering because they have unfinished business in the world of the living; life, to them, represents the ultimate brass ring, a great answer to an eternal question. The Underworld and its residents becomes a hollow mimicry of life. It offers Byzantine hierarchies. Ghosts toil away at meaningless tasks. Shades and geists offer earthly pleasures in unearthly ways. Even the way that bits of color punctuate the hues of black, white, gray and brown is done so to ape the colors of the living world.

Mood

No single mood dominates the Underworld. This is especially true given that different parts of the Underworld can manifest in different ways, particularly once one crosses that first river and enters the Lower Mysteries. The Great Below offers many potential moods to those who crawl within its catacombs, and Storytellers are wise to utilize all of these offerings to best evoke the descent motif:

- **Isolation.** A Sin-Eater that enters the Underworld is sure to feel it immediately, that sense of emptiness and loneliness. Even when traveling with a krew, the Underworld is not bustling with unquiet shades. Most hide. The halls seem... well, dead. Even when encountering the denizens of the Underworld, it’s hard not to recognize the stains of death upon them, the hollow far-away look in their lonely eyes. Even ghosts that travel together or communicate with one another aren’t forging long or passionate relationships – they are all ships passing in the night. This is a very distant, isolated place. It can stir a cruel, cold dissatisfaction.
- **Pressure.** Ever been down in a silver mine? Or deep in subway access tunnels? Even if you’re not claustrophobic, it’s hard not to feel the imaginary *pressure* – tons of stone might lurk above your head. A thousand feet of rock or cement or asphalt could come crashing down at any moment. To your left might be miles or rock, or even a million gallons of lake or ocean water. One tiny breach, and *pop*. You’re squished like a grape. Now, look at that same experience through the lens of one traversing a metaphysical realm where you’re not even a part of the living world anymore. It’s not just rock above your head: it’s blood and ghosts and plasmic residue. The realm goes down, down, forever down. The pressure may not be real, but that doesn’t mean it’s any less affecting.
- **Death.** Okay, maybe it’s redundant, but when the living enter the Underworld, it’s hard not to feel apart from the living. Those who walk the dark passages feel a spiritual sepsis, as if their very flesh is slowly becoming one with the energy of this dead realm, a slow shift to losing one’s way as a ghost, not a mortal being. It might take a character a minute or two to find her heartbeat. Her skin grows cold, clammy, corpse-like – or maybe she just *thinks* that’s what’s happening, a psychological response as opposed to a physiological one. Sin-Eaters are very good at feeling alive – they almost died, and so many become life junkies, feeling the vagaries of continued existence in a way that normal humans can rarely feel. The Underworld robs them of that, somewhat. It is a cold reminder of what’s coming: death for everyone.



Biske
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How Low Can You Go?

To what extent should you and the players use the Underworld? The Great Below isn't safe. Characters do not go there wantonly, as the hazards of the realm will be swift to punish those who cross the threshold with little or no purpose. This is intentional, of course. The Underworld isn't a vacation. The living world is dangerous enough.

Still, the Underworld isn't a castigating realm. It doesn't punish for the sake of punishing. While a Sin-Eater can encounter great horror, that doesn't stop that character from finding great reward or being part of a great story down there, either. It's important, then, to think about how much of a role the Underworld can and should play in your *Geist* game. In short, how low do you want the characters to go?

The Lobby Effect

It might seem a strange way to put it, but most Sin-Eaters think of and use the Underworld as a kind of hotel lobby. They know that setting foot in that realm is dangerous. They know that, should they go too deep, they might never come back out again. Many Sin-Eaters enter the Great Below hoping to communicate with a single ghost — the dead have a great deal of knowledge, and can individually offer powerful rewards (though rarely without some kind of deal or bargain). Interfacing with such a shade is like meeting someone at their hotel — you don't go up to the guest's room and try to break down the door. You don't have to. You go to the front desk and page the guest, hoping they'll come down to meet you.

It's a simplistic way to look at it, but that's what many Sin-Eaters do. They enter the Underworld and immediately attempt to summon the ghost of the person they seek. They splash blood on the ground. They offer a Polaroid picture of a loved one. They set a small Matchbox car on the ground; a toy from the ghost's living youth. And then they wait. They hope the summoning works. If it does, they can communicate with the ghost then and there without having to run through the labyrinthine catacombs of the Great Below. The dangers are far less prevalent in this way, and that's as designed.

Of course, it doesn't always work out. Sin-Eaters can only summon relatively "young" ghosts in this way (under a century dead), and they can only do so from within the Autochthonous Depths (p. 275). It goes back to the theme: the greater the reward sought, the greater the danger one will face. Which leads to...

The Quest

Sometimes, it's necessary to go deep. To cross a river or three. To encounter the myriad of dangers and lunacies the Underworld can offer.

Ultimately — and mythologically — this is a quest. Sin-Eaters don't think of it that way, of course, but it's a good way to frame it from the Storyteller and player perspective. Delving deep into the Great Below is never done casually... at least, not by sane characters. No, if a



character descends, it's for a purpose. A purpose that goes beyond something that the "lobby effect" (above) can support. The character wants to find a long-lost loved one that's been enslaved by a lunatic geist, or he wants to reclaim a powerful memento stolen from him, or he wants to ask a troubling question of an ancient Kerberos. This "quest" may be something the character wants or might be something initiated by a patron figure. Either way, the solution sits deep in the dark passages of the Underworld.

In myth and literature, a quest narrative features a number of common characteristics, most of which will be present on any purposeful trip into the Great Below. Hindrances always stand in the way of the quest item or reward — and the Underworld is home to many such hindrances (hungry ghosts, the demands of a callous ferryman, the spectral cult of a deathlord, the mad guardians of the old laws, and so forth). The quest-taker character may need help to surpass such hindrances, and help can come from his krewes, from another ghost, from someone up in the living world, or even from his own geist. When coming upon the target of the quest, usually a final task is demanded of the character (for example: the character encounters the ancient ghost who has the answer to the character's question, but will only answer that question if the character can perform a favor). Once the character has completed or failed this final task, he must return to the living world.

This usually keeps the "Underworld visit" at just a session or three — it doesn't overtake the story, and isn't something that happens often. It's a rare trip, a dark journey.

The Underworld Story

Of course, it's also possible that you want to take this to the next level. Sin-Eaters, particularly powerful ones with high Psyche scores and gobs of spent experience, can more easily survive down in the depths and can continue deeper than most. This means that an Underworld descent can easily comprise an entire story's worth of material, or may instead become something that the characters do again and again over the course of a chronicle.

Nothing wrong with that, of course, though it's perhaps worth mentioning that the business of Sin-Eaters is largely held to the living world — those that spend too much time in the Underworld may grow mad or distant from humanity and their own kind. Still, though, those characters that can survive in the depths may grow more comfortable in the Underworld. They might map it. They might know a way to dupe the nearby ferrymen. They might know the laws of different dominions and even have allies in the depths amongst the unquiet shades.

One important note: the Underworld should never cease to be dangerous. Even to the most powerful Sin-Eater, breaking the laws put forth by the Kerberos or making enemies of a deathlord's cultic followers can be bad news. One's soul and sanity is forever in peril down in the Great Below. Even the most stalwart Sin-Eater can succumb to a fear of darkness, or might tremble when he hears the gibbering wails of a pack of specters deep in the tombs and tunnels.

Portraying the Great Below

In any World of Darkness game, it's easy enough to portray most things, because the players are coming to the table with shared experience. They know what a city street looks like. For the most part, they know what it's like in a rainstorm, or what it feels like to eat a big greasy cheeseburger. The World of Darkness is our world, though admittedly one whose shadows are longer and whose realities are all the more disturbing.

The Underworld, though, doesn't necessarily have that common touchstone of experience. Some of the players may have been in some low places — subway tunnels or coal mines or down in the depths of the Hoover Dam on a tourist trip — but even still, the Underworld is its own monster. Thus, describing it takes a little extra work to make it feel alive... er, so to speak.

Below you'll find some snippets of advice on describing the Underworld. Feel free to use these tidbits to convey the themes and moods and experiences of the Great Below.

Show, Don't Tell

For a Storyteller, "effective" is often the same as "evocative." Evocative means that the Storyteller is literally trying to induce a certain feeling through the story he's telling; he is more than just an adjudicator of rules, he is the one who frames interactions and provides descriptions of action and scene and character. Ultimately, one evokes through the act of *showing*, not of *telling*. With the Underworld — a place wholly different from our own — this can be critical.

Telling involves a simplistic and non-descriptive version of what's going on (events, characters, setting). Showing, on the other hand, is an illustrative description, a small picture painted with words that are meant to do more than convey pointed information. The words are meant to convey feeling, mood, and theme.

An example: the krewes is making its way through the dark passages, and the Storyteller says, "You run through the tunnels. Something is following you." Well, okay. It provides information, so that's good, but the feeling of being tracked by some nebulous shade in the dark catacombs isn't really conveyed. (If an entire

novel was written in the “telling” style, you’d have something akin to a *Dick and Jane* book: “Jane goes to the store. Jane buys apples. Jane is killed by a ghost.”)

However, *showing* can really open this up for the players so that they can conjure an idea of what their characters are feeling: “You hurry through tunnels lit only by grotesque smears of luminous fungus. The ground is rough beneath your feet, and you stumble. As you do, you hear it – somewhere behind you, a clumsy *scrape* of bone on rock; the sound of staccato clicking like chattering teeth. You’re being followed. Or maybe you’re being hunted.”

Of course, you can go too far. Remember that you’re not writing epic poetry or a turgid romance novel – if your descriptions go on past three or four sentences, you might want to clip the wings of your spoken prose.

Color: Beads of Blood and Bright Fruits

Images are defined by contrast. That’s how our eyes work – ever turn down the contrast knob on your television? The image goes grayer and grayer until it’s gone. (Of course, you turn it too high, and the image becomes a blasted wasteland of harsh darks and lights, with all subtlety lost.) Our minds, too, enjoy contrast. We play thoughts off one another. Good is defined by evil. Greed is defined by selfishness. Ideas are often partly defined by their opposites. So it is with Storytelling, and so it is with the Underworld.

The Underworld is a dead place. We associate a certain bleakness with death – like a Gustave Dore illustration; it’s all blacks and whites and shades of gray. That’s okay, and it’s not entirely inappropriate. But, what happens when you punctuate this dreary palette with marks of color? You have contrast. (Yes, color and contrast are two different ideas, technically, but the idea here is that bits of bright color in a sea of gray stand out – our mind differentiates those things, like a red balloon cast against a storm-tossed sky.)

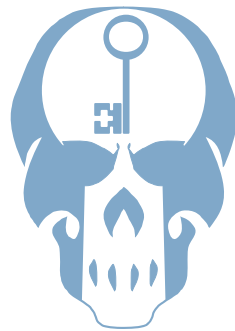
Outside the thematic appropriateness of color in the Underworld (color is reminiscent of life and the living world, and that is what ghosts seek most so they cling to whatever small remnants of color they can find), it’s also good for the purposes of contrast. So, whenever you’re describing the Underworld, remember that it isn’t all gray tombs and muddy or dusty catacombs. A streak of blood

on a white porcelain wall? A skull whose teeth have been replaced with blue and green sea glass? A rivulet of searing lava trickling down an obsidian slope? All elements of color meant to punctuate and provide contrast.

Ghosts Are Not Normal

Ever talk to someone you’re pretty sure is just a little bit crazy? A hair off-kilter? That’s what it feels like talking to ghosts, especially those that frequent the Underworld. It’s easy to assume that a character might get a normal conversation out of a specter, a frank and honest discussion like they might have with a krew-mate or the guy behind the counter at the convenience store. Not true. Ghosts are broken. They’re not living beings anymore. Their minds – or what passes for their minds – are consistently rerouted toward thinking about their unfinished business, and much of what they say and do is at least peripherally associated with that deep soulful regret that keeps them from moving on to whatever final reward awaits them. Thus, speaking to a ghost can feel a bit odd and inconsistent (or, it can feel outright insane, as some shades have gone off the deep end and have little chance of returning), and it’s the Storyteller’s job to convey this. It’s doubly important in the Underworld, where ghosts may communicate directly. In the living world, a lot of ghosts have to use Numina to convey a message, and even when they don’t, an entire conversation isn’t entirely likely (usually, it’s just a few sentences and phrases before the ghost flees or fades to Twilight).

Here’s a good rule of thumb: when a character is speaking with one of the unquiet shades within the Great Below, pick either a presiding Vice (any of the seven from the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) or a mood (grief, anger, regret, desperate, etc.). Consider the ghost to be an embodiment of that Vice or mood. A gluttonous ghost may hold a conversation with the Sin-Eater, but the specter is constantly eyeing up the *ofrendas* held behind the character’s back (or is perhaps just eyeing up the character, as if it wants to take a big ol’ ghostly bite out of her face or arm meats). A sorrow-filled ghost will be notably grief struck, so much so that a character will probably have to lie or massage the conversation to pierce that deep sadness so as to get something productive from the ghost’s wormy lips.



It took me two hours to find just the right dead woman. Couldn't be white, because that's too obvious. On the other hand, couldn't be too dark, too ethnic, because then she wouldn't catch their eye. Go for something in the caramel range, that always works.

I almost didn't notice that she was right because she was kind of bundled up. Never made sense to me in a suicide. You're going to throw yourself off the bridge, what are you wearing a heavy coat for? You don't want to be uncomfortable on the last day of your life? Joke's on you, lady — the other side is cold, too. And maybe you did get to take that coat with you, but it's not like it actually does you any good when it's part of your Corpus. Surprise, surprise, now you're cold forever.

So when you think about it, I'm helping her out.

I draped her at the feet of one of the lions: Patience or Fortitude, I forget which one is which. Dead girl on one of the library lions, and I made sure to smear out her plasm so you had a good and proper stain all down the pedestal.

Anyone sees one of the lions with a kill, they're gonna flinch. No mistaking this for some hobo. It'll be easy to pick them out.

Grunt work's over. Now comes the fun part: waiting.

APPENDIX TWO: THE MODERN GOMORRAH



PIATTI



The Crossroads of the World. The City that Never Sleeps. The Modern Gomorrah. More people live — and die — in New York City than in any other city in the United States. With more than 8 million residents in the metropolitan area, more than 60,000 lives end every year in the Big Apple: one every 10 minutes around the clock, every hour of every day throughout the year. The sheer number of deaths happening within the city virtually ensures one of the world's largest populations of ghosts — and Sin-Eaters — is found there.

Additionally, due in part to the extensive subway project and massive underground sewer systems beneath the city, there is an incredibly high density of cenotes located in, around, and under the city, resulting in a higher-than-usual propensity for travel into — and out of — the Underworld from that locale.

These two factors create both challenges and potential for Sin-Eaters in the city. While the NYC area is rife with resources ready to be tapped by an enterprising krewe, it also presents its citizens with a high risk of danger, harsh competition for those resources, and a greater potential for encountering something bigger and badder than the krewe was really ready to deal with.

Theme: Contradictions and Connections

From underground tunnels to towering skyscrapers, billionaires to paupers, and slums to penthouses, New York City is a study in contradictions. From the time the first European explorers pressed their authority into the Lanape tribe's lands, the area has been fraught with diverse influences co-existing side by side. Sometimes those differences blend well, resulting in a fusion of cultural traditions that spawn new and unique forms of art, cuisine, spirituality, and fashion. Other times, the disparity clashes in discord, creating crime, bigotry, segregation, hatred, intolerance, violence, and death.

In Times Square, a businesswoman in a thousand-dollar suit brushes past a vagrant whose meals that day are purchased with the change others toss his direction. A centuries-old church tower chimes out the hour, the sound lost over the rush of traffic towards a newly-built shopping mall. In the subways, a Julliard-trained violinist plays classical selections as a free public concert, as teens rush past, earbuds funneling hip-hop, crunk, or metal directly into their brains. In the shadow of Mount Sinai Medical Center, doctors and researchers step past a junkie as he clandestinely injects what is likely to be a fatal dose of crank into his veins. In Central Park, nannies push over-privileged children in designer strollers, while a rapist scans the path for his next victim. The rich and the poor. The educated and the ignorant. The atheistic and the devout. The pious and the profane. The living and the dead.

For the Bound, life in the Big Apple is no different. A single krewe may provide its own study in contradictions. One group, no matter how small, may well contain members who come from diverse backgrounds, who see the Underworld, Sin-Eaters and ghosts in entirely different ways, and who perceive their own roles in existence in incredibly divergent fashions. Street kids and supermodels may share sanctuary

with founding family members' descendents and those who have only just arrived on the city's shores. Those who have dedicated their lives to serving the needs of the dead may encounter conflict with or even join forces with, those who seek only to protect the living from hungry and malevolent ghosts. Selfless Sin-Eaters might come into conflict with those who survive, or even profit, from the spoils their abilities and knowledge allow them to plunder. And those who see their role as a religious duty, a service to their gods, may come face-to-face with others who treat being a Sin-Eater as a job that's half-Indiana Jones and half-Ghostbusters.

Yet, despite its differences, and the contradictions inherent in every level of the city's existence, there is a connectivity that runs deeply in New York's very nature. Physically, this manifests as bridges and tunnels that breach the city's dividing features. Arterial roadways, and above them, jet-stream pathways, connect not only different parts of the expansive city to itself, but to every corner of the globe. Culturally, opportunities exist throughout New York for the living to share in the experiences, traditions, and customs of backgrounds other than their own. Through fashion, food, and day to day life, these differences can be experienced first hand, and for those who are less daring, they can be learned about from a distance, through magazines and books, television programs and radio stations that cater to one or more of the city's several hundred different cultures and populations.

Likewise, krewes often form connections between those of diverse natures. A martially-minded Sin-Eater finds restraint and balance when sharing a channel with one of a more philosophical mind-set. Former fire-fighters work alongside street children and business people to deal with the ghostly aftermath of a global catastrophe. Priests and assassins, cooks and cleaning ladies serve the living and dead populations of their neighborhoods, working

"I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls."

together (willingly or unknowingly) to fulfill similar or complementary goals. The experienced teach and mentor the new, and are in time replaced by them, sometimes through elaborate rituals of transformation and growth – and sometimes through violent and mutinous revolution. New York City is an elaborate tapestry of singular threads, woven into a unique and exceptional whole. It is the City of Cities, the City of Light, Fear City, the Friendly City, the Land of Surprising Contrasts. It is Mecca to many Sin-Eaters, a place where anything can and does happen.

Mood

The dominant mood of a New York **Geist** story is energetic, in both positive and negative fashion. The city is constantly moving; there is no time of night in which there aren't thousands of people still awake all around you. The exuberant energy of a wake blends into the frenetic panic of a killer ghost hunt. Moments of stillness and repose almost have to be stolen – it's telling that the Big Apple's Bound often find themselves retreating into cemeteries as one of the few places they might find a few hours of peace and quiet.

Due to the duality of a **Geist** chronicle, this mood won't persist at all times; when the characters enter the Underworld, they trade the bustle of the modern metropolis for the somber chill of the necropolis. However, the vibrant mood of a New York chronicle can stress *life* as counterpoint to death; energy as counterpoint to entropy; bliss, pain, rage, and laughter as counterpoint to oblivion.

Old History of New York

New York may be a mere stripling compared to the cities of Europe and Asia, but it's got enough history to boast scars. It's never a bad thing for a Sin-Eater to study the past – you never know what will unearth itself from years or centuries ago.

Ancient Times

First discovered by Italian explorer, Giovanni da Verrazano, in the mid 1500s, the area around what is now New

York City was home to various native tribes for 12,000 years before Europeans landed on its shores. Many tribes, including the collected Wappinger bands and the Lenape tribe, made their home on or around the New York City area. While many Sin-Eaters know little of the history of the area before the post-colonization era, the native inhabitants were well aware of the existence of ghosts, and had their own elaborate ceremonies to aid in the passing of ghosts from this world to the next, to garner the protection and wisdom of those who had already died, and to protect the living from the malevolent dead. While the term Sin-Eater was not used by the Lenape, they did exist within that culture. Certain members of the tribe, called the Nanhilowet, were known to have bonded with the ancestral spirits of the tribe. After merging with the tribe's ghostly predecessors, they became responsible for ensuring that certain funeral rituals were completed when any member of the tribe died. If a Nanhilowet was not able to do so within twelve days of the tribe member's death, the ghost would come back to cause problems for the tribe, increasing in strength and malevolence until they were finally dealt with.

In one of the earliest examples of the duality of Sin-Eater culture in the area, a Dutch Sin-Eater named Krellis Vrooman immigrated to the colonial frontier near the Five Boroughs area. Some claim Vrooman was fleeing persecution from his old neighborhood, that he was the sole survivor of a hostile attack by a rival krewe or that he had simply overstayed his welcome in the Old Country. Regardless of the reason, he quickly found more work than he could handle amidst the hostile territory and harsh living conditions of the new settlements. When measles and smallpox struck the area over and over in the late 1600s, Vrooman – one of the only Sin-Eaters to have migrated to the settlement at the time, joined forces with several Nanhilowet to deal with the spiritual ramifications of the epidemics. While peace and cooperation between the native and newcomer ghost-workers waxed and waned over the next two hundred years, it was this initial teamwork that heralded an amalgamation of the traditions from both cultures.

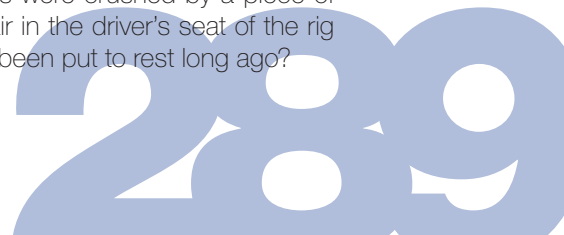
Revolutionary Era


It didn't take long for New York to start accumulating ghosts. The slave insurrection of 1741 brought out a number of slave executions, and Death by Violence began to

STORY HOOK: TAUWUNDIN MUMMY

In laying out excavation for a site for a new business complex, surveyors discover a well-preserved body. It appears to be that of a young native woman, dressed in a leather dress and clutching a gourd rattle. All construction on the site stops while the matter is investigated, but before work can begin again, the site is plagued with mishaps. Anthropology crews sent to study the burial site come down with fever and hallucinations within hours of arriving. Small children in the local area disappear and are found hours later locked in a shed nearby. They claim to have followed a strange girl into the building, but that she disappeared when the door shut behind them. Nearby pets are found brutally ripped apart, and animal control issues a report of a cougar or wildcat in the area.

And finally, when one of the developers arrived to check out the delays, his legs were crushed by a piece of equipment. In the hospital, he insisted he'd seen a young girl with long black hair in the driver's seat of the rig before it backed over him. Is it possible the excavation woke something that had been put to rest long ago?





get a foothold. The local Threshold became all the stronger when the Revolutionary War began. Battles spilled across the land, as did the Great Fire.

Industrial Age

The Industrial Revolution hit New York City hard. By 1790 the city had become the largest in the United States. The population more than doubled in the 30 years between 1850 and 1880 and tripled again by 1900. Such quick expansion left growing pains on the city's population. Immigrants from all over the globe flocked to the city, bringing their young, their old, their sick, and injured — and sometimes even their ghosts — with them.

Like rats in a too-small cage, competing for scraps of bread, New York City's sudden and rampant influx of new citizens spurred conflict within almost every neighborhood. Men and women alike turned to crime, gangs, prostitution or tuggery in order to make ends meet, spinning the city into a hotbed of conflict. Poverty bred crime, crime bred violence, and those who had the capability to often drank or drugged themselves into near-oblivion to forget their troubles. Sin-Eaters were heavily taxed to deal with not only the sheer numbers of conflicted deaths resulting in ghostly activity, but also the intensity of trouble that these ghosts created. Peaceful times were far in the past, and the chaos of industrial life in the city directly manifested as a chaos of troubled death within its borders.

To make matters even more confusing, the rules seemed to be constantly changing. Superstitions and folklore — part belief, part fact — from around the globe met, merged and bred new hybrid beliefs as once-isolated religions and traditions overlapped, inter-married and borrowed from one another. Sin-Eaters who had only experience in dealing with the ghosts and rituals of their own cultural traditions were now faced with a confusing mish-mash of post-life manifestations, which directly reflected the blending and merging the living populations were experiencing. Old ways didn't always work on new ghosts, meaning that Sin-Eaters had to either constantly expand their own knowledge and abilities — or were required to call upon one another to bring in experts who might know how to deal with new and unfamiliar situations.

The city's exploding immigrant population resulted in not only crowding, poverty, and crime, but, since the city was unable to keep up with the basic structural needs of the new population, also in epidemics that swept through the city like wildfire. In 1832, more than 3,000 New Yorkers died of cholera — a disease spread predominantly through poor sanitation conditions — between the months of July and August alone. Another cholera outbreak twelve years later claimed another 4,000 lives, and between 1865 and 1873, the city was hit with recurring epidemics of not only cholera, but also smallpox, typhus, typhoid, yellow fever, and scarlet fever.

As a result of these massive waves of disease related deaths, the city's Sin-Eater population took on a strange skew. While other Thresholds still continued to manifest, the Stricken became so prolific that it began to skew krew dynamics. Exclusively Stricken krewes began to develop, as their numbers increased, and those with other affinity Keys became a commodity to be negotiated for. A Sin-Eater of an Elemental Key, or one who had died by chance were far, far rarer than those who passed due to violence, deprivation, or disease, and while some krewes took it as a badge of honor to recruit them, others shunned those who had not passed specifically of the same disease (or even the same epidemic) that they had.

Ghosts of New York

Today's New York is the most populous city in the United States, and, of course, the largest number of lives also means the largest number of deaths. More deaths (especially in the often conflicted population center of the country) mean more ghosts and more ghosts mean more Sin-Eaters — both by virtue of creation and by immigration.

New York City is divided into five sub-sections or boroughs: The Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island. While all have a great deal of diversity within its boundaries, there are stereotypes of each that are based, at least loosely, in fact. Like any other area, neighborhoods, popu-

STORY HOOK: GHOST SHIP

During the latter part of the Revolutionary War, British naval officers were under orders to keep captured American prisoners on prison ships in Wallabout Bay. The conditions were horrific, specifically designed to encourage as many Americans to join up with the British Navy in order to escape imprisonment on the ships. Many civilians and soldiers died due to the rot, filth, and lack of clean food and water — an estimate claims that more Americans died in these prison ships from deliberate neglect than died in battle in the war.

Rumors told around the bay still claim that occasionally one of these ships is seen off the shoreline, and that on certain dates (the anniversary of particularly cruel actions against the captive prisoners), ghostly British soldiers in redcoat uniforms take new prisoners to fill their hold.

lations, cultures, and environments shift over time, merge at their edges, and contain pockets within them where the stereotypes are not true. But enough truth remains to cast some generalizations about each borough and the locations, people, and things that can be found there.

The Bronx

The Bronx is the northernmost borough of New York City, and the only one primarily on the mainland. Many signature landmarks of the city are sited here, from Yankee Stadium to the New York Botanical Gardens and the Bronx Zoo. The district runs from rich to poor, with the South Bronx as a focal point of urban decay. The neighborhood suffered from a wave of arson in the 1970s, and mementos from that period frequently manifest the Pyre Flame Key. Even today, the South Bronx suffers from poverty, drug trafficking, and violent crime – here Death by Violence is strong, and resilient Torn may arise.

Woodlawn Cemetery is one of the focal points of local Sin-Eater culture, with more than 400 acres and 300,000 people buried there. Many a Sin-Eater will take a pilgrimage to the grave of a particularly respected figure, covertly of course. Locals frequently pour out rum at the tombstones or mausoleums of such diverse figures as Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Herman Melville, and Bat Masterson.

Brooklyn

The western end of Long Island holds the Big Apple's most thickly populated borough, and one of its most ethnically diverse. For the mismatched, patchwork culture of the Sin-Eaters, Brooklyn is the perfect place to go scavenging. The Bound have scavenged and assimilated rituals, superstitions and art forms from all number of resident populations.



justin NORMAN

STORY HOOK: THE SCARRED HARLOT

For over a hundred years, McGurk's Suicide Hall on Bowery Street in Lower Manhattan was a landmark. In the late 1800s it was famous for low-brow entertainment, cheap prostitution... and several famous suicides. Most of the original victims were prostitutes, although over the years there were many "copycat" suicides as well, a phenomenon that ranged clear up to the building's destruction in the early 21st century. Hundreds are rumored to have killed themselves during the time period that the building stood. Some threw themselves from the roof of the four-story building, but many committed suicide by ingesting carbolic acid, a chemical that was easily obtained from pharmacies at the height of the building's suicide craze.

Police in the area were relieved when the building was finally demolished, figuring that the end of over a century of suicide investigations in the area had drawn to a close. However, after the building fell, the rate of self-harm in surrounding areas actually skyrocketed. Those who failed to accomplish their own death report being hounded into the action by a woman, who disappeared as soon as the deed seemed to be done. One witness (who is being held for psychological evaluation in a local mental institution) described her as a ghostly figure, wearing an "old timey" dress. Investigations reveal the area is being haunted by "Big Mame", a curvaceous ghost-woman low-cut late-19th century gown who has been possessing or otherwise pressuring local women (especially prostitutes) into suicide. The ghost's face and arms are disfigured with horrible chemical burns, although her hair and dress are pristine. Can the krewes stop her before she continues her bloody influence?



A ceremony performed here may draw equally in turn from Hasidic Jewish, Russian Orthodox, and a Caribbean mélange of Roman Catholicism and Yoruba practice.

Coney Island is a central point for Sin-Eaters to hold wakes, particularly on the sites of old, closed amusement parks. One local Haunt features a carousel scavenged from one such park, battered and worn, many of its mirrors broken. The Bound also hold meetings in some of the newly opened amusement parks from time to time — and there are more ghosts than the local tourism boards would like to think about under the boardwalk, staring out into the ocean as if waiting for some kindly Charon to come and take them home.

Manhattan

Manhattan is about as densely populated a place as you'll find in the United States. The borough is a center of finance, culture and more, thickly packed with people all working toward success. While all the boroughs bear a share of the city's character, Manhattan is probably what most outsiders think of first when they think of New York City — the skyline full of skyscrapers, iconic locations like Wall Street, Central Park, Grand Central Terminal, and Liberty Island, and more. Even some of its neighborhoods are more widely recognized than the actual capital cities of other states — Harlem, Greenwich Village, East Village, SoHo, the Bowery, and more. Fifth Avenue divides Manhattan between east and west.

And it pulses with supernatural activity. Sin-Eaters know full well that the most densely populated place in the States is also the most densely populated with ghosts. There are said to be vampires moving among the rich and influential, and sure, there are rumors of dog attacks that aren't actually dog attacks deep in Central Park. Some Sin-Eaters find themselves drawn to New York Presbyterian Hospital, and at least one krewe has spent a night there honoring the

memory of both Malcolm X and Jim Henson (both of whom died there). There've also been rumors of at least one Bound gone murderous that had his origins there (see p. 244).

By far, though, one of the greatest sites of supernatural vibrancy is Ground Zero. While the construction of Freedom Tower seems to be drawing away some of the potential negative energy, the site still acts as a remarkably potent cenote. It's not just the numbers of people who died here that attract geists and Bound alike: the Twin Towers died here, and with them a certain aspect of the city itself. Even now, Sin-Eaters tell one another stories of what happened in the weeks and months after 9/11, and how many ghosts were in need of help.

Queens

The borough of Queens shares Long Island with Brooklyn. Both John F. Kennedy Airport and La Guardia Airport were established in the borough, making it a heavy travel hub. Queens has a long history of jazz, something many Sin-Eaters appreciate; a local Sin-Eater wake tends to involve jazz in particular, as a point of pride. Queens is also very ethnically diverse, and Sin-Eaters who operate locally are prone to demonstrate an equally diverse grab-bag of rites and ceremonies.

Queens also is the only vehicular access point to Rikers Island, though the island itself is technically part of the Bronx. The Francis Buono Bridge is a potential hotspot for the dead, as ghosts seem to have an easier time crossing water at a bridge. A long history of violence on the island (almost more penal colony than prison) has engendered more than a few hungry ghosts.

Most notably to the Bound, Queens has a great many cemeteries; the interred dead outnumber the living by approximately three to one. In 1852, New York City enacted a law prohibiting burials in Manhattan. The result was an estimated 35,000 corpses disinterred and moved to Western Queens,

STORY HOOK: SPIRITS OF CARNIVALS LOST

The Steeplechase Park was the last of Coney Island's original amusement parks to close down. It did so amid rising crime in the neighborhood, and its site was acquired by Fred Trump with the intention of building a low-cost housing development there. Blocked by zoning ordinances, Trump actually staged a "funeral" for the park at one point, demolishing the place before it could attain landmark status. Invited guests threw bricks through the windows of the "Pavilion of Fun" before it was bulldozed.

While the site of the park is now occupied by KeySpan Park, home of the minor league baseball Brooklyn Cyclones, the shadow of the old park remains. Sin-Eaters entering the Autochthonous Depths here find that the Underworld has taken on a bleak carnival aspect, its enclosure a version of the old park's pavilion. The mock funeral seems to have actually "buried" the park, making it one of the more singular locations in the Underworld. It's not a harmless good time for the Sin-Eaters who visit, though; something about the dead park attracts geists of odd nature, and the unfettered are thickly populous here. What happens when they decide that the reason they were drawn here was "entertainment", and how will they go about acquiring it?

to the Cypress Hills Cemetery (which serves both Brooklyn and Queens). The neighborhood of Glendale was almost entirely encircled by cemeteries at this time, and the area became known as the Cemetery Belt. Sin-Eaters tend to take great interest in their local burial grounds — some look at them with pride and protectiveness, others with dread reservations. It's not at all unusual for a Sin-Eater to join in the mortal Halloween gathering at Harry Houdini's grave in Machpelah Cemetery, where fans wait to see if this is the year he escapes death.

Staten Island

The southwestern borough of the city, Staten Island is also the least populated. It's partly urban and partly suburban in makeup, connected to Brooklyn via the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. The island features a number of parks and beaches, and a 260-acre wildlife preserve. The borough has a very high concentration of Italian-Americans, and Sin-Eaters who operate in the area are perhaps more prone to cannibalize Catholic ritual for their ceremonies and observations.

One of the more notorious places in Staten Island is the Kreischer Mansion, a haunted house with a grisly past. The house was long rumored to be haunted by the ghosts of members of the Kreischer family; even when converted into a restaurant in 1996, employees claimed to hear slamming doors and voices arguing when nobody was around. But more recently, it was discovered that a grisly murder had taken place there in 1995, the victim dismembered and burned in the furnace. The local Sin-Eaters keep an eye on the place, as it seems evident that a cenote has formed in its basement. With the current owner planning to donate the house to an worthy charitable organization, a few krewes

have discussed the possibility of making a bid to own it themselves and make the mansion into a central gathering point for New York's Bound.

The World Underground

New York doesn't quite have the immense sewers that you see in a movie or cartoon, but there's a lot of underground to be seen there. The sandhogs — the construction workers who dig tunnels — have carved out subways and sewers, water tunnels, traffic tunnels, even secret command bunkers. And not all of those tunnels are regularly patrolled. The Sin-Eaters can claim some for their own.

One such tunnel runs under the Waldorf-Astoria hotel. Designed for private use, it once carried President Franklin Delano Roosevelt underground to and from Hyde Park — part of an effort to avoid having the polio-stricken statesman's physical difficulties and movements filmed. The private track fell into disuse long ago, but now it serves as one of many, many cenotes littering the New York underground.

Moving around in the disused tunnels below the city isn't completely easy, of course; the city is bound to monitor access to such dangerous passages. The world being what it is, though, security is often lax. A krewa can frequently slip through with a bit of clever Manifestation use. However, the tunnels aren't always *safe*. Old collapsed tunnels are haunted by the ghosts of sandhogs who died there — ghosts that are themselves old and strong. Things leak out from the Underworld, or from stranger places. And whatever other monsters exist in the World of Darkness, they too may look on these secret tunnels as ideal territory.

REBUILDING

It's basically impossible to discuss New York City without discussing the terrible events of September 11, 2001. The attack on the World Trade Center literally reshaped the cityscape, as well as the metropolis' collective psyche. You can't talk about the city without talking about this event. And if tackling New York in a game about death and ghosts, the omission's practically insulting.

We don't mean to trivialize what's gone before by discussing it in the context of the World of Darkness. Rather, this is one more opportunity to toast those who lost their lives that day, to raise a glass in their memory, and tell a few more stories. We hope you agree.

STORY HOOK: HALLOWEEN SÉANCE

For ten years after his death, Houdini's wife Bess held a séance every Halloween to try to contact her husband's spirit. The tenth year, she snuffed a candle in memory of him and never held another. However others took up her quest, and for years, each fall a séance is held in an attempt to contact the ghost of the magician. This year, something responded — but it wasn't Harry.

Now something is stalking the stage magicians of New York City, from birthday party performers to major stage artists. Even actors and actresses playing roles of wizards or magicians in Broadway plays are falling prey to unfortunate "accidents" often with lethal consequences. What was released, and can the krewa dissuade its ghostly wrath before it strikes again?

New York City Krewes

A city the size of New York can contain more Sin-Eaters and krewes than could be feasibly presented here. The following is a selection of some of the prominent krewes and individuals that make their home in the Big Apple. Depending on the style of your chronicle and the attitudes and actions of your players, they may serve as allies, resources, rivals, or enemies for your troupe's Sin-Eater characters.



Hudson's Heroes

Some NYC krewes are little more than gangs, be they benevolent protectors or self-appointed crime bosses. They control a zone, police a territory or simply reap what an area has to offer. Others are dedicated to a particular purpose – punishing those who abuse and kill children, making certain that the families of victims of military casualties are cared for or clearing out ghosts who make their presence too openly known. In most cases, the krewe's purpose is either defined by location or purpose. It's rare to find an area where there are enough supernatural issues of a particular kind in a tightly concentrated area to have the krewe defined by both. Hudson's Heroes are an exception to that rule.

When the terrorist attack toppled the Twin Towers in lower Manhattan, it caused a veritable spiritual tidal wave in the area. Death and destruction on that massive of a level in such a concentrated area is no small thing, and even years later the ghostly ramifications are still overwhelming. Hudson's Heroes have dedicated themselves specifically to dealing with the after-effects of that specific event, rarely leaving the area other than in the line of their self-appointed duties.

Even after years of work, the krewe has not yet managed to make a noticeable dent in the psychic maelstrom that is Ground Zero. They have lost several members over the years, due to either lethal accidents, hazardous job conditions or simple burn-out due to the overwhelming nature of the task before them. Through it all, however, Hudson has remained at the lead of the krewe, ever vigilant and always giving to support both her krewe and the ghostly mob to which they have dedicated themselves.

Hudson's krewe do not call themselves "Hudson's Heroes". In fact, they don't use a title for themselves at all. When referring to each other, they simply call their group "the krewe" or refer to each other by name, preferring not to draw attention to the relative fame they've received in the past years both in the city and beyond. However, others have spread the word of the Sin-Eaters who have dedicated themselves entirely to repairing some of

the horrors wrought on the spiritual world by the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, and the krewe's reputation both extensive and synonymous with selfless service.

Lea Hudson

Quote: *It's a full-time job. Help out or get out, I haven't got time to stand around and chat.*



Justin NORMAN

Background: Lea Hudson followed in her father's footsteps, braving peer pressure and overwhelming odds to make her way onto the New York City Fire Department. After years of hard work and dedication, she was promoted to the rank of Fire Marshall in August of 2001. She and her team were among the first responders after terrorist hijackers directed airliners into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. While scrambling to guide badly burned survivors out of the North Tower, the stairwell Lea was in collapsed. She died in that stairwell, girders crushing her legs as the smoke snuffed out her life. The last image she saw was a dark figure backlit by flame, stepping out of the rubble towards her. It asked her if she was ready to die. She responded "Not while there are people still trapped here," and

the figure stepped closer and closer again, until it merged with her and she found the strength to pull her legs from beneath the metal beams and extract herself from the wreckage.

She didn't have time that day to consider whether what she saw was a hallucination brought on by the fumes, a manifestation of her own will to survive or something far stranger, but over the weeks that followed, as she continued to hone in on the injured, dying and dead victims of the attack, she began to realize that something had changed. Time and time again she was pulled to the most horrific sites in the buildings, unable to resist the call of those whose physical forms had been destroyed, but who still lingered ethereally in the rubble. When the rescue efforts ended, and firefighters were barred from further rescue attempts, she still found herself haunted by those who had been killed in the attack. Driven by both her own survivor's guilt and her newly merged geist, she continued her efforts. She was first politely discouraged and then barred from the site as her attempts to aid those who the other rescue workers could not perceive took her into dangerous locations and situations. After being put on paid disability due to her injuries (and potential psychological scarring), Lea drew the attention of other Sin-Eaters who had also been drawn to Ground Zero, and eventually founded a krewa dedicated specifically to working with and for the tormented souls of the victims of that attack.

Appearance: Lea Hudson is a stocky woman with thick wavy hair that speaks of both her Italian and Spanish heritage. She left her firefighting uniform behind after the rescue efforts at the Towers ceased, and has officially been "retired" since then. Her normal attire now consists of comfortable walking shoes, sturdy canvas pants with lots of pockets for concealing whatever bits and pieces her duties may require of her, a T-shirt and jacket or cargo-vest. She frequently carries a messenger bag which not only provides extra space for documents or items she may require in her work, but gives those around her a "niche" to assign her to – few in the busy Manhattan area bother to think twice about a determined looking woman apparently shuttling business documents from one place to another.

Lea's geist carries the Aspect of the Faceless Victim – a young child whose features are blurred with dust, blood and tears. The Faceless Victim rarely speaks, but manages to communicate clearly with Lea. Whatever it says to her is enough to continue to spur her to unceasing service, even after nearly a decade in Ground Zero. Its keystone take the form of a small, scorched child's shoe.

Storytelling Hints: Lea's dedicated every waking hour over the years since the attack on the Twin Towers to providing some respite for the tortured souls created by the attack on the World Trade Center. Her day-to-day life is a complicated interweaving of trying to send on those ghosts who seek existence beyond Twilight, and attempting to minimize the harm done by those dead souls who have been driven to harm the still-living due to the madness, anger, or sorrow connected to their deaths. Over the past few years, she's built up quite a network of information and resources, all specifically tied to the lower Manhattan area, and her krewa is well-known for their work, both in local Sin-Eater circles and beyond.

Years of constant work, however, have taken their toll on Lea. She's become little more than a shell of her former self, and refuses to (or simply has no energy to) deal with anything that is not directly connected to the attack in some manner. Those who seek her aid for unrelated matters had better be willing to provide equal or better assistance to Lea on her own project, if they wish to have any chance of distracting her for any time.

Archetype: Advocate

Threshold: The Forgotten

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 1, Investigation 4, Medicine 4, Occult 3 (Specialty: Ghosts), Politics 1, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Larceny 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2 (Specialty: Urban)

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise 2 (Specialty: Lower Manhattan), Subterfuge 2

Merits: Allies (Firefighters) 3, Contacts 4 (Police, Psychiatrists, Street People, Clergy)

Willpower: 7

Synergy: 4

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 5

Speed: 12

Defense: 2

Health: 8

Psyche: 3

Manifestations: Boneyard 3, Oracle 3

Keys: Industrial, Stillness

Ceremonies: Krewa Binding, Pass On



The Invisibles

The Invisibles come from all over New York City – Flatbush, Cambria Heights, Cathedral Parkway, Spring Valley – anywhere that there is a sizeable population of Haitian immigrants or those who trace their heritage back to the island nation. Most were raised in and around the Voudon religion, although a few

members were skeptics or non-believers during their natural lives and converted after their deaths (and merger with a Loa-geist) convinced them of the veracity of the belief system.

Like many religiously focused krewes, the Invisibles cater to the spiritual needs of their specific religious community.

Considering the wide-spread nature of Voudon in New York City, the krewe tends to travel quite a bit, at least within the greater metropolitan area. They can rely upon their parishioners for support, which makes travel easier, but tend to be nomadic in nature because of the requirements of their duties.

Poor Martin

Quote: *I'm the last one you see while you're alive, and the first one you see when you die.*



Justin NORMAN

Background: Martin (aka Marty, aka Tinman, aka Poor Martin) was raised by bad folks. Sometimes they'd throw him in a closet to keep him out of the way, or take any excuse to "punish" him by denying him food. He grew up hard and cold, but he also grew up empty. He knew that there had to be something else out there to justify what he went through, and he kept looking for it even in the face of his abuse.

Then eventually his paternal grandfather showed up on the family's doorstep, looking to reconnect with his son and grandson. Martin's father allowed him to stay, because the old man seemed to have a little money. Martin didn't trust his grandfather at first, but eventually he realized that his grandfather had exactly what he was missing — faith.

It all went to hell, of course. Martin's father pissed off the wrong people, and they sent a message in a hail of gunfire that killed the entire family: parents, grandfather, and Martin as well. But waiting for him on the other side was the Bargain. He accepted without a second thought.

Appearance: Poor Martin is a skinny mulatto man, whose slight build and boyish features often result in him being mistaken for a tall child or early teen. In truth, he was 19 when he died (the first time) and he's been a Sin-Eater for over a decade,

while still retaining his youthful appearance. He's rarely seen without dark sunglasses on, even in doors, and often wears a black suit jacket over the top of whatever other clothing he's wearing, no matter how casual or incongruous the appearance might be.

Poor Martin's geist carries the Aspect of Baron Kriminel, the Ghede Loa cold-blooded "strong arm". Baron Kriminel appears as an impossibly thin man with skin as black as night itself. He wields a gleaming knife with a razor sharp blade, and his eyes are always covered with dark glasses. His key-stone is a similar blade, kept by Martin himself.

Storytelling Hints: Martin believes he was brought back from the brink of death for one reason and one reason only — to serve justice on other sinful souls who have committed unredeemable wrongs. While the other members of his krewe may seek to right wrongs in other fashions (as appropriate to their geists' Avatars), Martin tends to see one solution for every challenge — a quick death followed by destruction of any resulting ghost.

Those who wish to deal with Martin are most likely to succeed by convincing him that the course of action they want him to take is in keeping with his role as a holy assassin — without a religious or spiritual spin on the matter, they are unlikely to enlist his aid. Fortunately, he believes that the tendrils and ramifications of actions almost inevitably have their roots in matters of faith and the Loa, so it's not overly difficult to draw a connection he will believe. He will not, however, take any action against those who he perceives as devout and faithful members of the Voudon community, unless it can be proven without a doubt that they have knowingly taken evil and unforgivable actions.

Martin's krewe refers to themselves as the Invisibles, both in reference to their stealth and cunning, as well as an outright homage to the Ghede Loa Avatar forms their geists took on upon the krewe's formal creation.

Archetype: Reaper

Threshold: The Torn

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4,

Composure 2

Mental Skills: Computer 1, Crafts 2, Investigation 2,

Medicine 1, Occult 4 (Specialty: Voudon)

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Larceny 4,

Stealth 3, Survival (Specialty: Urban) 2, Weaponry 4

(Specialty: Knives)

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 2, Intimidation 4,

Persuasion 3, Socialize 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Fighting Finesse (Knife) 2, Haunt 4, Memento 3

(The Projector)

Willpower: 4
 Synergy: 6
 Virtue: Faith
 Vice: Wrath
 Initiative: 6
 Speed: 11
 Defense: 4
 Health: 7

Psyche: 3
 Manifestations: Rage 3, Marionette 2, Shroud 2
 Keys: Stigmata, Stillness
 Ceremonies: Krewe Binding, Mortis Mask
 Weapons/Attacks:

| Type | Damage | Range/Shots | Dice Pool |
|-------|--------|-------------|-----------|
| Knife | 2(L) | N/A | 11 |



The Castaways

In a city of 8 million people, there will always be a portion of the population that falls between the cracks. According to official records, more than 38,000 New York City citizens sleep in shelters each night, taking advantage of the fact that the city is legally required to provide shelter for anyone who asks. More, however, are either unwilling or unable to take advantage of that requirement, and spend their lives on the streets and alleys, sheltering in doorways, under bridges and overpasses, or in the underground tunnels and abandoned buildings of the city.

Denied the protection of a steady income, safe shelter, regular food supplies, and adequate health care, they often fall prey to those who are more powerful, more ruthless, or simply have more resources than they do. The homeless have few advocates before their deaths, and fewer still afterwards. Except for the Castaways.

According to official statistics, more than 100 people die in NYC shelters every year. They are the lucky deaths. The ones who pass in relative safety, sheltered from the cold, with a recent meal in their stomachs. The fatality rate is much higher among those not in shelters. They are more likely to die of exposure, of illness, of violence, than their shelter-dwelling brethren. Castaways come from both crowds, brought into one of the small cults that make up the Castaway's larger faction. They're recognized by existing Sin-Eaters from the group who serve the homeless population and keep tabs on when someone shows up talking about having died or almost died, and recruited to the krewe where they can use their new powers and knowledge to help those who cannot help themselves.

Led by Dregs, this mostly homeless krewe is an example of a Tier Two organization. They share communication and information across the streets and shelters of the city, using both Sin-Eaters and human homeless folks to pass information as needed. Individual neighborhoods or areas have small cults that monitor, serve and protect the homeless communities of that area, and each lends others support as they are able to. The krewe focuses almost entirely on the homeless or at-risk populations, clearing harmful influences (living and otherwise) out of the squatters' sites and homeless camps, easing the journey on for those vagrant spirits who have passed into the next state of existence, and in general keep to the "we take care of our own" paradigm.

Dregs

Quote: *Yeah, I might know something about that murder over on 57th. Then again, I might not. What's in it for me?*



Justin NORMAN

Background: Every year dozens of New Yorkers, most of them elderly or homeless or both, die due to exposure to the elements. Whether the relentless, sweltering heat of the summer or the bitter cold of winter, belonging to the population of America's most metropolitan city is not necessarily proof against death by exposure.

Dregs spent six years in Vietnam, and what seemed like another 60 on the streets of New York after he returned. He suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, along with other mental and emotional issues due to the things he'd done and seen during the war, and found that even attempting to jump through the governmental hoops required for someone of his experience to get aid from the Veteran's Association was too much to handle. He lived a quiet life, not aggressive to others who encountered him on the street — unless they took action against him. When challenged, however, his training and experience roared to the forefront and he quickly earned a reputation as someone not to mess with.



The weather, however, has no such qualms. One night during a particularly bad snow storm, Dregs chose the wrong grate to sleep on. Halfway through the night the heat stopped and the homeless veteran died in his sleep – or would have, had he not been visited by a ghostly vision of storm incarnate. Dregs accepted his offer, and the information the geist brought to the union encouraged the long-time street dweller to begin pulling together a force to aid those who were not so fortunate. His first duty was to shepherd the spirit of another man who had shared the same grate (and who had not been so fortunate as Dregs in being chosen for another fate.)

Appearance: Dregs' skin is dusky and his hair mostly dark, although whether this is from genetics or simple lack of hygienic practices is anyone's guess. His clothing appears to be a mish-mash of multi-layered cast-offs and dumpster-diving finds, much of it either too big or too small for his short-but-burly frame. Even in the summer months, he wears heavy fingerless gloves, boots, a heavy coat and at least one stocking cap. He speaks through a snarled grey beard that seems as much a repository for crumbs from earlier meals than any particular fashion statement.

While he still fosters a haggard appearance, Dregs' merging with his geist cleared away a great deal of the mental issues that he'd suffered from since returning from the war. He's still prone to flares of temper, but he has a mind like a steel trap and a cunning wit that serves him, and his krewes, well.

Dregs' geist is something he calls the Ravenous Storm, a personification of constantly moving, bitterly cold and ever-hungry wind. It appears as a translucent figure with a great, gaping maw and is always accompanied by inexplicably bitter gusts of wind. Ravenous Storm is easily half-again as tall as a mortal man, nearly two-dimensional, and covered in a tattered shroud that whips and snaps with each icy gust. Its keystone is a chunk of fused glass, the result of a lightning strike.

Storytelling Hints: Dreg personally began serving the homeless community both to protect them against malevolent spirits and to guide those of the group who had died themselves. He took the responsibility seriously, adopting it immediately upon becoming a Sin-Eater. Over time, however, he encountered others with similar goals and put together a small band of Sin-Eaters over the course of the next few years. This was the original cult of the Castaways, a half-dozen

Sin-Eaters with similar views (although a great deal of diversity in how they went about accomplishing them.) As more and more Sin-Eaters arose from the city's homeless population, they were brought into the krewes, where most made a natural fit. Soon, however, the group became too large to function as a single cult. As new members joined, they split off into smaller units but retained a central channel based on protecting one's "family" (to be read as the members of one's community), sharing resources when possible, doing what needs to be done (no matter how dirty or unpleasant the job), and persevering regardless of the circumstances.

The Castaways comprise one of the most extensive and effective information networks in New York City. Because of his position at the apex of this network, there is little information that Dregs doesn't know or can't find out about what is happening around the city.

Archetype: Bonepicker

Threshold: The Prey

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 4,

Composure 2

Mental Skills: Investigation 4, Medicine 1, Occult 3, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Firearms

(Specialty: Pistol) 3, Larceny 3, Stealth 2, Survival

(Specialty: Urban Street) 4, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation 4, Persuasion

2, Streetwise (Specialty: Homeless), Subterfuge 3

Merits: Contacts 3 (Drug Dealers, Street Gangs,

Homeless), Iron Stomach, Haunt 5

Willpower: 4

Synergy: 6

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 4

Speed: 10

Defense: 2

Health: 8

Psyche: 4

Manifestations: Boneyard 2, Hex 3, Shroud 2

Keys: Cold Wind, Industrial, Stillness

Ceremonies: Finding, Krewes Binding, Distant Voice

Weapons/Attacks:

| Type | Dmg | Rng/Shots | Dice Pool |
|---------------|------|---------------|-----------|
| Brawl | 0(B) | N/A | 6 |
| Pistol, Heavy | 3(L) | 30/60/120 7+1 | 9 |
| Sap | 1(B) | N/A | 6 |



Teknival

Led by Lolly, this krewa embodies the ideal of having looked into the face of death and turned around to embrace life. Most are between 16 and 25, and many met their geists in the throes of accidental overdoses, negative reactions to party-pills laced with harmful substances, or even death by dehydration brought on by a lethal combination of highly caffeinated energy drinks, Ecstasy, extreme heat, and strenuous physical activity during a dance party. That hasn't stopped Teknival, however. The young krewa consists predominantly of Celebrants, although there is more than just partying to their lives. They work as hard as they play, doing their best to police and protect their peers in the rave scene using the skills and abilities that their new existences as Sin-Eaters give to them. Those who target the party crowd may well find themselves receiving a visit from the krewa — anything that brings down the party is a serious threat.

Lolly

Quote: “Dance close to the line, but not across it. There’s nothing you want over on the other side.”



Justin NORMAN

Background: Growing up in an upper-middle/lower-upper class family in NYC, Lolly took many things for granted before dying. Ze (Lolly insists on all members of Teknival using the fabricated “ze” an “hir” pronouns when they’re talking about Lolly) didn’t have to worry about food, shelter, or any of the basic necessities of life, and barely recognized that there were those in the city who did. Instead, fed on a constant supply of hired-help and designer luxuries, ze took it all for granted and threw himself into a series of self-destructive behaviors designed to “show” hir up-scale parents how unhappy ze was. By the time ze was

16, ze was drinking, using a broad variety of recreational drugs, skipping school, staying out all night, and going to raves. It was at one of those clandestine dance parties that ze met hir end — and hir new beginning. Passed out in a corner from heat exhaustion and a lethally-spiked dose of X, ze slowly slipped away from the mortal coil to the trance bass-beat of her favorite band — and was met by hir geist who offered hir another chance.

Appearance: Lolly is a young androgyne. Ze prides himself on the fact that not even the members of hir krewa are completely sure if ze is male or female. The uncertainty is something Lolly carefully cultivates, by blending both male and female clothing styles, personal habits, and other affectations. Zi believes this blurred perception strips away preconceived notions of hir nature, and allows her to be accepted (or not) wholly for the individual ze is, without labels or stereotypes.

Lolly’s wild clothing and jewelry are not uncommon for “candyraiders” of hir social clique — ze’s prone to neon colors, fake fur boots, striped stockings and fingerless gloves, along with the ever-present glo-sticks and LED jewelry that give hir particular party-group its defining bright appearance. Only the incorporation of skulls, skeletons, and other death motifs (in equally bright colors and glow-in-the-dark finishes) set Lolly (and the rest of Teknival) apart from most of the rest of the party scene. Ze often wears faux hair falls that reach nearly to hir waist, featuring bows, lace, and big chunky yarn or tubular crinoline dreadlocks.

Lolly’s geist carries the Aspect of the Candy Man, a slick, sharply featured individual with eyes that flash like the lights inside of a busy dance club. Lolly suspects that, once upon a time, hir geist may have been a drug dealer himself, as he is particularly adamant about the krewa taking revenge on those who abuse the dealer-client relationship to the client’s detriment — and insistent that there’s always a steady supply of ingestibles for the latest do. Its keystone is a long, lacquered fingernail with a peculiar glyph painted on it.

Storytelling Hints: Despite Lolly’s youthful appearance, ze has been patrolling the raves and nightclubs of NYC for more than a decade. Ze and her krewa, who have numbered between three and ten at various times over the last twelve years, have a reputation for making a party. From college frat beer brawls to goth clubs to BDSM play parties to impromptu raver-balls, if Teknival shows up, everyone is pretty much guaranteed to have a good time. Lolly’s krewa also helps organize and run a suicide prevention hotline specifically focused at young gay and transgendered folks, which not only allows them to help prevent a lot of unnecessary deaths, but also gives them an early warning heads-up about situations that may be (or have the potential to become) ghostly danger-zones.

Archetype: Celebrant

Threshold: The Forgotten

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 3
Mental Skills: Computer 3, Crafts (Specialty: Clothing) 2, Investigation 2, Medicine (Specialty: Recreational Drugs) 3, Occult 2
Physical Skills: Athletics (Specialty: Dancing) 3, Drive 1, Larceny 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2
Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression 1, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 3, Socialize 4, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2
Merits: Barfly 1, Striking Looks 4, Contacts 1 (Drug Dealers, Club Kids), Memento 2 (a vanitas in the form of a mix tape filled with the voices of young ghosts)

Willpower: 5
Synergy: 4
Virtue: Charity
Vice: Gluttony
Initiative: 7
Speed: 11
Defense: 3
Health: 8
Psyche: 5
Manifestations: Boneyard 1, Marionette 3, Caul 3
Keys: Industrial, Passion, Phantasmal
Ceremonies: Krewe Binding, Distant Voice, Plasmic Manifestation, Lemure's Lure



Phasma Sodalitas

For every act of practical application, there is a source of knowledge and research for its own sake. While there are no currently known global-spanning krewes to collect and all of the various and sundry bits of information uncovered by Sin-Eaters, Phasma Sodalitas does its best to serve that niche. This academic-focused krewe came together under the leadership of Isaac Bristol, former senior anthropology professor at Columbia University, and has made itself available to Sin-Eaters around the world as both a repository for information and a central resource house for research. In doing so, they have aided (and garnered favors from) more krewes than most Sin-Eaters are even aware exist.

Isaac Bristol

Quote: *Classifications of this type can be found in various cultures as far back as Mesopotamia. However, I must admit this is the first time I've seen one manifesting on a subway.*



Justin Norman

Background: While on a Columbia University anthropological dig outside of Alexandria, Isaac Bristol wandered away from the rest of his group. This was not an uncommon act for Professor Bristol, who often took exceedingly long and rambling strolls regardless of location, as a means of gathering his thoughts about the given quandary at hand. This time, however, he'd forgotten to take the necessary precautions against sunstroke. Dizzy and fatigued, he was soon lost in the desert. Realizing his error, he began searching for a base point from which to alert searchers to his fate. Hours of hiking produced nothing, and the effects of dehydration and sunstroke began worsening. Still he wandered, knowing that the chances of a search group finding him without any landmarks or structures by which to navigate were infinitesimal. Delirious after hours in the sweltering desert heat, his path eventually curved back upon itself and he stumbled across an abandoned ruin, less than a mile from where the university group had established their base of operations. Unable to go further, he collapsed amidst the rubble. In his dying dreams, he was approached by a woman who spoke to him in first ancient Greek and then Latin, offering him "The Water of Life." He accepted, and drank from the liquid she offered him. Refreshed, he followed the instructions of the ghostly apparition (which had now merged with him on a fundamental level) back to the university dig site. He was never able to re-find the ruin, and left the university soon after returning to the States.

Appearance: Unlike many Sin-Eaters, Bristol is in his later years, having been "saved" by his geist near to his retirement. Balding, with a fringe of white hair, he looks every one of his 60-some years, and dresses in tweed blazers and polyester pants, every inch the university professor even this long after leaving his post. Bristol moves with

the quick, almost spritely, gestures of a man accustomed to working on a deadline, any slowing due to age having been mostly erased during his rebirth as a Sin-Eater. He has a razor-sharp mind, capable of remembering even the minutest details of a given scene, but still surrounds himself with lists, notes, and other paperwork-reminders, as if afraid that his memory will not serve him at some point in the future.

Bristol's geist has been imbued with the Aspect of Hecate, "Queen of Ghosts", Greek goddess of wilderness, witchcraft, ghosts, and the underworld. She appears as a tri-faced woman in an ancient Roman gown, bearing a torch in one hand and a scroll in the other. The keystone she gave Bristol is a coin with the face of a dog on one side and a horse's head on the other — and the face of a serpent on a third side that manifests when one turns the coin over and over.

Storytelling Hints: Bristol is a researcher, more interested in prying secrets out of the dead than acting as a guide to the dead himself. He believes the purpose of his second life is to unravel the great mysteries of death, and has gathered a like-minded band of the insatiably curious and desperately knowledge-hungry around him. He may make a useful ally if he stands to gain lore from cooperation, or a cunning rival if he feels the players' krewe is trying to gather some interesting secret for themselves.

Phasma Sodalitas (the Secret Ghost Society) are centered out of NYC, although they have members in remote locations like London, Alexandria, and Portland, Oregon. The members are predominantly academics, each whose geist takes on the Aspect of one of the classic gods, goddesses, or monsters from an ancient culture. The group includes some of the world's greatest authorities on legend, religion, and historic spirituality, and while they tend to be more thinkers, teachers, and students than "do-ers" they are an incredibly useful resource to any Sin-Eater faced with a mystery.

One of Phasma Sodalitas' pet projects is a clandestine, heavily-encrypted database of information sources called "Celsus" after a famous ancient Roman library. While the database contains no occult information itself, it archives bibliographies, collections, and contents of occult libraries scattered across the globe, and can point researchers in the right direction to uncover information specific to their topic of study.

Archetype: Necromancer

Threshold: The Silent

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Anthropology) 5, Computer 3,

Investigation 4, Occult 4, Politics 2, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Hiking) 2, Drive 1, Larceny 3, Stealth 1, Survival (Remote Locations) 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression (Dissertations) 2,

Intimidation 2, Persuasion 4, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Eidetic Memory 2, Encyclopedic Knowledge 4,

Language (Latin) 1, Allies (Librarians) 3, Contacts (Librarians, Historians, University Professors, Museum Curators) 4,

Resources 2

Willpower: 7

Synergy: 6

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 6

Speed: 8

Defense: 2

Health: 8

Psyche: 4

Manifestations: Hex 4, Oracle 4

Keys: Cold Wind, Grave-Dirt, Phantasmal

Ceremonies: Most of the ceremonies in Chapter Three, at the Storyteller's discretion.



CELSUS: A RESOURCE OF RESOURCES

Celsus is a virtual database that cross-references occult resources available to Sin-Eaters across the globe. It includes everything from private libraries owned or accessible by Sin-Eaters to public (yet sometimes nearly forgotten) archives dotted across the world. Some of the resources are commonplace — the occult and anthropology sections of the New York Public Library system are referenced there, as are the contents of the New York Society Library, a 200-year-old private collection available by subscription only. Other resources are a bit more clandestine. One designation points to a collection of 12th century manuscripts held by an obscure monastery deep in the Swiss Alps, and another to a series of cuneiform tablets held by a private collector in eastern Iraq.

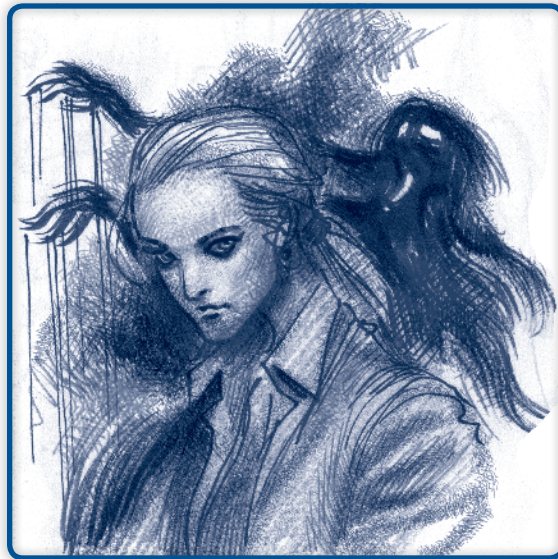
Not all of the indexed resources are written materials. Some of the world's experts on various fields are referenced in a sub-system of the database. However, whether they are able to barter with Bristol or other members of Phasma Sodalitas for this information is another matter. No amount of monetary influence will gain them access to Celsus' nigh-limitless information bank. Phasma Sodalitas trades only in information, so an inquiring krewe had best come prepared.

The Unaffiliated

Not all prominent Sin-Eaters in New York City belong to a krew. Some have been cast out, some are the sole remaining survivor of an ill-fated krew, and some simply prefer to work alone. Below are a few of the notable “solo operators” in the New York City area. Like the prominent krewes, these characters can be used as allies, rivals, or even enemies of player characters, depending on how the Storyteller’s needs and desires, and how the player characters choose to interact with them.

Jacqueline “Goldie” Goldschmidt

Quote: *I fail to see the issue. It's not like he had any use for those funds where he is now.*



Background: Jacqueline Goldschmidt had clawed her way to the top of the Manhattan real estate market, leaving a trail of broken friendships and thwarted rivals in her wake. A hard-hitting, high-stakes business woman, Goldie died of heart attack at the age of 35. She was given a second chance at life by her geist, the Kingmaker, and expected to have to slow down or take things a bit easier after merging. The Kingmaker, however, had other plans. Since becoming a Sin-Eater, she has turned her new “life” into an even greater financial success than before her death. Using her own background, along with the Kingmaker’s secrets and knowledge, she’s parlayed blackmail and Sin-Eater tricks into a powerbase that few mundane business aficionados could hope to match.

Appearance: Goldie is a perfectly preserved and immaculately maintained woman of indeterminate middle-age. Her physical appearance, both body and clothing, is without flaw, from her four-inch tall business heels to her custom-tailored power suits.

She never appears in public without being dressed to kill, although usually only figuratively. Her waist-length blonde hair, the source of her nickname, is most often worn back in a severe French twist, better to put forth the image of a professional woman who is not to be trifled with.

Goldie’s geist takes the form of a faceless man with elongated fingers from which puppet strings extend out into nothingness. The strings are taut, as if attached to something, but what exactly they connect to is a mystery, as they disappear a few feet from his fingertips. Its keystone is a gilt orb, small enough to fit into a pocketbook.

Storytelling Hints: Goldie’s always looking for an angle. She believes in learning everything she can about a situation, then trusting her gut to point her in the right direction, and her gut is rarely wrong. She’s amassed a veritable mountain of resources over the years, and she’s willing to use it on others behalf — as long as the price is right. She collects favors like some folks collect baseball cards, waiting until the perfect time to call one in.

She isn’t in a krew, predominantly because she’s not found anyone that she’d prefer to bond with long-term rather than just use and throw away. In fact, she usually eschews the company of other Sin-Eaters, preferring to surround herself with those who don’t understand what she is now and can’t complain about her using her powers for utterly selfish means. However, many within the ghostly world have become upset with her predations and may turn to other Sin-Eaters to attempt to get them to stop Goldie’s abuses.

Archetype: Bonepicker

Threshold: The Stricken

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Real Estate) 4, Computer 3, Investigation (Digging up secrets) 3, Occult 2, Politics 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Drive 1, Larceny 1, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Empathy (Body Language) 3, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 4, Socialize 2, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (Finance) 4, Contacts (Finance, High Society, Government) 3, Resources 5, Retainer 3

Willpower: 8

Synergy: 8

Virtue: Fortitude

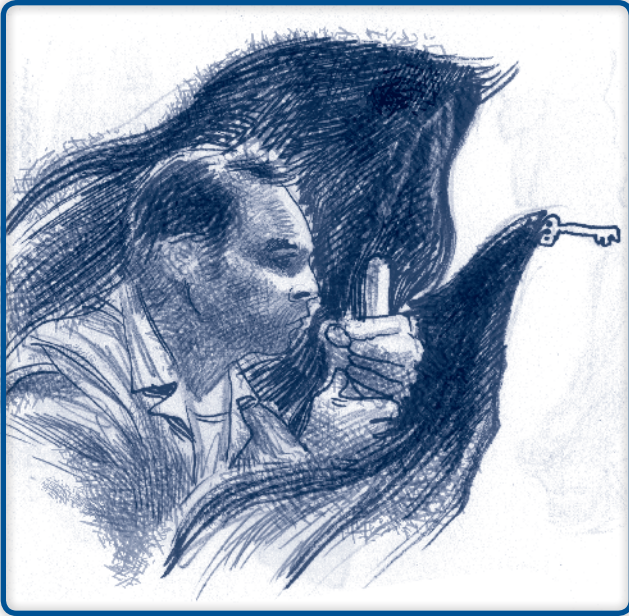
Vice: Greed

Initiative: 7

Speed: 9
 Defense: 3
 Health: 7
 Psyche: 5
 Manifestations: Hex 3, Marionette 2, Oracle 4
 Keys: Industrial, Passion, Phantasmal

Jacob “The Doorman” Doarmund

Quote: *It’s not about you. It’s almost never about you.*



Justin NORMAN

Background: Much of the city makes its living in small quiet ways, going about their daily business as the world’s perception of the busiest city on earth looks over and past their subtle contributions. Jacob Doarmund began working at Calvary Cemetery in Woodland, Queens as a young man. At first it was evenings and weekends, helping out with the landscaping while finishing school, and then after graduation, as a full-time job. He married his wife in a church near the grounds and buried her in a private plot a decade later, never marrying again. Over time he rose from crew to foreman to head foreman, although he voluntarily went back to being a sort-of independent groundskeeper after his near-fatal bout with emphysema a decade ago. Since then, Jacob “The Doorman” has made it his personal duty to escort any lost souls buried at the cemetery who may not yet understand that they have changed states after their death. His job at the cemetery allows him access both to death notices and funeral information, as well as personal contact with family members and other mourners. As well, the sheer size of the cemetery affords him a great deal of flexibility and freedom as he goes about maintaining the flora and fixtures of the 365-acre graveyard.

Jacob himself, a heavy smoker for his entire life, “died” of emphysema and complications related to advanced stage lung cancer in the mid-1990s. He has continued to smoke heavily

after becoming a Sin-Eater, referring to his habit with a bitter irony as “putting another nail in the ol’ coffin.”

Appearance: Jacob is a short, stocky man, and no stranger to hard work. He’s continued to hold his maintenance and landscaping position after “recovering” from his lung issues, and tends to wear blue denim, long-sleeved coveralls with his name embroidered on the pocket, whether on or off the job.

His geist is an entity he calls the Rattlebox. It manifests as a cloaked figure, apparently wrapped in a shroud. It communicates by shaking its body, which gives off a sound of rattling and jingling, like bones and keys. Jacob is able to understand the messages, of course. The Rattlebox’s keystone is itself in the form of a key, an ancient and tarnished brass skeleton key that looks as though it belongs in a museum.

Storytelling Hints: Jacob is rough, gruff, and sympathetic toward the dead. He may grump at those who come “poking around” his cemetery, but he’s always willing to aid those in need, especially the newly departed and their families. He’s plain-spoken, and not afraid to call a spade a spade, so those who expect social niceties or polite lies are often offended by his blunt mannerisms. On the other hand, he’s got a rather impressive reputation among the Sin-Eaters of the city as someone who is quietly dedicated to his self-appointed duty and persists in doing what he feels is right regardless of the lack of reward or pressure to do otherwise.

Archetype: Gatekeeper

Threshold: The Stricken

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts (Landscaping) 4, Investigation 1,

Occult (Ghosts) 2, Science (Horticulture) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Weaponry (Ax) 3

Social Skills: Intimidation 4, Socialize 2 (Religious Communities), Streetwise 3

Merits: Contacts 2 (Clergy, Funeral Directors), Haunt 2,

Memento 4

Willpower: 8

Synergy: 5

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 6

Speed: 10

Defense: 2

Health: 8

Psyche: 4

Manifestations: Boneyard 4, Caul 2, Shroud 1, Marionette 1

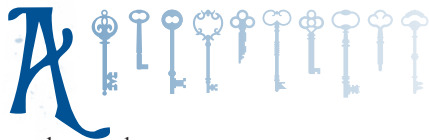
Keys: Grave-Dirt, Industrial, Phantasmal

Ceremonies: Pass On, Speaker of the Dead, Listening to the Spectral Howl

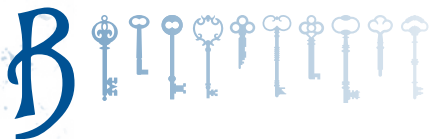
Weapons/Attacks:

| Type | Damage | Range/Shots | Dice Pool |
|----------|--------|-------------|-----------|
| Brawl | 0(B) | N/A | 6 |
| Large Ax | 3(L) | N/A | 10 |

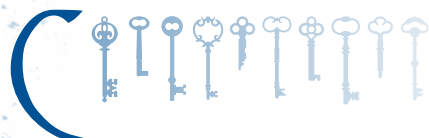
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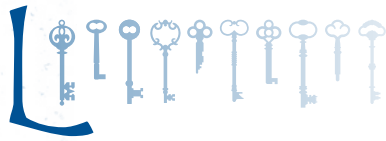
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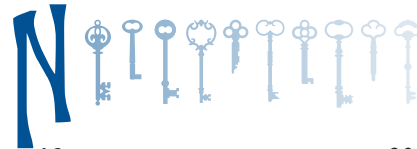


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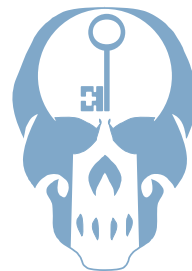
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Name:
Player:
Concept:

Geist:
Virtue:
Vice:

Archetype:
Threshold:
Krewe:

Attributes

POWER Intelligence: ●○○○○ Strength: ●○○○○ Presence: ●○○○○
FINESSE Wits: ●○○○○ Dexterity: ●○○○○ Manipulation: ●○○○○
RESISTANCE Resolve: ●○○○○ Stamina: ●○○○○ Composure: ●○○○○

Skills

MENTAL
(-3 Unskilled)

Academics _____ ○○○○○
Computer _____ ○○○○○
Crafts _____ ○○○○○
Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Medicine _____ ○○○○○
Occult _____ ○○○○○
Politics _____ ○○○○○
Science _____ ○○○○○

PHYSICAL
(-1 Unskilled)

Athletics _____ ○○○○○
Brawl _____ ○○○○○
Drive _____ ○○○○○
Firearms _____ ○○○○○
Larceny _____ ○○○○○
Stealth _____ ○○○○○
Survival _____ ○○○○○
Weaponry _____ ○○○○○

SOCIAL
(-1 Unskilled)

Animal Ken _____ ○○○○○
Empathy _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ○○○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○
Persuasion _____ ○○○○○
Socialize _____ ○○○○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○

Other Traits

MERITS

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

FLAWS

MANIFESTATIONS

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
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_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

CEREMONIES

WEAPONS

HEALTH

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□□□

WILLPOWER

○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

PLASM

□□□□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□□□□

PSYCHE

○○○○○○○○○○○○

SYNERGY

10 _____ ○
9 _____ ○
8 _____ ○
7 _____ ○
6 _____ ○
5 _____ ○
4 _____ ○
3 _____ ○
2 _____ ○
1 _____ ○

Keys: _____

Size: _____

Defense: _____

Initiative Mod: _____

Speed: _____

Armor: _____

Experience: _____

Attributes: 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Record Archetype and Threshold • Manifestations: 3 dots • Select 1 Key from Threshold and 1 to represent keystone • Merits 7 • (Buying the fifth dot in Attributes, Skills or Merits costs two points) • Health = Stamina + Size • Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = 5 for adult human-sized • Defense = Lowest of Dexterity or Wits • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity + 5 • Starting Synergy = 7 • Psyche starts at 1 dot • Plasm starts at 5 points.

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AND PREDATORS LIKE TO HIDE FROM THEIR PREY,
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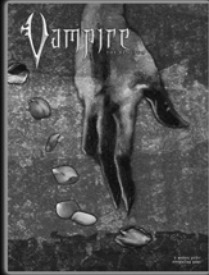
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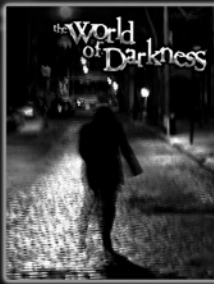
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