

# GHOST

THE  
SIN-EATERS  
SECOND EDITION



KICKSTARTER MANUSCRIPT PREVIEW

Part 5

# Chapter Seven: Ghost Stories

*All that you touch  
You Change.  
All that you Change  
Changes you.  
The only lasting truth  
Is Change.*

Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

**Geist: The Sin-Eaters** taps into the very fabric of what makes us human: our stories. No matter who you are, you tell a story, be it a soul-shattering, sweeping tale of surviving the horrors of war or the steps of a mundane web search of how you bought this book. Each of these stories serve as the building blocks of life, and that's the heart of **Geist**. It's a story of death, but also one of celebration. The dead are speaking and the Sin-Eaters listen. They may lend aid to the dead, flee from their calling, or exploit their power for their own gain. Those choices form the story of your chronicle, tell the life of your Sin-Eater, and remember the life of the dead.

If you are reading these words, then you are the Storyteller and get to breathe life into brief snippets, weaving scenes of action, drama, romance, or tragedy. Multiple scenes build into a story, and multiple stories into a chronicle.

This chapter aims to assist you in that privilege.

What does a Storyteller do? Storytelling is an evolving, cooperative art form, equal parts improvisation and planning, and it varies for each Storyteller, as not everyone values the same style of play. In brief, though:

- A Storyteller fills in the blanks for the players — the players are the actors on the stage and their actions influence everything. Those actions may be in response to some world event outside of their control, but more often they're built on the choices made before.
- The Storyteller plays the supporting cast (antagonist, childhood friend, or that harassing coworker that stole their lunch from the fridge), and describes the world and the ramifications of the characters' actions. Do they help that wailing ghost child who doesn't know she's dead, or do they leave her in the streets reliving her last moments of life until madness overtakes her? Each of those actions have consequences.
- Lastly, the Storyteller is the neutral arbiter of the rules, interpreting die rolls, adjudicating mechanics, and ensuring that the game is fair and fun for everyone.

The rules below (and in general), are tools to empower you and are completely optional. Pick and choose what works best for your table, your players, and yourself. Simply summarized, **Geist** is a collaborative telling of a story that is at times mystery, horror, humor, and other genres to be defined as you play. The players' responsibility is to experience the emotions, drive the story, and be willing to take part. It is the Storyteller's job to make that story possible. It's a collaborative experience.

## Theme

Let's talk about the big ideas, the backdrop of the world you are trying to create and how to evoke it. Telling the players a main theme of the chronicle lets them shape their characters. If the game's main arc is the crushing weight of the two-tier justice system on minorities versus a theme of the mundanity of daily life, the two can be interwoven, but highlighting the theme of injustice lets the players know their characters will be engaging with police, wrongly accused as perpetrators, and there may be a racist Attorney General returning laws to "separate but equal."

## Those Left Behind

Car accidents, slipping in the shower, dying in the line of duty, being struck by a plummeting toilet from a disused space station, falling in a duel for the affection of your parent. Comically or horrifically, death comes for us all. At that moment, the things left undone rush back to you: kissing your daughter on the forehead before dashing out the door, graduating from college, getting one last smoke, finishing your novel. So many unfinished things. Things that define you, empower you, and tie you to the world. Things that haunt the ghost that can't find their daughter, put words to the page, or move on.

That endless frustration of death forces them to lash out, becoming things of nightmares. One inhabits a house and causes the walls to bleed every time a three-year-old child walks in as a way to say "I love you." The child flees and the cycle continues. Any person that passes the site of a burned-down bookstore from some 50 years ago, located at the disused 111 E. Memory Lane, catches the whiff of smoke from the site, then immolates in a flaming column, hearing a cackling laughter before finally dying.

No ghost story can exist without tragedy. Ghost stories are terrifying until one looks deeper at the specter that was once alive. Are they reliving the moment of their death? Have they slipped into madness? Are they simply evil? All can be true. Sin-Eaters see and hear the dead. They seek a sense of understanding and peace with the geist that gave them a second chance at life, along with a sense of what the dead experience. The Sin-Eater's own Burden constantly pulls at them. Sin-Eaters peer into the heart of the ghost and see its true intention, not the ghastly expression of frustrated violence. The Sin-Eater knows that could have been them, if not for the geist and the Bargain. Sin-Eaters and ghosts are still human.

## Why We Fight

Do you fight to avoid the senility of the Underworld? For the thrill of feeling alive? Because it is the right thing to do? Did circumstance draw you into it? Or because if you don't, who will?

Sin-Eaters are objects in space, pulled toward the black hole of their Burdens; they can't escape that draw if they ever hope to find a semblance of peace. Their synergy with the death-delaying geist is bound into resolving the spirit's Remembrances. Each can be avoided, but you have a character at conflict with itself and tormented with self-enforced limitations to their second life.

But that does not answer the question of why we fight. The Sin-Eater may dedicate themselves to moving on but that takes time, research, allies and understanding. No being is ever one thing or one task. To truly be alive is to be in conflict with something, be it ideology, fellow Sin-Eaters, or Chthonic Gods.

## Breaking the Cycle

We are born into a world that categorizes us, puts us in neat small boxes, and places its expectations upon us. The words of the lofty, privileged elite constantly reinforce their power

through threats and deputized, jackbooted goons. That is reality; that is existence. Countless socially accepted slights and actions break down a person's will until they are a husk of what they should be. The Reapers that hunt down ghosts to drag them back into the Underworld to serve, to obey their authority. The CEO that constantly asks a female director to take minutes in a meeting. The black man trailed through a store by the clerks. The ghost-eaters that consume the dead for their own aggrandizement. The cabs that never stop for you unless you have a white friend. But still, we all strive to make it better, or carve out a small piece of heaven for ourselves and our loved ones, or to make it easier for those coming after us.

That reality does not have to be the Sin-Eaters'. They walk in the world carrying the knowledge of what life is for the living and the dead. Both sides of the coin are told to submit, to heel, to know their place, and many do. It's easier to be a sheep and hope something will change. But Sin-Eaters, by their very nature, are radicals, change makers who walk in both worlds with the power and benefits of each.

Sin-Eaters have broken the cycle of death, the thing that comes for all living beings and shapes the world through their fear of it. No defined culture, no defined role, and no purpose other than that what they choose puts them against the grain of the imposed system.

## Mood

As the Storyteller, you do a lot to set the scene and mood. The music you use at the start of the session, the challenges the players encounter, the names you choose for places and people. A story with a recurring threat called the Duchess of Ham is going to have a different tone to a storyline focused around returning ghosts in the killing fields of Cambodia to their family.

A story should aim for a consistent mood in terms of consequences and narrative arc (will this be gritty realness with savage lingering consequences? How likely are musical numbers or a protagonist turning into a puppet? However, the tone needs to vary so players don't get worn out hitting the same notes repeatedly — a story about the killing fields might need the Duchess of Ham for a chapter of light relief.

**Geist** encourages stories where facing death and horror can lead to transformation, finding ways that stretch beyond horror to the hope, resilience, and survival that lies beyond. Dystopias can be easy to imagine just by looking out the window, but as the Storyteller you can challenge yourself and players to stare into the abyss and then imagine how to bridge the chasms we face.

Think big, so that you can make story and detail choices that challenge us to new life, be it in the moment, or into the future.

## Hope, Joy, & Healing

Life is precious, adaptive, marvelous, and strange, and no one knows that better than those touched by death. While others fight death, Sin-Eaters sit with death, have beers with death, dance with death until the sun comes up and their feet bleed. A storyline that could superficially be about reuniting a ghost with their family could lead Sin-Eaters to spend time with cultures that have danced their way through generations of dispossession and premature death.

Sin-Eaters help ghosts find closure, sometimes as detectives, sometimes as combat monsters, sometimes as a friend who asks the right questions, and sometimes by teaching someone how to sing the blues or put on some dancing shoes.

Hope is real, even in the darkest hours; Reapers can be and have been stopped, the Underworld can be overthrown, the all-night takeaway still does great kebabs, and today you can taste them. Trauma accumulates, but it can also be faced and overcome; characters can resolve their Burdens and even their shattered geists can find healing. The path is hard, and always uncertain, but **Geist** holds space at the crossroads, a place of transformation, joy, celebration, and transition. Nothing stays the same, not even death.

## Modernity

Sin-Eaters tap into ancient forces and cultures, but culture is not stagnant. Culture is adaptive, smart, and draws from many sources. Adapting to the times does not make a culture less real: In a world that struggles to understand its post-colonial self, indigenous peoples order books from anthropologists and can leverage online platforms to challenge interpretations. Message sticks that used to be carried by hand from person to person before a ceremony could begin, can now be express posted. New mediums allow for different cultural expressions and preservation, from paint and dye technology that puts bright colors in the hands of everyone, not just the rich, to colors that endure longer where ochre would flake away. 3D scanning and printing allow us to touch what was reserved for the elite or could only be imagined.

We live in a time with more technology, adaptations, and expectations of dialogue than ever before. Powerful imbalances exist, internet access appears to be ubiquitous to those who live with it, creating equal-access illusions. However, internet is still difficult or prohibitively expensive the further away you live from infrastructure. High-tech and low-tech live next together; more people own cell phones than have access to toilets or running water. People who do not know how to open the hoods of their luxury cars are neighbors with people who keep their cars rolling by using laundry detergent for radiator fluid and stuffing spinifex into a flat tire.

Culture, technology, magic, past, present, and dreams of the future interweave with each other to make a whole; they are not binaries in opposition.

Ghost stories are part of our oral histories, the local important stories that are marginalized by larger historical narratives. Textbooks might not remember who those people were, but the land and the lives they touched remember; sometimes their stories are rediscovered every generation anew.

Each generation discovers innovative edges that are quaintly familiar to other times, cultures, or places. In **Geist**, history, modernity, and concepts of what modernity *is* are embodied and talk to each other. The past always has unexpected layers.

## Conflict

The world is full of conflict; no living or reborn being can avoid it. Conflict is the heart of scenarios, it's the driving force behind the story.

## Sin-Eater vs. Sin-Eater

Sin-Eaters are individuals, first and foremost. Like most people, they don't necessarily get along just because they have a similar background. Any number of conflicts can arise between the Bound, which can range between battles for territory, access to Avernian Gates, different approaches to helping ghosts, significantly opposed ideology, or just a gut reaction.

Both sides understand how hard it is to kill one another and the repercussions associated with it. Bring up the issue of how to handle differences. Do they kill each other? Try to starve out the other? Bring in human allies and have the police roust or arrest them?

Story Hook:

The players' krewes recently took over an old Baptist church and its attendant cemetery, and now controls access to the only Avernian Gate in the city. A rival krewes believes the only true release for a ghost is being sent to the Underworld, and they need the krewes' Gate to do it. To add an extra layer of tension, the players could have wrested the gate from a third krewes, who charged a hefty fee to use it.

## Sin-Eater vs. Ghost

Ghosts populate every corner of the world, unseen by most and constantly in need. They range from desperate people in need of aid, to irritating hangers-on plaguing the living, to monstrous spectral nightmare things killing everyone in sight.

Ghosts see Sin-Eaters as vehicles for their needs. They need someone who can see, hear and understand them. What lengths might a ghost go to for a Sin-Eater to carry out its last wishes?

Story Hook:

Shane, eight years old, is a ward of the state who has bounced from home to home and orphanages for the last six years. The young boy is haunted by the ghost of his dead family's dog, Robot. Robot won't let anyone get too close to Shane and has scared every foster family into returning him to the homeless shelter. Robot believes she is protecting Shane, but she's destroying his every chance at happiness.

## Sin-Eater vs. Geist

At the moment of the Bargain, both geist and Bound look into each other's souls and see the true nature of the being before them. In most cases, moments before death, the Bound agrees to join with the geist, but once bonded, the two don't necessarily remain in sync.

Story Hook (Example):

The conflict of Sin-Eater vs. geist is a perfect setting for a solo scenario to fully delve into both parts of the character and explore what makes them tick. Susan and Burning One are out of sync. Her powers have been failing her sporadically throughout the chronicle and Arturo is looking for a new host, someone who will help his former business prosper. Susan is looking to have Amanda, her girlfriend, find someone else to help her alleviate her grief. Both have come to a head, the Burning One's business is being foreclosed, and Amanda is walking into a vampire's den.

## Sin-Eater vs. Underworld

Sin-Eaters fear few things. They can die 1,000 times and always come back, but the Underworld can destroy them, by Kerberoi and the very world itself. A dip in the river Styx would destroy their minds, corrupt them, and turn them into a hated specter. The Underworld is not treaded lightly and never without consequences.

Story Hook:

The players' krewe awakens trapped in the Underworld with no clue how they got there. The thrust of the game becomes about escaping before succumbing to the dangers around them and discovering what happened to them. Has this happened to others? Are others trapped below?

## Sin-Eater vs. Society

Sin-Eaters are part of the mundane world by choice, need, or both. Money moves the world and society is all about it. To walk among the living, a Sin-Eater must adhere to some semblance of what is considered normal. That may mean ignoring the dead for hours on end while working the daily grind, finding excuses why that beating you just took did not leave any wounds. This easily leads to a parapsychologist investigating the character and to the government learning of them and doing experiments to create soldiers that don't die.

Story Hook:

The players' krewe is getting kicked out of its apartment and all of its possessions are taken, including a recently discovered Key, seized by the local sheriff. The scenario can't focus on them overpowering the sheriff's department but instead on how society functions and what legal course they have to take to recover their belongings.

## Being a Storyteller

Everyone can be a Storyteller. The way you build a world and experiences for your players is unique to you, your voice, the way you create space, and how you invite players in.

Sometimes people stop themselves from becoming a Storyteller because they worry about getting the mechanics right, or not improvising well, or getting something wrong. Every Storyteller has their own strengths and weaknesses. Every Storyteller gets better with practice. Nothing beats practice: getting in there, giving something a go, growing from mistakes, growing from what goes well, and trying again. Cultivate kindness in yourself and kindness in your players. This is a learning experience and you will learn a lot from each other.

Some Storytellers master complicated plotlines, others intricate mechanics or characterization, comedy, tragedy, catharsis, or a good night out with friends. Becoming a Storyteller means exploring the space you want to create, discovering your voice and strengths, and working with them.

If being a Storyteller feels overwhelming, remind yourself that you don't need to learn everything at once. Trying to do everything at once will make you feel scattered. Pick the core aspects you want to focus on, what resonates with you and one or two stretch goals.

When in doubt start small and simple. That gives you the opportunity to practice, gather together people you like to game with, and get the sessions in. Athletes get better with repetition; it's the same with Storytellers. Step one is turning up, so is step two.

## The Golden Rule

When asked a question, always say “yes.” Every question answered with an affirmation is a chance to further explain the story and bring the players more into the fold. This amazing freedom to impact the narrative, with the understanding that all actions have consequences (some immediate, some delayed) will add a sense of importance to each choice the player makes.

This type of approach requires a lot of thinking by the players and usually leads to some of the greatest stories. Most players nod quickly and take advantage of the freedom given to them, but that enthusiasm for freedom quickly subsides when the consequences rear their usually ugly head(s) to thwart them. Saying “yes” creates story, which is the core of any storytelling game. It also creates a safe space for players to express their ideas and helps bring out shy players who may sit in the back and surf along.

## The Chronicle

Creating a chronicle is like creating an ongoing television series. The chronicle is composed of interlinked stories that work toward a goal (exposing a conspiracy, overthrowing the Underworld, becoming President).

The first step is to establish how long the chronicle will be. Is it five big stories and a climax? Or is it a multi-year conspiracy of a fallen Sin-Eater’s plot to become death incarnate?

The opening story is the **hook** for the chronicle. It needs to be powerful enough to draw the players in and lay the groundwork going forward, but it shouldn’t expose everything.

Every chronicle has an **antagonist**. It could be a shadowy organization, a deranged necromancer, or a well-meaning Bound breaking the laws of the universe for the “greater good.” This character is the main, recurring enemy throughout the chronicle. By the second or third encounter, the players should know it’s serious business if the antagonist appears.

Not every story needs to relate to the chronicle; some stories can be standalone beats that highlight the characters’ relationships or personal struggles. When the chronicle’s plot does appear, each story should have solid clues and leads that let the players know this is part of the big picture.

Just as crucial as the chronicle’s plot is the **setting**. A game set in 1967 Los Angeles feels different than one in 2013 Tokyo. You don’t need to become an expert on your setting, but a basic knowledge and cultural respect for the setting are vital. Consider searching the internet for pictures, or for things like popular music, local slang, and the like to really make the setting come alive.

What is the **vibe** of your game? **Geist** is a game of hope in a shroud of darkness, but other themes run through it as well. The vibe helps the game focus on a certain mood. Is the game a gritty street game with the geists trying to make the world a better place, one existence at a time? Or are they a nonprofit that promotes laws to make massive-scale changes?

The players’ world is vast and full of new faces, but **recurring characters** should also appear. These are the people with whom the characters engage regularly. The occasional recurring person with motivation makes the world feel alive and creates repercussions for actions.

## Where is the Horror?

**Geist** is a game of terror; horror and death are the constant companions of the characters. Terror and horror, while similar in the minds of most, are vastly different things. Terror is the more



mental, it's the anticipation and intermediate uncertainty something is wrong. It's that loud thump in the next room, and after investigating and finding nothing you hear it in the room you just left, or there is a lengthy period of nothing before it happens again. That knowing dread that something is coming.

Horror is more visceral and obliterates terror by being in your face. It's the wailing wall of boiling blood, the indescribable grotesque that erupts out of the veil, or the serial killer draped in the skin of your parents coming out of the shadows.

Where is the fear for a Sin-Eater? Their geist grants them amazing endurance, regenerative abilities, and a form of immortality. Horror, then, comes not from the threat of harm or death to the characters, but from the vast, impersonal systems that grind down those they love.

Personalize the terror and horror with the characters' personalities and relationships. Keep mundane pressure on the characters; while they have an array of powers, Sin-Eaters must live their daily lives in addition to aiding the dead. They must work to earn money, their partner or children need attention, their friends stage an intervention based on the Bound's odd behavior. Keep the mundane pressure on even as the supernatural permeates their existence. This increases the impact of horror when it happens. For instance, Carl has spent 10 hours working at a call center, stepping out into the night once off duty, and drives home. He orders a pizza and has a beer. Then he lies down for the night, half-asleep and alone. He blinks once or twice and sees a crimson-stained man with blood pouring out of his eyes, staring at him and repeating the word "murder."

The terrors, horrors, and antagonists are endless, but the true fear in **Geist** comes from inevitability. Lives are taken too soon, and you peer into someone's life only to discover you can't bring them peace. You have failed.

## Weaving the Tale

Running **Geist** begins with outlining a story. A good story addresses the theme, mood, and overall plot that the chronicle has established, while also weaving in the players' goals and motivations.

This might sound intimidating, but with a little planning and a lot of flexibility you'll find it evolves as the chronicle goes on. Think of each story as an onion: You peel away one layer to find another layer under it, and keep peeling until you reach the core. The first layer is the main plot of the story: *A Reaper is doing a sweep of the cemetery and taking everything to the Underworld*, maybe. The next layer is something that relates to the players' goals: *Your mother is buried in that cemetery*. The third layer is a little extra something that could be linked to the larger chronicle: *Jinx, a Sin-Eater from whom you stole a Memento, directed the Reaper to that cemetery*. Those three layers give you multiple antagonists (one that is recurring and linked to a previous scenario), a reason to care, a limited time frame, and a few leads to follow. All of that is before any red herrings, mundane life, or players' plans are added.

## The Perfect Session

There is no such thing as the perfect session. A session can be amazing or dull, but not perfect. The story, no matter how well crafted, changes the moment players engage with it. Players are smart and creative, and as a group can think of ways to do things a lone Storyteller cannot.

This is one of the moments to just say “yes, but” and roll with it. If the players are totally off base and need help to get back on track, move a clue to a location they are about to go to, or have an ally reinforce a piece of information that they overlooked. The objective is to allow the players their fun and to give them every chance to succeed without railroading them.

## One-Shot vs. Chronicle

A one-shot is a single story, usually played out in a chapter or two, while the chronicle is a series of linked stories played out over an extended time. Which one you choose to run impacts the amount of planning, play style, and the way theme and mood are addressed. Both are solid choices with positives and negatives.

Chronicles are ongoing series of stories that can be loosely linked or directly connected. The characters have long-term goals, evolve over the course of the game, and breathe in the nuances of the world. The plots can be more complex, given the time the characters have to investigate. Actions have repercussions further down the line, as the characters exist after that scenario ends. This requires more planning from the Storyteller.

### Prepping a One-Shot

**Timing:** Set a few key, timed events to help keep tabs on players’ progress. Have a few scenes that can be cut without changing the scenario or scenes that can be combined without losing their impact.

**Characters:** Consider creating the characters, backgrounds, and relationships between them yourself, then let players pick the ones that interest them most. In a one-shot, they won’t have as much time to develop organically, so priming the pump with pre-made characters can help. These should be punchy and short, with clearly defined goals, and convey the essence of the characters.

**Tone:** The tone and theme need to be established early, usually within the first or second scene. Be heavy handed, if needed.

**Rules and Rulings:** Give the players a quick overview of the rules. Don’t spend time debating about rulings or flipping through the book. Focus more on the story, be player friendly, and make quick decisions. Be fair and consistent in rule enforcement.

**DOA:** Killing players doesn’t create a good game or a good atmosphere for the table unless that is what the game is designed to do.

One-shots are great for convention games, introducing people to gaming, and testing out a new system for a group.

The one-shot is more story focused, hitting on the major themes of the game rather than delving into the characters’ inner lives.

### Prepping a Chronicle

Create a campaign has a daunting feel to it as you are creating a story and theme that could run for years.

**Story:** Know your overall story. It’s impossible to have a detailed campaign plan set in stone that doesn’t railroad players. The story needs to be flexible and allow the players’ actions to change the course of the story.

**World Building:** The world around the players is critical for a campaign. It needs to feel like a living place that functions even when they are not there. Recurring Storyteller characters of varying levels of importance should turn up. It could be the same barista at the coffee shop they frequent or a rival Conjure Man harassing the krewe to move on.

**Slow Build:** The story should be sprinkled throughout the scenarios, with some of them being totally unrelated to the overarching plot. This is a delicate balance, as too little story will only irritate players, while too much dancing on the cusp will feel like railroading.

**Antagonist and Goons:** Memorable antagonists are one of the greatest parts of a campaign. It could be the villain of the piece that fuels the characters' hate, a trickster that helps or hinders the party, or a loser mook from whom the party can get information.

**Notes:** Keep track of major or interesting actions the players make. These can be used to adjust the campaign according to the players' actions and personalize the experience.

## Building a Story

Let's get one thing out of the way first: There's no one true way to build a story. These examples are just a couple of approaches, but whatever works for you is the right way. Here's one approach you might use when building out the spine of a mystery story:

**Introduction/recap** is an optional but useful step. In the first chapter, it's a chance for the players to get into character or for you to set the stage. In an ongoing game, a quick recap, by players or the Storyteller, of what has been going on gets the table back into the swing of things. This step leads directly into the hook.

**The hook** is the thing that draws the players into the scenario. This is the first layer of the onion to be peeled away and galvanize the characters to action.

For instance, the krewe discovers a stabbed victim in the garden of a socialite and this catalyst starts the action. The socialite could have called them, they may know the victim or this could be the latest in a string of killings.

**The truth** is the thing behind the hook and is what's actually going on. The Storyteller decides what initiated the hook, how it plays out through the story, and the repercussions if it is not resolved. The arc of the story needs to be logical and something that players can deduce with their abilities, contacts, and know-how.

For this example, the socialite is a Bound who has called the krewe for assistance. The truth is that the socialite has wards that stop an angry ghost from entering the home. The ghost killed one of the servants to draw the police to get the bound arrested outside the protective wards.

**Red herrings** are the false leads that go down rabbit holes and take the characters by the nose. While these don't help and may hinder the characters from solving the hook, they should be entertaining. No one wants to spend an hour of play to have the Storyteller tell them, "Nope. Nothing of interest."

The krewe discovers some item planted on the victim that links to another crime only to discover that the two are not in fact connected.

**The spine** is how the scenes of the scenario are laid out and is usually straightforward (before adding red herrings and multiple routes to uncover the clue to the next scene). The scenes can be tightly woven onto the spine or loose and easily movable based on players' actions.

**Clues** are what allow the scenario to play out. They lead from one scene to the next, whether singularly or in a shotgun-spread approach. Clues are mostly scene-specific, but having a few transferable clues to help nudge the players back on track is useful. The characters may discover a bloodied knife, a boot print, a few scraps of hair in the victim's hand, and an arcane symbol. Each of these are clues that lead to a new scene, which in turn contains more clues, until the characters have enough information to reach the resolution. The scenes narrow down as the players follow up on them.

**Antagonists** are the forces behind the plot. They won't sit idle and wait to be caught. If they catch wind that the Sin-Eaters are on to them, they will respond in a fashion that fits their archetype. A mastermind creates obstacles, hires goons, and exerts influence. A brawler just attacks the characters.

**Directing the scenario** is all about balance and gets easier with time and learning the players. Do they need a more action-based game or are they good with a soul searching investigation? Scenes can be tweaked to fit the needs of the group. Add a quick fight for the action junkie, a fast-talking mook for the social character, or a puzzle for the thinkers. Challenge the characters on their strengths.

**Ending a scenario** is crucial. Players mostly forget any dull parts but everyone remembers how the scenario ends. All of the points of the story need to be addressed if not wrapped up. Perhaps the crook goes to jail (to escape later), or the restless spirit finds peace, or a reward is given.

#### The Hollywood Formula

Another approach to building a story, commonly taught to screenwriting students, is called the Hollywood Formula. It goes like this:

**Introduction:** Leads to the problem.

**Problem:** The catalyst of the story.

**Action:** The protagonist comes face to face with the antagonist in some kind of confrontation.

**Stalemate:** The antagonist gets a hand up on the protagonist and escapes.

**Action:** The protagonist, now at some sort of disadvantage, rallies to confront the antagonist.

**Climax:** The zenith of the previous action scene, which ends with the antagonist defeated.

**Denouement:** The resolution, the protagonist's reward and wrapping up loose ends.

Be careful applying this structure too rigorously: A script, wherein the writer has full control over everything that happens, is not the same thing as a collaborative story in a game, where player actions and the luck of the dice can take the outcome of scenes in unexpected directions. In particular, be prepared for players to find creative ways to shortcut the stalemate and following action scenes. Still, if you plan loosely and are ready to adapt, this method can be useful.

## Remembrance

As discussed in Chapter Three, a geist's memories and identity are, by and large, buried beneath the fetid layer of Underworld power that gives them their strength. Only a fragmentary image remains, conveyed across the psychic link of the Bargain. The Bound can, if they're determined enough and willing enough, follow that image back to its source, gradually unlocking the secret history of their geist and bringing them the peace they were denied in life.

## Creating a Remembrance

As a Storyteller, part of your job is to develop the Remembrances of your players' characters' geists, sketching out their history and the unfinished business that drove them to drink from the Rivers and become geists in the first place.

### Step 1: Talk to the Players

Before you go off and design Remembrances, make time to chat with your players and take notes about what kind of story they want to explore with their geists. You can do this as part of character creation, as short one-on-one conversations outside of the game, or even via email or messaging software, whatever's easiest. The point is that, while you might want to surprise your players with twists in their stories, there's a fine line between a twist that surprises and one that undercuts a player's character.

As part of character creation, each player chooses a crisis point trigger for their geist and an initial Remembrance image. These form the core of their geist's story, and you must keep these in mind as you create the Remembrance. In addition, consider asking any or all of the following questions of your players to get a sense of what kind of story they want to explore:

- What core theme drove your geist to become a geist? Tragedy? Hubris? Greed? Something else?
- What reminds your geist, just for a moment, of the best part of themselves in life?
- What reminds your geist inescapably of their greatest failing in life?
- What impression does your geist give of their relationship with your character? Are they maternal? Protective? Abusive?

### Step 2: The Sketch

Taking into account the information you received in Step 1, come up with a quick, ideally one-sentence, sketch of who the geist was in life and what drove them to drink from the Rivers and become a geist. You don't need to delve into extreme detail here: "Mob bookie who was killed for cooking the books and wants revenge" or "sea captain who swore to return to her true love, but died in a shipwreck" are about the level of detail you want here.

### Step 3: The Path

Starting from the Remembrance chosen during character creation, devise three additional scenes that lead to discovering, understanding, and ultimately resolving the geist's story. Each scene should include one or more links to the next Remembrance scene that the player can follow up with investigation. You can do this in any order you want: You can come up with three scenes and then decide on how they link together, or you can devise a scene and, based on what information is present in that scene, figure out what it could lead to.

Keep your links flexible: They're suggestions and inspirations, not rails the player has to follow. If the player comes up with a totally off-the-wall idea for how to follow a lead, run with it. Conversely, if the player seems stumped on how to proceed, it's good to have a couple of ideas in your pocket to provide a gentle suggestion of where to start.

*Example: The Broken Bookie's player came up with "Taylor Swift's 'Fifteen' playing from a car radio as a man is buried alive in the desert outside Las Vegas" as a Remembrance image. The Storyteller decides that will lead to a scene where his Sin-Eater learns the geist's real name (possibly by trawling missing-persons cases from 2008, possibly by finding the grave itself and the dead man's wallet, or by some other form of investigation), which in turn leads to learning that he was (falsely) accused of skimming from his employer, which ultimately leads to a scene of revenge — but as a twist on the expected, the Storyteller decides that the geist's revenge is "find the actual embezzler and turn him over to the boss" rather than the expected "kill the people who killed me."*

## Resolving Remembrances

In brief, a Remembrance scene is considered "resolved" when the character has enough information to start tracking the next scene in the sequence — or, in the case of the final Remembrance scene, the story reaches a dramatically satisfying conclusion. That doesn't have to mean doing what the geist wants — in the example above, convincing the Broken Bookie to let the actual embezzler go, or turn him over to the police instead of the mob, could be just as valid as following through with the geist's revenge fantasies.

There are no explicit systems for resolving a Remembrance scene, because the nature of the scenes themselves is so varied. What follows are *guidelines*, not ironclad requirements.

- **Investigation:** The Investigation rules (p. XX) are ideally suited to research done in downtime: identifying a particular stretch of road based on landmarks from the vision, combing census records, etc.
- **Social maneuvers:** Sin-Eaters don't run into nearly the same problems with cold cases that living investigators do. A Sin-Eater can interview eyewitnesses to events that happened centuries ago, if they're willing to go looking for the right ghost (and maybe brave the Underworld).
- **One scene per chapter:** While Remembrance stories are strong personal elements for the characters, they can derail a plot if given too much attention. As a general rule of thumb, try to limit each character to one scene per chapter devoted to their Remembrance stories — and unless they can get all the characters involved, try to keep those scenes brief.

## Rewards

In addition to narrative catharsis, resolving a geist's Remembrance grants powerful mechanical rewards.

### Remembrance Resolution

- **Synergy:** *Each* Remembrance scene resolved grants a dot of Synergy.
- **Remembrance Traits:** Upon resolving the second and third Remembrance scenes, choose an additional Remembrance Trait (p. XX). Your character may spend up to (Synergy) Plasm to gain temporary dots in any Remembrance Trait, on a one-to-one basis.

- **Rank:** Upon resolving the final Remembrance scene, your character's geist gains 1 Rank (p. XX), to a maximum of Rank 5.

## End Game

A chronicle can end in any number of ways, but **Geist** focuses on three: Catharsis, Catabasis, and Cabeiros. Each resolves the tale of a Sin-Eater and her Bound geist in its own way. If your chronicle is going to build toward one of them, you should discuss it with your players before the game starts: It's much easier to build toward a satisfying conclusion if everyone is on the same page.

**Catabasis:** The way things are is not good enough, the deal is rigged and it's time to change the rules. As the krewe deepens their understanding of their shared mythology and the decaying corrupt Underworld, the krewe takes on ritual challenges to overthrow the Underworld and create something new. This ending may happen in conjunction with Catharsis.

**Catharsis:** Resolve both the character's Burden and their geist's Remembrance. This can be a personal ending for one character, or the ending of a chronicle (a krewe working together for resolution, for example). Catharsis allows the Sin-Eater and her geist to move on, bypassing the Underworld altogether. Depending on how the chronicle shapes up, this can happen in conjunction with Catabasis.

**Cabeiros:** Trade empathy for power. By crushing her geist's will and force-feeding it the polluted Essence of the Underworld, the character ascends to become a living embodiment of the Great Below, a Chthonic God presiding over a corrupt and dehumanizing system.

## Catabasis

The Underworld is not healthy. For some, turning a blind eye to its decay and corruption is not an option. To challenge and change the Underworld requires mythic levels of cleverness and more than a few friends. Brute force alone will never change the Underworld, it is too vast and numinous, but the way it responds to Ceremonies and rituals provides clues for how it can be reshaped through epic challenges, akin to stealing fire from the sun or getting the sky and the earth to move apart so there's room for everyone else.

Only a krewe, bound by a common faith and common cause, can face the challenges of Catabasis. These include external challenges and internal challenges, great works undertaken in the Underworld and a constant questioning and honing of belief.

Few krewes have ever realized this is even possible, and fewer still have ever attempted it. If you have Catabasis in mind as a Storyteller, this can be a great opportunity to put the krewemates through a hero's journey where they initially resist the call, but feel forced to step up when they can no longer ignore the harm the Underworld does. The act of survival, facing the full weight of the Underworld, and acquiring the strength to make a difference provide many opportunities for rich storytelling.

## Challenges

As the krewe increases in power, it faces several challenges. Even if the chronicle isn't aiming for a Catabasis endgame, you can use these challenges as dramatic fodder; they can even be inciting incidents that cause the krewe to decide Catabasis is a path it wants to take.

In all cases, *how* the krewe reacts to these challenges is less important than *that* it reacts. Don't look at these as tests for the characters to pass and fail, but as formative experiences that shape their identities going forward.

### What Do You Stand For?

At Esotery 3, the krewe faces a challenge to its identity. It's grown enough that it needs to articulate who it is. This challenge most commonly comes in the form of a hard decision related to the krewe's Doctrines. When faced with a difficult choice, does the krewe stick to its principles or does it bend? When its Doctrines fail those it's supposed to be helping, does it double down on its dogma or does it rewrite its commandments?

### What Will You Sacrifice?

At Esotery 5, the challenge is to the krewe's commitment. Hit it with a scenario where achieving their goals costs them personally, or conversely, where pursuing personal happiness comes at the cost of the mission. What's more important to the krewe? When it comes down to doing the work versus being safe, comfortable, and happy, will it step up or crumble? When asked to give of themselves, do they give so fully that they martyr themselves to the cause, or do they remember that self-care is revolutionary, too?

### Who Will You Refuse?

At Esotery 7 comes perhaps the toughest challenge of all: the no-win scenario. It's easy to keep the faith and be true to your ideals when the choice is clear between right and wrong, but the real world is never that neat or tidy. When faced with two choices that bring equal harm, how do they calculate the lesser? If they can only save one, how do they decide who lives and who dies? Or, in either case, do they stubbornly refuse to act, or try to bull through with a third option?

### Against Impossible Odds

Finally, at Esotery 10, the krewe knows who it is. Its members have a vision for how the Underworld could be a better place... a vision that is, at last, united enough to come together. They have Ceremonies and rituals the way a carpenter has hammer and nails.

By this point, the krewe is too big and too powerful not to be noticed. Reapers don't want anyone getting too comfortable with that much power, rival krewes see them as an existential threat, and even the living authorities are likely watching "that creepy death cult" for signs of terrorist activities. If the krewe doesn't take the leap, it faces ever-increasing pressure, for even making no decision is a decision. The only options are to take the plunge or self-destruct.

Descending into the Underworld in the fullness of its power, the krewe faces an embodiment of the Underworld itself, crystalized out of its archetype and Doctrines. This embodiment is a direct challenge to the krewe's ethos, a refutation of its entire philosophy of death. This is the closest anyone comes to meeting the Chthonic Gods — and to reshape the Underworld, they must be conquered. Whether that means casting them from their thrones and tearing bloody hearts from their chests, besting them in a dizzying riddle game, or tricking them into their own eternal prisons.

Succeed, and you are rewarded beyond imagining: a new Underworld, created in the image of your krewe and presided over not by callous and uncaring entropy, but by doctrines of justice and equality. Fail... well, no one knows for sure, but some Mourners point to the strange laws of



the Deep Dominions as half-formed Catabases and their Kerberoi as the twisted remains of the Sin-Eaters who dared and failed.

## Catharsis

Every ghost story is, at its core, a tragedy, and tragedy is best resolved through closure. Catharsis comes when a character resolves her own Burden Touchstone and her geist's Remembrance.

Creating opportunities within stories to improve or slide backward around Touchstones and Remembrances builds a satisfying chronicle. Having occasional stories that focus specifically on one character's past is a way to create opportunities to progress or demolish progress toward Catharsis. Specifically calling out that a chapter or story will spotlight a specific issue or character before you start can be a great way to resolve issues before they happen. Make sure to spread that spotlight around, though, and give each player their moment to shine.

## I See You

When the Touchstone and Remembrance are resolved, this is an opportunity to dramatize how far they have come to create a moment of shared recognition and catharsis.

One option is to create a harmless and temporary situation that would normally be triggering for the geist and burdensome for the Sin-Eater, such as an unfair request from someone who smells exactly like the geist's trauma. Neither are triggered or burdened, because of the resolutions they have found they are able to face the situation without losing themselves or harming their other half. The moment creates space for emotional catharsis, euphoria, and celebration of invisible chains removed.

Another option for the moment of Catharsis is to run through a series of flashbacks with the Sin-Eater and geist, they share each other's memories and fragments, only now they can do so with healthy distance and emotional closure.

## Moving On

Caught in the power of Catharsis, Sin-Eaters may wish to host the party to end all parties (right now, there is no time to lose), pay the bills and make sure the dog has a good new home, sit quietly with nature, or run from friend to friend as they revel in their Cathartic awakening, as well as the growing sense that their work is done and it is time to move on.

As the euphoria of Catharsis fades, the call to move on grows stronger. It feels right: like coming home after a long journey. The Sin-Eater and geist know that all they need to do is step into each other and they will merge, and vanish in some manner consistent with her krewes' mythology. They know this is the most blissful thing they could ever do.

## Refusing the Call

Some Cathartic Sin-Eaters merge fully with their geist to become essentially one inseparable being, but choose not to move on. This is a painful sacrifice and few deny themselves whatever is beyond, but some chose to stay behind, bodhisattva-like, to guide others along the path to enlightenment, or to help their former krewes reach Catabasis.

It's strongly recommended that Cathartic Sin-Eaters be retired from play and become Storyteller characters. Their story is over, and it's time to make room for new protagonists to take the stage. However, if you're okay with allowing a player to continue playing their character post-Catharsis (or if you just need to roll dice for one as a Storyteller character), the following rules apply:

- The character's Synergy is 10, and she no longer suffers crisis points.
- The character no longer gains the Doomed Condition for unlocking Haunts with her Keys.
- If the character dies, she and her geist move on to whatever comes after this world. Her geist no longer revives her.

## Cabeiros

Who's afraid of absolute corruption if it promises absolute power?

Following the path of Cabeiros is giving into the corruption and despair of the Underworld. It's most common among the Bound who don't adhere to the Sin-Eaters' creed, but Sin-Eaters know that some of their own have sought Cabeiros nonetheless. Some argue that their Bargain was coercive and they were simply seeking a way out. Others simply grew disillusioned by the endless fight.

The path to Cabeiros starts with a Remembrance tableau that goes horribly wrong. Maybe the Sin-Eater is repulsed by what he learns about his geist, or maybe he just handles it badly, but whatever the cause, instead of resolving the issue and moving forward, the Sin-Eater lashes out and pushes his geist away.

Some stagger along a path that could be Cabeiros or Catharsis. Horror and healing, repulsion and acceptance often dance together, and it's hard to tell what's a step forward and what's a step backwards until you're through the tunnel. Synergy can fluctuate wildly as geist and Sin-Eater are drawn toward each other and repulsed in equal measure.

## The Beginning

To pursue Cabeiros, the Bound must have intimate knowledge of his geist. Not only must he progress through the first three tableaux of the geist's Remembrance, he must also know its Touchstone (p. XX). After all, only those who really know us can truly hurt us.

## Committing to Cabeiros

Eventually the geist becomes aware that the Sin-Eater is building towards Cabeiros. Once it cannot avoid the truth, it tries to escape, cajole, or threaten the Sin-Eater, often attempting wildly differing strategies as it tries to escape its enslavement and destruction.

It's almost impossible to achieve Cabeiros while still walking the path of Synergy. Most Bound who pursue this endgame break their geists' wills and rebuild the Bargain as Tyranny (p. XX).

## The Fatted Calf

Once the Sin-Eater has discovered his geist's final Remembrance tableau, he forces his geist to drink from the Rivers of the Underworld until it reaches Rank 5. Forcing your geist to drink is a chance die roll for characters with Synergy, or the player's choice of Strength, Intelligence, or Presence + Tyranny for characters with Tyranny. In either case, it's contested by the geist's Power + Rank. The process takes about an hour, and every drink must come from a different River.

## The Final Act

With his geist fattened on the polluted might of the Underworld and the final tableau of its Remembrance laid bare, the Bound ritualistically destroys his geist's Touchstone. This act of

betrayal shatters the Bargain and cracks open the geist like a marrow bone, pouring its power into the Bound. In a hideous perversion of the merging that accompanies Catharsis, geist and Bound become one, but instead of moving on from this world they fall through it, entering and merging with the Underworld to become its new Chthonic God.

## Story Seeds

Maybe you don't have time to plot out an entire chronicle on your own. That's fine — everybody has different amounts of free time. Or maybe you're staring at a blank sheet of paper, unsure where to begin. That's fine, too — coming up with that initial spark can be the hardest part of any story.

These seeds can serve as a jumping-off point for your stories and chronicles. Feel free to use them as is or change details to better fit your players and your game.

## Art Show Horror Show

This scenario draws on Beijing for specific cues and the flavor that brings a story to life. Consider what would change and why if you set it near the Louvre in Paris, Bourbon Street in New Orleans, or Edinburgh during the Fringe Festival, somewhere with a heady mix of tourism and creativity.

### Setting

Creativity abounds in Beijing's public parks, be it erhu masters gathering to play, karaoke setups, ballroom dancing, salsa, tai chi, or calligraphy drawn on the ground with large sponge brushes and soapy water. Many calligraphy masters write letters to the departed that evaporate and disappear almost as soon as they're written. In Twilight, ghosts cradle the words as if they were children.

The calligraphy is gorgeous around the bustling and dynamic Dashanzi Art District, a grim industrial district contentiously turned into a gentrified arts hub. Bustling with BoBo (bourgeois-bohemian), tourists, and innovators, it's the place to party, visit a fetish club, get loaded, or absorb art through every orifice. Con artists and people with wild dreams abound. Getting a foreigner to buy you overpriced coffee with a kickback from the café is an easy con, the fake indie art show selling mass-produced work is another.

Anita Ling is a ghost condemned to repeat her last day. Anita was a young woman who came to Beijing from Shandong to chase her dreams. She told her parents she had a job in a factory, but really, she went to Dashanzi to become an artist. She didn't find a lucrative artistic career, but she did find a dodgy boyfriend who worked for a syndicate. Her job was to draw people to art shows that sold mass-manufactured paintings in the basements of abandoned warehouses. Over time, these art shows devolved to simply drugging and mugging potential buyers. When Anita tried to break up with her boyfriend and be a true artist, he arranged for her to die, locking her inside the art show basement where she asphyxiated to death along with five tourists.

Every month, Anita Ling possesses a young woman who has recently arrived in Beijing from Shandong. Anita then woos tourists (domestic or international) to her art show not far from the art district and relives her last days. Her power grows as she claims more victims, as does her abject misery and inability to break the cycle.

The art show is in an ancient warehouse's bomb shelter. Anita maintains an illusion of a wonderful party with her Hallucination Numen (p. XX). Cushions are thrown around the room and up the stairs, and details are hard to make out in the dim sparkle of fairy lights and candles. Abstract, splashy art lines the walls, paint cans stacked next to fresh canvases in progress. The art show is a blast, and Anita commands the room, charming human tourists and other ghosts alike. It feels natural and right to drink a lot, but not eat a lot.

The moment anyone tries to leave, the illusion falls and the bomb shelter transforms to a decaying charnel house where all of Anita's ghosts relive their deaths, manifest ghastly aspects, distended bellies, rotting flesh or hanging jaws. The stench is overpowering, as the cushions are all rotten corpses. The transformation of the space is as radical as White Bone Demon tricking Tripitaka and then dropping her mask.

Anita screams and sobs as the room descends into chaos, infecting people with her emotional aura. "Not again, not again," "He locked us in... they're all dead, all dead." Anita runs around frantically, trying to wake up the corpses. Unless someone forces her to change her attention she can only see rotting corpses and can't perceive the distress of the living, who she is going to kill through her flashback. As the trauma deepens she hovers (still in her host) in the air surrounded by swirling sloshes of paint that move like ribbons, screaming her rage, helplessness, guilt, and fear.

Once everyone in the room who can die dies (be it from dehydration, disease, suicide, accidental bludgeoning by a distraught ghost, or CO2 poisoning), Anita's ghost screams and disappears. Next month she will repeat her story, adding to the corpses on the ground.

### **Story Hooks**

- Characters are lured into the art show as one of Anita's victims or have companions suddenly show an unnatural love for art and the "hot new show" tonight when they had never shown interest in art before.
- One of Anita's previous victims is famous person one of the characters has publicly threatened. Now that the person has gone missing under suspicious circumstances they are the chief suspect.
- A relative of one of the missing women from Shandong begs the players to help find out what happened. The police don't seem to care.
- People going missing when they were just going to an art show is making life really hard for all the other artists trying to make a living. The CowboyPunks (p. XX) would owe the players a serious favor if they could sort out this problem.

### **People in Peril**

- Anita's host
- Tourists choking, throwing up, freaking out, and trying to escape
- Anita herself, doomed to repeat her fate with escalating power

### **Obstacles**

- The door is physically barred from the outside (two layers of reinforced steel, durability 6).

- The area around the door is dangerous to approach because of a battering telekinetic wind full of shattered art supplies, Anita's own way of obsessively banging on the door.
- The room is an airtight bomb shelter that has fallen into disrepair and is full of dead bodies. Whatever ventilation system it used to have is broken.

### **Possible Solutions**

- Help Anita resolve her Anchors. If one is resolved, the supernatural effects stop and the door can be opened without risk of battery. If both are resolved she will realize how powerful she is and unlock the door. She is no longer doomed to repeat the cycle and can move on.
- Destroy all of Anita's Anchors. This banishes her ghost to the Underworld and ends the effects, but Anita will continue to enact her death in the Great Below, dragging other ghosts into her grim tableau.
- Kill Anita's host. The door can be broken down while Anita is disembodied and grieving and she will temporarily go down a Rank, this will not resolve the underlying cycle.

#### *Anita's Anchors*

A battered boar's-hair brush that has become unusable with solid blue paint, the last paintbrush Anita ever used. Anita wanted to be an artist but dreams are expensive. The syndicate and a bad boyfriend kept her off the streets and she is filled with grief for the artist she never got to be.

A faded photograph of her family back in Shandong. Anita wanted to be successful and bring pride and joy to them, instead she has gone missing and they don't even know if she's alive or dead.

## **Bad Air Day**

Over 5.5 million people die every year from air pollution, through toxic smog and smoke-filled living conditions. Some ghosts are caught in the air that killed them, spinning out of control, colliding with fellow chokers until they are ground like sand.

The weather is hot and awful, a high-pressure system that will not leave, crushing people with headaches and bad tempers. The air gets so bad that it is dangerous to go outside, even with protection. The smog draws in uncountable fragmented ghosts from around the world. The ghostly mass increases hauntings, momentary possessions, and poltergeist activity. Fragmented ghosts are not easy to perceive, despite being drawn to Sin-Eaters' warmth. Fights break out as accusations fly.

If the high-pressure system does not break, within a week the fragmented ghosts coalesce into a Rank 5 ghost, with a collective intelligence that is often in conflict with itself and unusually vulnerable to wind machines.

Creepy ghost eaters are drawn to the area. The haunted smog learns to operate collectively and defensively to deal with threats.

The bad weather and smog intensify and people die, adding more ghosts to the howling horde. The new ghosts start out fairly whole, somewhat able to communicate, but over time tumult will fragment them.

The ghosts are so insubstantial and bound to earthly winds that there is not enough for Reapers to hold onto and suck into the Underworld. To deal with this threat, Reapers and Sin-Eaters will need to combine their abilities. The Underworld has increasing instabilities and irritation from all these ghost fragments clumped so closely together. The clouds of ghosts are desperate for release, desperate for closure, and are drawn to the warmth of Sin-Eaters.

## Necromancer Blues

Beauregard Blake Whatley is a very precise man. A skilled surgeon, he is never late. He has spent most of his life helping people, patching them up and donating money to the annual policeman's ball. He has friends on the force, goes golfing with the chief of police, and even saved the mayor's life once.

Detective Daniel Davis works has been trying to solve the Old Jack murders, named by the local papers for Jack the Ripper, for the last 20 years. His obsession with the decades-old cold case made him the laughing stock of the department — until last year, when bodies start turning up matching the killer's MO. Now he has eight officers under his command, and the mayor breathing down his neck for results.

Every two weeks, the police discover a horribly mutilated, partially eaten body. Tests of the wounds show only the victim's DNA and dental impressions, as if they were eating themselves — but that's impossible given the location of some of the wounds. The department is at a loss. It has even hired famed psychics Marcia West and Roland Dean, both of whom suffered sudden, acute hemorrhaging and remain hospitalized.

The killings go back farther than anyone knows. Beauregard Blake Whatley is in fact François Marlow, a 300-year-old necromancer and ghost-eater. For centuries, he has conducted a terrible ritual called the Nacreous Harvest, which combines human sacrifice and ectophagia to open a path to becoming a Chthonic God. The time, at long last, is near; he is 20 kills away from completing the ritual.

His last victim was Lt. Davis. Davis's ghost was only spared by the untimely arrival of one Officer Kennedy, who Marlow captured and plans to use as his next sacrifice in two weeks. Davis flees to the players' krewes and, before being unmade by Essence bleed, demands that they bring this killer to justice and save Kennedy.

This chronicle is designed to be a loose skeleton that the Storyteller can bring in as needed. It allows ample time to tackle Burdens, Remembrances, and other B plots while still giving the game a structural spine. Even one-off stories can be retroactively linked to the plot: A ghost the characters help might have been an earlier sacrifice who escaped, or a ghost eater the characters tracked down could turn out to be a copycat killer.

The Kennedy hook kicks off the first story, as it gives the krewes an additional motivation: a life on the line. You can seed further clues at whatever location Marlow held Kennedy: eyewitness testimony if the characters get to Kennedy before he's murdered and consumed, tracing ownership of the abandoned warehouse back through shell companies, and so on. Even Marlow's response can be a clue, as he sics his influential friends on the krewes.

Marlow is precise, but still just a man. He may have left hairs at the crime scene, or maybe he is in a blurry photo from the gas-station security camera across the street. If your players seem

stuck on the occult angle of the investigation, remind them that good old-fashioned detective work is also an option.

Dealing with Marlow once he's identified brings its own problems. Even assuming the krewe can make charges stick, he has enough mystical acumen to escape most any form of incarceration. If he's killed, the necrotic power he's already ingested means he returns as a Rank 4 geist (Rank 5 if he manages to complete five more sacrifices). As a geist, most of his personality is stripped away, but his Remembrance is fixated on completing the Nacreous Harvest. Marlow is also obsessed with the players who killed him and actively hunts them, hoping to add their family, friends, or loved ones to his sacrifices. He may or may not make the Bargain, but if he does it's with an executed serial killer or similarly nasty customer.

Krewes interested in a magical solution might be able to delve into the Underworld to devise a counter-ritual that undoes Marlow's accumulated power and thwarts the Nacreous Harvest. Finding such a Ceremony could easily be the meat of three or more stories

## Dead Letter Drop

Every Sunday, at 4:02 a.m., a letter drops into the krewe's Safe Place. Every letter is different: handwritten on parchment, typed on triplicate carbon paper, scrawled in leaky pen on a coaster. Every letter is the same: a plea for help and a powerful smell related to the challenge (waffles and pancakes for a mystery set in a diner, the distinctive cologne of a murder victim, sulfur for a day that's about to go very, very badly).

The peril is always real, but the person who wrote the letter (ghost, human, or otherwise) never remembers writing the letter. Sometimes they welcome the help, sometimes they are defensive and angry about it.

This structure creates a monster of the week, shared-purpose investigation that carries each chapter, complemented by a discovery-oriented chronicle.

### Discoveries and Twists

- Discovering the "rules," for example, people do not know about the letters they wrote, despite the letter matching their syntax/handwriting.
- To start with it's easy to determine who wrote the letter, but determining the where and what the threat is can play larger parts of the mystery.
- What happens when the letter is from a character?

### Why the letters, why this krewe?

- A more powerful krewe that is testing this smaller krewe. The way they perform their tasks could lead to being formally invited to be allies, membership invitation into the bigger krewe, or blacklisting. The other krewe is not homogenous and the members of the decision-making committee all have their own agendas, which shape the kinds of letters the Sin-Eaters receive.
- Inhabitants of a domain committed to justice have found a way to reach beyond the Underworld and send messages. They'll be in a lot of trouble should the Old Laws catch up with them.

- A Reaper is at war with itself and what it does, and creates the notes as a pressure valve so that it does not have to reap ghosts that should have a chance to move on instead.

## Intensives

Sometimes to go deep it's easier if you know it will be for a short time. An expiration date can be quite attractive.

A well written, self-contained intensive runs three to eight hours and is a complete story. It's a great way to focus on a particular question or moment in time (an intimate one-room ghost story, a detective mystery, or going straight to the five Sin-Eaters at the end of the world).

The Storyteller writes all the character sheets, including:

- A cover page with character name and a few evocative images or phrases. You wrote the characters, ensure the players choose who they play among themselves without your intervention.
- No more than one page of backstory, relationships, conflicted feelings, and seeds for conflicts with other characters.
- The actual character sheet.

Within those pages you can craft complexity: Smith hates her brother in the first paragraph and three paragraphs later we can see how that hatred comes from a deep love as well as shame that she abandoned him. You can place things people have wanted to say to each other, but never dared speak, planting the seeds for moments of truth, heightened conflict, or resolution.

Through this format, players can play characters they never would have explored on their own. You might be surprised by who picks which character when they are given a bounded palette to choose from.

## Begin at the Ending

*Jump straight into conflict, enjoy the foreboding and create permission to reach for the sky and crash hard.*

This intensive is for any group that wants to immediately dive into more intense or cathartic modes of storytelling. In addition to providing an unusual structure to explore it shows good storytelling processes in action and the good hosting that creates the safety and space for stories that go into more dangerous and experimental waters.

## The Setup

During character creation make sure each character has identified a safe place, a place they fear, and someone they care about. Pick an antagonist, be it a sadistic Reaper or a beat cop that wants some answers and has resistance to supernatural forces.

Establish ground rules for safety, if the Geist Card (p. XX) is in operation or other techniques (make a T with your hands for "timeout player conversation" or a space, such as the kitchen, which people can go to at any time without giving a reason and will always be an out-of-character space). Discuss with the players if there are any topics they want handled with care or stuff that will kill their enjoyment. When running an emotionally charged game, the more you develop safety, trust, and the choice not to engage, the more people can explore the game in an open hearted and challenging way.



## Session One

Throughout this session, everything that is improvised will become the characters' future, building foreboding, narrative arcs, twists, and unexpected acts of courage.

When the players are ready to start, use atmospheric music to set the scene, and let players know it's time to put aside pleasant chitchat and get into character.

**Storyteller:** It's been five years since you all died and came back. Five long years of heartache and joy, love and loss. And here you are.

Describe an interrogation room that fits the themes you want to explore in your chronicle: a police station, a lavish penthouse with cocktails for everyone and locks on every door, a dungeon in a squalid sewer filled with hungry ghosts

The interrogation is held during a moment of crisis; something dramatic has happened and is still unfolding. Specific details will be discovered as the antagonist interrogates the players. Characters may lie during the interrogation, but as the Storyteller you can always ask players if their character is lying.

Ask questions that allow players to define parts of what's happened. Interrogate each character and ensure everyone has a chance to speak.

Have the antagonist ask questions that give players room and time to come up with details. For players who struggle to improvise, give them time and use leading questions to help them build up an idea "Who decided to drive to Mexico?" "Were you the driver?" "What's in the suitcase?" "Did the air smell like strawberries or rotten milk?" "Did you really think going to [safe place] could help you?"

If you have players that love to improvise, the antagonist can ask more open-ended questions. "Why did you do it? What on Earth did you hope to achieve?" Or even "You did it, start talking."

The interrogation allows the Storyteller to plant tensions and connections between characters. The antagonist asking, "She shot you, and now you're protecting her?" can plant tension.

The character responding with "And I'll shoot her when I get the chance, that's not what this is about," creates one sort of tension and arc.

The character saying "Yeah, and I was mad as hell for a long time, but she did what she had to do with the information she had. She's my friend and I trust her," telegraphs a very different story arc.

Either way, the players now know someone's going to get betrayed in the chronicle.

Knowing that these events are coming, and that there will be a reconciliation, allows players as well as the Storyteller to build a satisfying story arc. Players empowered by meta-knowledge might cause their characters to have a deeper friendship to start with, to make the betrayal more poignant. The betrayal might be more profound because the players know that a reconciliation is coming. Where possible and appropriate, encourage players to stay in the moment and ask leading questions to generate specific details that will shape the campaign

If players struggle with the interrogation, use a timeout mechanism to check in and see if this is still something they want to do or if there are things that could make it more fun for them. It's

better to proactively check in early and provide graceful exit points without a fuss than push on and hope for the best.

When the session feels like it is drawing to a natural conclusion or you've got 30 minutes left before someone needs to leave, the antagonist receives a phone call.

**Antagonist:** What? You're not serious. Where? How?

The antagonist stands up and starts blaming the players for something. He's interrupted by an explosion and a blinding white light.

**Storyteller:** Next time, we start five years ago.

## Debriefing

Make sure to leave enough time after the chapter for folks to chill out, have a few snacks and talk about the game out of character. It'll be a great opportunity to share good moments, speculate about how different elements could come to pass, talk about anything that came up, and relax before going back into the real world. It's important to make this time.

## Session Two and Beyond

Feed discoveries into the game, and like any prophecy make some stuff play out logically and put a few interesting twists in. Build out the seeds planted in the first session in ways that allow players to fight for Catabasis, Cabeiros, or Catharsis endings. Sections can be collaboratively fast forwarded through to get to specific plot points. Further flash forwards can be used to build out the story and create tension.

## Cutups

*Get in touch with your inner Dadaist*

### Setup

Players and the Storyteller each bring in a page of poetry that relates to their character or thematic elements they want to explore. Any poetry you like: It could be Dante, Rumi, Jay Z, or Jack Kerouac. Pass your page to the person on the left and cut up the page in a way that creates interesting phrases and fragments.

Place the fragments in a box that will be used throughout the campaign. As events unfold, you will add words to the box, such as "the smell of pennyroyal and a profound longing," or "viscous fluids." The first time in the story a character regains Willpower from their Root, they add a one-sentence nightmare from the Underworld. The first time per story a character regains Willpower from their Vine, they add one sentence about the human condition.

## Session One

Each player takes turns drawing a slip of paper from the box. As each slip is drawn, players discuss its meaning and how that can be incorporated into the world. Multiple interpretations are fine if they're not derailing.

- What keeps the krewe together during the hardest times?
- What is something unique hidden in this krewe's celebrations and Ceremonies?
- What is a secret everyone knows, but no one talks about?

- Who is an antagonist to the krewe?
- How does the antagonist harm?
- How is the antagonist admirable?
- What crisis is coming?
- Where will joy be found?

Each player draws two slips for their character; one influences their Burden, the other, their Remembrance.

## Later Chapters

Use slips to start each chapter, or at moments that feel appropriate, to create scenes, design space, and give dimension to people the characters meet.

Keep in mind the slips that started the game, they are the refrains you will call back to, feed into, and shape conclusions.

## The Geist Card

The “Geist Card” is a variant of John Stavropoulos’ X-Card. The card is a tool to facilitate an open, safe space at the gaming table.

The goal of any game is for everyone present to have an enjoyable experience. The first step of any ongoing game is to set expectations of topics that may be covered and to allow the players to make an informed choice about what content they want to engage with. **Geist** is a horror game about systemic oppression and abuse, and that can get too intense for some players. Running a **Geist** game in Jim Crow Alabama, for example, may be more than some players can stomach; there’s no shame in that, but it’s best to establish that before play starts. No pre-game discussion can cover every potentially triggering topic, though, and that’s where the Geist Card comes into play.

Any time during a session, if a topic comes up that anyone at the table feels uncomfortable with, they can tap or hold up the card. That’s a cue for the rest of the table to change the scene or back away from the topic. The person who used the Geist Card does *not* need to explain why. Play continues in the new direction, and everyone agrees to keep that topic out of the story going forward.

Note that this is not an optional rule. *Unless the entire table agrees to forego using the Geist Card altogether*, it’s as binding as the rules for calculating successes or how many Merit dots a starting character gets. If you never need to use the Geist Card, that’s fine — the presence of the card and the talk outlined above may be enough for everyone at the table. But if you do need it, it’s there.

## Common Questions

**I think about running a game, but the thought of dealing with all the mechanics makes my brain shut down! What do I do?** Establish up front that your game will be system light, with fewer dice rolls. You can ease your way into mechanics where they add flavor, tension and unexpected twists. You can ask your players which mechanics are most important to them and

focus on them one at a time. When in doubt, you can almost always fall back to a simple roll of Attribute + Skill to gauge success or failure.

**How do I make the mechanics flow smoothly?** Practice and figure out what works best for you and your players. Invite players into the experiment: “I’m trying a new way of doing combat, I’d love to know what works and doesn’t work.” As the Storyteller, you’ll be leading the experiment, and you don’t have to go with anyone’s ideas, but with diverse players you’ll make interesting discoveries. Stating up front that it’s an experiment will make people more comfortable providing feedback, and more forgiving if something doesn’t work well.

**I have an amazing idea, but I just can't seem to run it! What can I do?** If you have been dreaming about a scenario for a long time it can be hard to expose it to the world. The story in your head will never be the same as what the players create with you. If you find you’re holding on to something for a long time and it’s keeping you from starting, you have two options.

First, write down the obstacles and work on them one by one, with deadlines, so you can’t back out. Create a plan of action (action, not perfection), and set the story free.

Second, move on. You either need more experience or a change in circumstances before you can run your grand chronicle, or it has become an idealized burden that is getting in the way of new ideas. If you’re a new Storyteller, give yourself smaller, easier projects that haven’t been circling your mind for a long time. Focus on short, fun experiments before you engage with bigger idea. As you practice running games and experimenting with your voice as a Storyteller, you might find better ideas or new layers to add to the old ideas.

Do not let a big grand idea weigh you down or stop you from telling stories now.

**How can I hold it all in my head?** No one holds it all in their head. Figure out a note-taking system that works for you. Focus on what makes the story sing and your players engaged. Priority one is to prepare for what is in front of you, during a character creation session focus on what players need to do that task; if it feels like a crisis point is coming up focus on what you need to prepare for that. The bigger picture will come, break it down into smaller and smaller pieces until you can tackle them.

**I meant to reward X with Y when Z happened, and I forgot! What do I do?** It happens! Don’t beat yourself up if you miss something that would trigger mechanics. Story is more important than any one reward, and players can remind you if it’s important to them. Cultivating a gaming environment that is kind and collaborative will build trust that leads to better stories. If you find yourself regretting not capitalizing on something spectacular in gameplay (good or bad), find a way for it to come back and have repercussions through other means.

**What if I don't have any ideas?** Do what the greats do: Steal an idea and add a twist. What would the **Geist** Iliad in New Orleans be like? Or Huckleberry Finn? The Matrix? Pride and Prejudice? Grab a story that calls to you and shift it into a new space and time. Between your unique voice as a Storyteller and your players, it will be something new. Or try one of the stories, chronicles, or frames in this chapter. Often, “I don’t have any ideas” is perfectionism in disguise. Ask your perfectionism to step aside, grab an idea, and explore it. If it’s not what you were hoping for, grab another concept and try again.

**What do I do if I find out that something in my game was hurtful?** If someone tells you something has hurt them it can be feel a little like being a **geist** in a Remembrance. If that happens, you should take the following measures:

- Take a deep breath and be kind to yourself. This isn't about who you are as a person, this isn't about intention; this is about an action or a trend and someone trusted you with information. Keep the focus on behavior.
- Listen and ask non-defensive questions. Some questioning styles can be aggressive, even when that is not the intention. Books like *Taking the War out of Our Words* can be helpful. When looking at communication tools, make sure you work on how you apply these tools to yourself rather than using these tools to deflect others.
- Give yourself time and avoid reacting in the moment if you find yourself wanting to go to fight or flight responses.
- Collaborate on tangible solutions, as appropriate.
- Keep it in proportion. It can be easy to beat yourself up or over respond to something that is a small note (which can be scary for the person giving feedback; they just wanted to give you a small note for improvement) or minimize an experience that is unfamiliar or creates a cascade of worries if you let it in. When in doubt go back to breathing and focus on the now.

**Why does X feel that way? It's just a joke, it's just a game!** One person's joke is another person's repetition of bullying they have received. We don't get to decide what's "just a joke" for other people. Games are wonderful, there's no "just a joke" or "just a game" about them. We spend time there, we like to feel safe there. It can feel scary and unfamiliar to become aware that someone else is experiencing harm where you were unaware. Use new information to learn, modify things, and repeat the tools outlined above.

**How do I not screw up?** None of us are perfect, we live and learn. A helpful thing to keep in mind to avoid one of the big screw-ups is: Do not decide what is good for a player on their behalf!

Storytellers have fallen into trouble when they have decided a particular character must experience a particular thing, be it public speaking, romance, or less savory experiences, because they have decided it's "good" for the player or character. That is not your power to take. You can always discuss things with a player and what they want to get out of the game. You can create non-coercive opportunities and invitations, but deliberately caging a character and player in a non-consensual way is at best manipulative storytelling. It is the source of far too many war stories, and has driven people away from gaming.

**I'm worried I might have screwed up. What do I do?** Beating yourself up because something went off in a way that seemed uncomfortable? Don't endure it alone, check in and ask, it will save you an ulcer and show that person you care. If that person suggests further reading or research, check it out, you'll find some powerful stories that will make you a better storyteller.

**What to do about The Fade Away?** The Fade Away is when a player constantly cancels (usually at the last minute) and slowly tries to distance themselves from the game without ever "officially" leaving. The Fade Away can eviscerate your chronicle faster than a necromancer devouring a ghost. If a player cancels or calls out three times in a row, speak to them privately. Ask how things are going, check in, float some language around like, "Maybe your schedule has changed and you need to bow out of the game for a while. That's fine — you will be missed, and if your schedule changes in the future and you want to play, let me know."

This approach can save a friendship, and sometimes players can return later with no hard feelings. Saving friendships and saving games is a win/win scenario.

## Storyteller Cheat Sheet

Things to think about when running your first game.

### Before the Game

Print out a list of first and last names appropriate to the setting. This will make it easier to improvise. When you use a name, cross it out and make a small note about who the person is, they might come in handy later.

Prepare an easy reference sheet with any mechanics or details that will be important in the game. If you're going to use reference books, make friends with good quality bookmarks.

Think about plot beats you'd like to happen and how you might balance light and dark. Do players need some fun and let off steam? Do they need to push further into horror and have options for cathartic resolution?

How are the characters' relationships with their geists going? Is it time to focus in on a particular geist's Remembrance? What will help the game be balanced?

### The First Chapter

Lay out any ground rules that are important or need a refresher. Perhaps this session will be more cinematic and run in real time, perhaps people need to be reacquainted with the Geist Card.

Go over anything that happened between sessions, especially if time is being fast forwarded or it's been a long time between sessions.

Give players a sense of place and atmosphere to start the session; this ranges from, "When we last saw our plucky krewe they were squashed in a corner booth at the Frogface nightclub, Patrice smells like rotten eggs and Hammer's hair is dripping with bright green Plasm. What do you do now?" to cinematic sound effects and dramatic staging.

### During Play

Note when a player uses actions that are once per story.

Ensure a good balance of attention and collaborative gameplay. Sometimes the players will take the game in unexpected twists, so be ready to improvise in new directions.

If the session focuses more on a particular character, ensure the other characters have opportunities to interact, or play other characters with more proscriptive roles ("While your character is in Geneva could you play the mayor?" "I need you to come in, be loud and unreasonable, and then command your minions to drag the characters off to the tar pits.").

### End of Chapter

Make notes while they're fresh. You will forget things you thought were unforgettable.

Track Beats and Experiences.

Allow time for players to relax and discuss the game afterwards.

### End of Story

Celebrate and take note of what worked well.

Think about how the story will impact the characters and krewe in the long run. New reputation for hosting a great party? How will they not have their car impounded without a job and that many parking fines?

What are the dangling plot threads and how can you weave them in later? How will antagonists change their plans? Even if they are not seen for a few stories they will be pursuing their agendas.

If there is a break between stories, ask players if their characters are going to do anything in their downtime. Finding out what characters will do on their day off is a great way to find out where their passions are, how they are maintaining their relationship with Root and Bloom, and what would be a satisfying arc for the chronicle.

Encourage players to find in-character reasons for spending experiences (e.g. they spent a few days in Las Cadenas De Los Condenados to develop better contacts).

# Appendix One: The Absent

*I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.*

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

*The thing is, I know you can't see me. I'm sitting here next to you. I close my eyes and I hear you, breathing shallow in your sleep. You're so fragile right now, so damn delicate and I can see, or maybe sense, that your hold on life is weak.*

*It's my fault.*

*Doctors and nurses rush about their work. They ignore me. I'm just your father, the man who lost control of the car. The one who put you here. This is my fault. Even if you did open your eyes and look right at me, you wouldn't see me. I'm invisible. I can't do anything when the doctors joke at your expense. When the nurses are rough with you while changing your sheets. I want to scream at them, but I'm powerless to stop them. Or to help you. I can't even read you stories or tell you how much I love you because I died when I fucked up and now I can't decide which one of us got the worst of this. You may never wake up. You may grow old, or at least older, and never actually live, and I'll be here watching you, trying to touch your hand, and knowing it's my fault. There are people who could help you, I'm sure of it, if I could get them to listen. I snooped once, on a neurologist in the doctor's lounge on the fifth floor. I poked around in his memories — they floated about him as he napped — and found a memory of a lecture on a girl in your condition. The treatment they tried on her proved to be effective in 51% of similar cases. He knew, once, how to fix you, I'm sure of it, but he never got called in. The staff never made the connection between your condition and his expertise. So here we are, you not alive enough and me not dead enough. I'm going to find a way to get him down here to see you. I will do whatever it takes. I just need you to wake up, baby, and then, I'm sure, I'll be okay too.*

## Being Absent

Most ghosts do little more than exist. They relive their private memories and gather the Essence they can, and hang on just to survive. For the Bound, the Bargain allows them to cheat, to be in both worlds, the living and the dead. Ghosts are not so privileged. Most spend so much energy just staying out of the Underworld that they can't consider that the system is bent against them. The Bound look at the suffering of the well and truly dead as a problem to be solved. For ghosts, survival is job one, and just getting through that takes almost more energy than they have.

No ghost wakes up aware that they have to work with the Bound to make the afterlife better. It's the rare ghost who even has the ability to contemplate their situation and realize that the system — struggling to hold to Anchors and getting dragged away by the Reapers when they lose that struggle — is untenable. Situation and misfortune force them to come at the struggle sideways. Maybe their Anchors are threatened, their cemetery is dominated by a ghost running an Essence racket, or maybe they ran out of their own memories and had to start stealing others' just to survive. Whatever the reason, ghosts who leave their bones behind call themselves Absent, if only to differentiate themselves from the suckers who never would.

For the Absent, every day is a new hustle, and hustle is what they need to survive, not what they do to thrive. Thriving? That's for the living.

## What the Absent Do



Ghosts who step out of the cycle of remembering, weeping, clinging, then fading away, they hustle. They skirt the unwritten rules of the dead and create breathing room for themselves without ever crossing the line. The Absent are like the guy who can't get a normal job because of his record for selling CDs on the corner. He doesn't have a business license, but he's not exactly selling drugs. It's not legal, not really, but it's not high crimes either. The Absent aren't facing trigger-happy cops and a litigious society that can't decide when they're finished punishing the "undesirable." Rather, they're facing Chthonic monsters from the Underworld and a population of the living who could help them but doesn't. Of course, the living don't just ignore the dead because it's difficult to face the inequalities of the afterlife: The nature of Twilight means ghosts are literally erased.

### Absent Mechanics

Unless explicitly overridden by something in this appendix, Absent characters follow the rules for ghosts in Chapter Five (p. XX).

## Making Room

In **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, krewes creation requires players to consider the ghosts who join and support their cult. These rules allow players to take this to the next level, mixing a ghost into the player-character group among the Bound. The Absent are playable even in the most straightforward chronicle. However, if players show an interest in playing the Absent at the table, the Storyteller should consider a few things while discussing characters before the final decisions are made.

Do you understand what ghosts do? Do you understand what their limitations are? Questions for players and Storyteller alike make sure they're on the same page.

Who is centered? Is this a game for the Bound with ghosts? Is this a game for ghosts with Bound characters? Can the Storyteller move back and forth between the two extremes easily, or should they flag who is centered when?

Does the Storyteller understand the way memories work for ghost characters and is she comfortable working them into her game? It's possible that a game can include ghosts as player characters without using memories, but it would be unfair for a player to invest a lot of thought and dots into the use and manipulation of memories if the Storyteller doesn't intend to use them.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, of course, but they should be considered at the table and agreed to by the group.

## Can't Stop the Hustle

For many, the hustle doesn't really start until after they're dead. If life was hard, death is a struggle. But the struggle, and the hustle to endure that struggle, isn't a simple thing the Bound or ghosts can just fix. It's complicated, and fixing one thing can mean breaking a lot of other things and ruining a lot of (dead) people along the way. Why? It's different for every ghost. Life has a lot of rules, a lot of boundaries, and very few of the living ever test them. Death has one rule: Just hang on. It has boundaries too, but to hang on you pretty much have to push them. And the other side of most boundaries is Hell. Death for the dead.

Presented below is a collection of characters that examine many different aspects of ghosts that could be used as a springboard at the table. This collection is a variety of themes, struggles, and

possibilities to encourage players to dig in and find a diversity of choice in playing Absent characters.

#### A Note on Gender

The genders suggested here are for demonstrative purposes only. Your Dead Boyfriend isn't necessarily a he, nor is Your Dead Boyfriend necessarily into women. Ghosts don't actually give much of a shit about gender anymore, and given how freely they trade memories of different genders and sexualities, a lot of the Absent genderfuck as a matter of course.

## Concerning the Living

We naturally assume that for ghosts, the world they left behind is the only one that matters. And that's true for a little less than half of ghosts. While all ghosts have at least some awareness of or interest in the living, for these ghosts their hustle and even their existence is deeply tied to those happily living just past Twilight.

### The Family Man

*Everything I did, everything I do, I do it for you! Why is that so hard for you to understand? Why are you crying? Stop crying all the time! It's like you can't even hear me anymore! Are you even listening?*

**Who he is:** In life he was a bad person. He didn't set out to be, he wanted to be a good father, but what his upbringing taught him it meant to be a good father was pretty shit. He died with his kids and his wife terrified of him, and they remain afraid of his ghost to this day without really knowing it's there. Directly, anyway. He doesn't mean to terrorize them with his Manifestations, he's trying to protect them! His wife's new boyfriend is even worse than he was.

**His hustle:** His family is his everything and he's more aware than anyone that he failed them and continues to fail them. He's looking for another way, seeking out the memories of good dads he can emulate. He can't yet admit to anyone out loud that he needs help, but he needs to. Soon. Because he family is in real danger now.

**Playing the Family Man:** You never meant to be the bad guy. You just got so angry sometimes, and at least you never beat on your kids the way your old man beat on you. Sometimes you have trouble remembering you're dead and they're alive and you just get so mad! You want, no, need to make things right, but literally do not have the ability to do so.

**Suggested Traits:** Wake (Merit), Possess (Manifestation), Telekinesis (Numen)

### The Vindictive

*I have, literally, forever to make you pay for this. Forever.*

**Who he is:** He was wronged and then he died. And while the afterlife is an awful struggle, it is nothing compared to the agony of knowing the bad guy in his personal drama got away with it. On the bright side, the guy who betrayed him is dead, too. Which makes revenge just a little bit more interesting.

**His hustle:** His reason to exist is making that guy suffer. This isn't about justice, this is about revenge. This is a vendetta. Making that guy as miserable as possible is everything to him. And

unless he can be reached by others, he is willing to do some very, very bad things to get what he wants.

**Playing the Vindictive:** He has it coming. He did this. He deserves to be punished forever. If there's anything keeping you from grabbing him and yanking him with you into the Underworld, it's an awareness that your obsession is going to consume you and you don't deserve that, even if he does. You just don't know how to stop.

**Suggested Traits:** Pierced (Merit), Materialize (Manifestation), Blast (Numen)

### **The Erased**

*But I really didn't see anything. I don't understand any of this attention.*

**Who she is:** She was killed to protect a secret. She knew or represented something someone needed erased from the world. Of course, there's more to things than the living, and here she is with a secret worth killing over.

**Her hustle:** People, living and dead, kinda want to know what she was erased to hide. Or, if they don't, they should, because her existence was important, and not just to the Erased. She's a piece in a big terrible puzzle, one that once revealed could change everything. But don't ask her what it is. She doesn't know.

**Playing the Erased:** You proved, or could prove something. Only thing is, you're not ready to face your death, it would be too much for what's left of your mind. So for now you're trying to hide that you're you and how important what you know is, while trying to find a safe way to rediscover your secret.

**Suggested Traits:** Dead Meat (Merit), Image (Manifestation), Hallucination (Numen)

## **Concerning the Dead**

The living go on with little regard for the dead, by and large. And for some ghosts, the disinterest is returned. For those who were already steeped in death, or otherwise disconnected from the living, death and existence trump any longing for their life as it was. Holding onto the safety of their current stasis or mastering Twilight becomes the whole of their hustle.

### **The Banshee**

*You come in here, thinking you understand this place and what it's like for us? You think you know us because you saw death for a minute, made a deal, and walked away. You know what the living call people who get pulled in, make a deal, and walk away? Narcs. So fuck off, narc. I got a dead city to save.*

**Who he is:** He died by way of betrayal, though not necessarily because someone stabbed him directly in the back. Rather, he died because the system that was supposed to support him failed him. If he wasn't a vet denied treatment for something that didn't have to be deadly, it was something exactly like that. In life, he believed in institutions and community, so he was quiet and well-behaved and died waiting for help. Never again.

**His hustle:** The Underworld is the perfect example of how systems don't work, and while he'd like to take part in dismantling it, he doesn't trust the Bound. He doesn't really trust anyone besides himself. And so he screams at the first signs of injustice, of corruption, when he sees

them. That said, he'll work with people so long as they're really making good on promises to make existence easier for ghosts like him.

**Playing the Banshee:** Never ever hesitate to call out bullshit. Feelings matter, but not compared to doing the right thing. People might not like you, but they'll respect you because you get shit done. Friendship is nice, progress and security is better.

**Suggested Traits:** Deep Memory (Merit), Discorporate (Manifestation), Implant Mission (Numen)

### **The Grinder**

*Hey. You got memories? Anything juicy? How about your first kiss? No? Well, I got a first kiss you wouldn't fucking believe. Sure, it's yours. Don't sweat it. Let's just say I'll need your help with something in return. Nah, nothing dangerous. You know the guy with the stringy hair that hangs around your Haunts? You get his name for me, his real name, and the memory is yours. Believe me, baby. It's worth it.*

**Who she is:** She was in the game before she died, really, a low-key medium who helped a dead aunt collect memories for sale and trade. But she didn't know much about much at the time. She's not sure how she died, but she's pretty sure it has something to do with the ghost eater that was after Tía for years. But now she's dead and all the weird things Tía asked her to do make so much more sense. She gets it: Death's a game, and the winners are the ones who collect the most memories and favors. Any other possibility is just too terrifying to consider. So, she grinds.

**Her hustle:** There's plenty of casuals out there, ghosts who pick up a memory here or there, a favor from a friend that they call in when shit goes sideways. That's good enough for most. Not you. You're here to master the game. You don't just find memories; you yank 'em out of heads if you've got to. Your collection of memories is impressive, but you keep 'em moving because people needing what you've got is more valuable than the stock itself. That's a demand economy, right? You're planning to make a move on some much older Absent who've set up one of those Essence-debt situations with a bunch of real low ghosts. If you can break up their deals, you might be able to free their victims. Or use the farm for yourself. Either way.

**Playing the Grinder:** There's always a deal to be made. You interact (technically) with the living because they're a resource rather than a state you remember with fondness. You were steeped in death before you died, so it doesn't really feel like you're missing out. You're too busy to feel like you're missing out. If you ever slowed down long enough to consider all you didn't get to do, dying young and living life for the dead to begin with, it might be soul crushing. Which is just another reason to keep on grinding. Anyway, you're good at the game, the hustle. You can reap memories with the best of them and everyone's interested in the merchandise you're carrying around.

**Suggested Traits:** Deep Memory (Merit), Possess (Manifestation), Reap Memory (Numen)

### **Your Dead Boyfriend**

*Sleep when you're dead? Nah. They've been telling us that from day one, that life is too short so you gotta live your life. Well guess what baby, death's short too, and I'm going dancing. You can sit here and mope if you want, but don't sleep. Come dancing with me before the Gates open and we're dragged to hell. They don't have dancing there.*

**Who he is:** You had this thing before you died. It wasn't love, but it could have gone that way if you'd just had more time. Then you died. That sucked. And in dying you realized just how much you wanted, no, needed to love someone and be loved in return. Now, death is bouncing from one dead girl to the next, looking for the one. You're a hopeless romantic, but everyone else just seems hopeless and that's killing you. Are you a vapid party boy? A player? Nah, nothing like that. You just really want to know love, real love, and there's got to be someone out there who can give it back.

**His hustle:** Your Dead Boyfriend has some high personal ideals, chasing the perfect romance, and it can blind him to the actual social interactions happening around him. Some ghosts get stuck chasing an ideal or dream they never satisfied in life and it becomes an obsession for them. He'll work the memory game like any ghost, but for him it's about finding brief moments of other people's romantic pasts and hoarding them. He's not stupid; he knows people will manipulate him given the chance, but the chase is worth it to him. He's willing to spend eternity having his heart broken over and over again for those fleeting moments of pure romance.

**Playing Your Dead Boyfriend:** Dance, sing, throw half-remembered lines of poetry around and see who they stick with. Haunt locations where sad girls draw pictures of the boys they lost in the hopes of grabbing a juicy memory of happier times. Flirt with every Bound and ghost you meet. True love isn't picky, you aren't either. Make yourself vulnerable, put yourself at risk. It's worth it, it has to be.

**Suggested Traits:** Striking Looks (Merit), Materialize (Manifestation), Seek (Numen)

**((ART NOTE: IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO ART FOR ANY OF THE CHARACTERS, DO THE ONE ABOVE, AND MAKE HIM LIKE THIS: [HTTPS://S6.FAVIM.COM/ORIG/141119/ABS-ACTOR-DEREK-HALE-HANDSOME-FAVIM.COM-2246926.JPG](https://s6.favim.com/orig/141119/abs-actor-derek-hale-handsome-favim.com-2246926.jpg) THANK YOU AND YOU'RE WELCOME.))**

### **The Priest**

*Church is a word for a building. I don't have a church. Faith is a word for a feeling, an understanding, and some days, I tell you brothers and sisters, I just don't understand! But love? That's a word did a thing we can't fit into an easy definition, I say, love is a thing we cannot define my brothers and sisters, I say love is just love, and do you know what I got? Do you know what I got? Well I got love! Let me hear you sing it!*

**Who she is:** There might not be a man or woman alive who truly remembers her, who she was and what she did. It doesn't matter, because at the moment of death she understood. She understood why the dead suffer and the living mourn. She understood why the Avernian Gates lead to hell and not heaven, and that reason is simple. Ain't nobody got enough love. So now she preaches to the living and the dead. She believes herself to be a vessel for divine love, and the righteous defender of a better, brighter future for all comers.

**Her hustle:** while she doesn't bother herself with her own personal connection to the living world, she still ministers to the living that come and bring libations to her grave. Like a local saint, they pray and whisper confessions, and so she is rich in Essence and memories that aren't her own. They leave with a sense of peace. With the dead she is more... proactive and persuasive, building her congregations and therefore her krewes. She leads ceremonies for the Bound and

other ghosts, and sees her Bound as beloved tools toward a right and righteous afterlife. She is their rock, or is working to become so.

**Playing the Priest:** Freely share your love, your ideas, your memories and of course, your opinions. It's not that you know best for each person you meet, it's that you know better for everyone! You know the key to true paradise. And you get the world in that order. You'll make it happen no matter the cost.

**Suggested Traits:** Common Sense (Merit), Fetter (Manifestation), Omen Trance (Numen)

### **The Professor**

*Interesting theory. Let me see how that compares to my research.*

**Who she is:** As an anthropologist already fixated on the traditions of death all over the world, she lingered after death not because life left her with unfinished business, but because death itself was her business, Rumor has it she's already released an Anchor and knows how to release others but chooses not to as a part of her research. She's not saying either way.

**Her hustle:** She is a bona fide expert in the dead in folklore and mythology. Her most precious memory is an expedition to witness secret burial rites all over the globe and she'll never give that up. Still, there is so much to learn here, now, and frankly, holding on to new knowledge is difficult in her current state.

**Playing Professor:** Little known fact, but when books are destroyed before they're used, they can enter the Twilight in some places. You have to use your own Plasm for makeshift ink, but blank books are in short supply. Writing the secrets you've discovered about the reality of death is all well and good, but you're hoping to implant that knowledge in minds that can make memories of it and thus deepen your access to the information. (This process is reflected in a Staff merit, they are researchers for you.) It's a process. But anyway, these days? Your real curiosity? The Gates and the Rivers. You're making plans. Great plans.

**Suggested Traits:** Staff (Merit), Fetter (Manifestation), Pathfinder (Numen)

## **Concerning the Strange**

There are more things in heaven and earth than any of us can imagine, and not all that lingers in Twilight fits the neat narrative of "you live, you die, you become an ethereal being, and things get worse from there." For these rare beings, exploring their own strangeness becomes its own hustle.

### **The Open Wound**

*I used to know how to do that, but the knowledge, it's missing. You meant something to me once, the look on your face says as much. But it's gone now, who we were to each other, and I am so, so sorry.*

**Who they are:** Maybe they were whole once, a Bound's friend or lover or just a sort of dead employee, but the worst happened. It might have been Reapers, or necromancers, or even ghost eaters who took them away. The Bound rescued them from their needlessly cruel incarceration but a part of them is gone. They left behind, possibly literally, parts of their personality. While they are still a thinking person with a free will, who they are and how they felt about existence are just gone. Physically, their Corpus is literally missing pieces, limbs or big horrible bites out

of their torso depending on the nature of their incarceration. They don't remember any of it, and probably can't.

**Their hustle:** the Open Wound has two choices; regret what's lost and chase it to make themselves whole again, or think of this as a fresh start and seek to fill in the blanks on their own terms. The best and worst of that follows how their friends treat them from here on out. Deciding who to be and how to hold on to that when they know it can all be taken away again is one hell of a hustle.

**Playing the Open Wound:** You're a blank slate in a lot of ways. You have tastes and preferences, even flashes of recall, but nothing to tie them to. Your sense of morality is nascent, mostly built around good is safety and bad is getting taken away again. Then again, you could have been or could become anyone dead, now. Which is kind of exciting.

**Suggested Traits:** Pierced (Merit), Discorporate (Manifestation), Speed (Numen)

### **Zombie Baby**

*Oh hell... you noticed me? Nice! You wanna go dancing? Yeah sure, baby. Just come up to my place real quick. I need a real quick bite to eat before it really feels like living, you know?*

**Who he is:** He is a disgusting abomination, but he's also an innocent victim. He's a murderer and a cannibal, but he didn't ask for any of this. He's a ghost, but he's stuck in a body, and that body needs him to feed. He's doing the best he can, okay?

**His hustle:** The Zombie Baby just wants to live a little more, and he's kind of doing it. It just takes a lot of Essence and a lot of raw meat. He knows what he does is disgusting and that most ghosts hate him, but maybe they're just jealous. So, he burns through Essence and butcher-shop burglaries to get what he needs. Though he knows it can't go on like this forever, he doesn't really know how to stop.

**Playing Zombie Baby:** Look, maybe you've got a dead guy in a meat freezer in the basement, but it's not like you killed the guy. You've got control of that! You do okay scavenging instead of killing.

**Suggested Traits:** Dead Meat (Merit), Emotional Aura, Moliate (Numina)

### **The Never Born**

*What was it like? Do you remember the screaming and the blood? No, no, not death. The other thing.*

**Who he is:** No one is really sure who he is. He might simply be a ghost who lost all his personal memories and became... confused. Or he might, as he claims, have always been a ghost. He says dark magic birthed him, not a living woman, and the shadows were his embryonic fluid. Suffice to say, he's not a lot of fun at parties.

**His hustle:** He wants to be born. Not in a religious sense, though it's close to that, but in a very real and physical sense. He is desperate to find a way, to know life as he never has, or at least has forgotten. He longs to breathe, to take a real breath for the first time and feel sunlight on skin.

**Playing the Never Born:** You are obsessed with necromancy from the other side. Any possible tale of rebirth or reincarnations interests you. While you do what you can to stay out of the

Gates, your only real goal is to have what you think you never did. Life. Should you ever get it though, oh, the lengths you will go to keep it. Forever.

**Suggested Traits:** Shackled (Merit), Avernian Gateway (Manifestation), Anchor Jump (Numen)

## Memories

*It's all we got left, you feel me? Who we were, what we supposed to be, who still thinking about us, and whatever we remember as important. The longer you in this game, the more about what you actually was you forget. So you gotta get the memories from somewhere. That's why we do what we do. It ain't personal. It's survival.*

— 50 Cal of the Restview Deadgirls.

## The Road to Hell

It's not good intentions, it's harsh reality. Memories, good or bad, yours or someone else's, they slow you down along the way. If you can grab a good strong one, you can hang on indefinitely, wrapped up in pleasant stasis. Or at least stasis that keeps you out of the Underworld.

For many ghosts, who they were and what happened when they died is simply too hard to deal with. When the dead are remembered by their loved ones and gain Essence, those moments are good times, fights, last words, secret trysts — but only rarely do the living think of the dead at the moment of their death. Even then, it's impossible for the living to truly understand the trauma of entering Twilight until they've done it. To maintain their sense of self, most ghosts work hard to avoid thinking about that one specific moment of transition. The pain and fear, the uncertainty and the betrayal as life is taken away but awareness remains.

For most ghosts, moving on is a rumor or an impossible prospect because they don't know how it works. Breaking, losing Integrity, means becoming an echo stuck in a traumatic moment until oblivion takes you. Or worst of all, falling apart and being dragged into the Underworld. So, while the Bound hold high ideals of freeing ghosts from the Underworld and curing them of their hang-ups, just hanging on is a full-time job and a part-time job to boot. Memories, theirs or other people's, are the stuff of that work.

## New Trait: Memories

A Memory is a short phrase, a description of a significant moment in someone's life, the ghost's or someone else's: When She Walked Out On Us, maybe, or Monday Morning is Always the Same. Memories are born of strong emotions: love, despair, hate, terror. They're little pieces of lives lived, at once bulwarks against the loss of self and priceless currency among the dead.

Memories are experiential: They can be traded back and forth, but while a ghost possesses one, she *remembers* the events it describes as though they happened to her. Doesn't matter how different the Memory's original owner was, or how out-of-place that Memory is with the ghost's own memories, it's exactly as though she lived it.

Memories have Skills attached. These are not the ghost's own abilities or knowledge, not really, but echoes. A ghost singing an ancient lullaby is beautiful and haunting, but it isn't really the ghost singing any more than it's her hand you think you felt on your cheek when you heard it.

**Example:** *Baby Doll just sacrificed her Memory of Her Father's Rough Hands (Crafts 2, Athletics 2). It was a rough scene. But at the end of it, a fellow ghost, in gratitude over Baby's*



*sacrifice, offers her My Mother's Middle Name Was June. After Baby accepts the memory, the Storyteller tells her it has Expression and Occult attached. Baby's player assigns three to Expression and one to Occult. If it had only Expression attached, Baby's player would have a dot left over for a new memory to be picked up later.*

## Memory Basics

- **Associated Skills:** Every Memory is associated with two Skills.
- **Associated Conditions:** Some Memories come with Persistent Conditions, which remain with the character as long as she hold the Memory.
- **Memory Skills:** The Absent always have 12 dots of Skills to distribute among their Memory Skills. They may reallocate these dots between chapters, or when they gain a new Memory or lose one they possess.
- **Memory Skill Maximum:** No Skill may have more than three Memory Skill dots assigned to it, and Memory Skill dots cannot take a ghost's Skill rating above her Rank-derived Trait Maximum (p. XX).

## Memories as Buffers

A Memory is more than a memory: It's a bulwark against nonexistence. The Absent hoard Memories, treasuring them for the warm glimpses of lives once lived that they are, but any good hustler knows when it's time to cut her losses in exchange for a little more existence.

### Buffer Basics

- **Essence Buffer:** When the Absent would spend Essence to remain active for a day *or* suffer Essence bleed (p. XX), she may instead sacrifice a Memory.
- **Integrity Buffer:** When the Absent would suffer a breaking point, she may instead sacrifice a Memory.
- **Sacrificed Memories:** A sacrificed Memory is gone forever. The character loses access to the Memory Skills associated with it, and forgets ever having experienced it.

## Breaking Anyway

If the ghost has no Memories to sacrifice, or chooses not to, she must make the breaking point roll as the living do. The player or Storyteller rolls the ghost's Resistance + Rank modified by their Integrity score (p. XX).

The character doesn't sacrifice a Memory to use a Skill from it.

## Acquiring Memories

The Absent have, broadly speaking, four ways of acquiring new Memories. They can trade them with other ghosts, scavenge them from the oblivious living, harvest them using the Reap Memory Numen, or, rarest of all, make new <emories in concert with the living.

### Potent Memories

Not just any recollection can become a Memory. To have enough power to sustain a ghost, a Memory must have significant emotional context. The following is a non-exhaustive list of circumstances likely to be potent enough to create a Memory.

- A breaking point
- Fulfillment (or failure) of an Aspiration
- Resolution (or acquisition) of a Condition
- Dramatic fulfillment of a Virtue or Vice

## Trading Memories

For ghosts, Memories are tangible things, like paper clips. It's tough to describe them, and one could define them by Plasm or Essence or pixie dust as they like. But for ghosts, they are real and touchable in a way the living world is not. For anyone not a ghost? Memories have no substance. They don't exist outside of some neurons firing in a brain somewhere.

Because they are tangible to ghosts, a thing a ghost can pick up rather than just an idea, they can be carried and favored and traded. If Sissy Starved has a Wedding Night Memory, it's hers, and Toothless can't borrow it. It changes hands, and in fact, it changes itself as it changes hands. Sissy attached that memory to herself, and when detaching it to give or trade, it takes some of her with it. A ghost can tell the difference between a Memory that's hers and a Memory that came from someone else most of the time, but she's still imprinted. (Though a ghost with no personal Memories can't tell which aren't hers, as she has no point of comparison.) Memories, especially those that have changed hands a number of times, can't be trusted as facts, only as experiences.

If a ghost gives away a Memory, the moment is gone. She can remember talking about the Memory if she did, but cannot feel the experience again. This is a willing exchange. Ghosts can't pickpocket Memories from each other (the living are another story). A ghost can threaten and coerce another, of course, but while Memories are tangible, they can't be taken away by force.

For most ghosts, Memories are currency, and that has its own value: a nebulous, shifting calculus of "useful Skills" versus "not completely traumatizing" or, rarely, "pleasant." Faced with an angry Reaper and armed only with a Memento pistol she doesn't know how to use, the Crow's Daughter might give you a deal for His Eyes When I Shot Him. In less dire circumstances, good luck unloading a Memory that comes bundled with PTSD and night terrors. As to the goods that currency supports? It's debatable. Trust, safety, secrets, Essence, names and places, a place to hide when the Reapers come. This part of the economy is less concrete.

## Trading Memories

- **Willpower Cost:** It costs 1 Willpower to give another ghost Memories. Multiple Memories may be given at once.
- **Consent:** Both parties must consent to the exchange of Memories.
- **Transfer:** The ghost giving the Memory immediately loses all associated Memory Skills and associated Persistent Conditions. The receiving ghost gains them. Both may immediately reallocate their Memory Skill dots.

## Harvesting Memories

Have you ever gotten up in the middle of the night, gone to the kitchen, and seen your dead mother weeping blood on the floor over a phantom image of your long-lost sister, secretly murdered by your father in that very kitchen? No? Are you sure? How about this: Have you ever gotten up in the middle of the night and gone to the kitchen, only to forget why you went down there to begin with?

Any ghost with the Reap Memory Numen (p. XX) can reach into a living person's mind and yank a Memory out. Or more likely, force the living to suddenly recall something. The Memory, then, is really of reliving the experience unexpectedly. A harrowing concept, softened only by the thought that the living person loses the experience as soon as the ghost reaps the Memory. It leaves behind only a residual feeling of unease that's easy to sweep away as nothing.

## Finding Memories

Memories happen. They follow the living for a while after they're made, then they fade away in most cases. Sometimes they linger in a spot a while where the Memory was made and hang there, waiting to be picked up by passing ghosts. Some places store Memories and, after a fashion, make new, littler Memories. That big oak tree in the woods everyone you knew in high school drank at? That place holds a ton of Memories. When you brought your teenage son there, years later, showing him the spot where you carved his mother's name, you revived that shared Memory as well as creating a new one with your son. Theme parks and museums are rich veins of Memory. Places where important events were held and viewed by a mass of people, especially tragic events like a hospital fire, make Memories as well, but the ghosts made there tend to guard them pretty exclusively.

Memories take time to be formed or recalled, so finding them required patience — something not all ghosts have in great supply.

## Making Memories

It is possible, though difficult, for ghosts to make new Memories strong enough to be useful, tangible things. A ghost at Rank 2 is sentient. She more or less remembers her conversation with her Bound friend on Sunday, but it's not really a true Memory in the intrinsic and valuable sense described here.

To make new Memories a ghost can consider personal, the living must be involved, and they must be aware, at least vaguely, that the ghost is present. This is a good argument for working with mediums and the Bound. From there, the ghost must find a way to directly interact with the living. Manifestations work, but are often painful emotionally. Certain Numina work as well. In that moment of contact, the Memory is made. The Storyteller associates Skills with it, and the ghost's player notes it down and puts a star by it. After this first contact, Memories with the same living person must be formed in a different way in the future. Things have to escalate to be a new-made Memory.

## Memory Bleed

A ghost can hoard as many Memories as she has dots in Integrity. More than that and she enters a state of confusion as to who she is and what is real. She gains the Memory Bleed Condition (see below). Her own, personal Memories don't count toward this limit.

### Memory Bleed (Persistent)

Wait, did you *actually* kill that guy at Dottie's Diner outside Reno? Or was that someone else? Come to think of it, was this always your face?

**Effect:**

- Once per story, the Storyteller replaces one of your short-term Aspirations with one suggested by one of your Memories. You can veto any Aspiration you're uncomfortable with, but you can't choose not to have a new Aspiration.

**Possible Sources:** Having more non-personal Memories than you have dots of Integrity.

## Merits

These Merits are all available to the Absent.

### Brain Eater (•)

Any ghost can harvest Memories from the living if they know how. You can extract Memories from dead tissue, which you can interact with. It's never pretty.

**Requirements:** Ghost

#### Effects

- You can interact with human corpses as if they were in Twilight.
- You can consume important organs to collect Memories, though usually the only Memories that remain are Memories tied to the person's death.
- You can harvest memories at a rate of one Memory per organ, with viable organs equal to the Stamina the corpse had in life.

### Dead Meat (•)

You've still got your bones and your meat. It's not pretty, but it's yours.

**Requirements:** Ghost

#### Effect

- You still inhabit a body, and therefore have Health instead of Corpus. You can regain Health with Essence as a ghost does, but must supplement this by replacing lost meat, at about 10 pounds of raw nonhuman meat (or one pound of raw human meat) per Health level lost to lethal or aggravated damage. You don't have to eat meat to heal bashing damage.
- People tend to ignore you. To interact with them on any social level, you must spend 1 Willpower. Other people notice you as usual if you attack or act aggressively.
- For every week you don't consume 10 pounds of raw, nonhuman flesh or one pound of raw human flesh, you temporarily lose a point of Finesse or Resistance. When you eat the meat you need, you regain all lost points. If either Attribute falls to 0 before you feed, you enter a frenzy in which you cannot do anything but find and consume an adult's weight of flesh and bone.
- You can't use Manifestations (but since you have a real, physical body, you usually don't need to)
- Your body is an Anchor, and resolving it will be wet and brutal.

### Deep Memory (•)

Do you remember how Carl could memorize baseball stats better than anyone? But it wasn't just that. To the day he died he could tell me what color shirt I was wearing the week before, the year before, he was just like that. Always full of memories.

**Requirements:** Ghost.

**Effect**

- You can retain more Memories than most ghosts. Add Integrity + Resistance to determine how many Memories the character can carry before suffering Memory bleed.

**Wake (• to •••••)**

You were well-loved or deeply feared in life, and still get regular visitors who come to mourn at your remains or some other spot of significance in your life. Their visits generate easy Essence for you.

**Requirements:** Ghost

**Effect**

- Once per chapter, collect Essence equal to dots in the Wake Merit.

## Iconography Merits

By and large, ghosts look like the people they were in life, at least to anyone who can see Twilight. The living, by and large, imagine the dead as grotesque and horrific due to the traumatic nature of Manifestations. But still, some ghosts' Corpus reflect certain widely accepted symbols of death. Called iconography by those who recognize the patterns, they tend to follow cultural lines and vary from region to region. These are merely a few examples. When a ghost Manifests, her iconography is a part of that Manifestation.

A ghost can only have one Iconography Merit.

### Ajna (•)

The word specifically refers to the third-eye chakra in some faiths, though in ghostly iconography it can mean any out-of-place eye placement, such as in the palms or belly button. He has an eye where it ought not to be, and it suggests an ability to see further than the living. He saw it coming when he died. It might bring to mind a beatific Buddhist saint in meditations, images of the White Tara and the eyes in her 100 hands, or certain frightening Japanese yokai like the shirime.

**Requirements:** Ghost

**Effects**

- Enjoy a +3 to any perception-related rolls.
- Double any penalties caused by sensory overload.

### Banda (•)

Banda is the name of a provocative dance popular in voodoo. In the context of ghosts, I's more about the movement and rhythm. She has a certain crooked, cocky swagger to her steps reminiscent of a strut. She died in service to the dead already, and only now is she coming into her own. This crooked rhythm is alluring as it is absurd and to those who know of it, it immediately brings to mind the dance and behavior of a ghede.

**Requirements:** Ghost

**Effects**

- Enjoy a +3 to becoming the center of attention and getting away with it.
- Suffer -2 to any Stealth action. Even the living should get a chance to notice something, even if they can't see the ghost.

### Crowned (•)

Present in images of the dead from Ancient Greece to Constantinople to Thailand, the halo or crown is a facet of actual ghost iconography as well. She is bathed in a ray of soft golden light, or carries a gentle spectral mandala about her head. She is certain to have died sacrificing herself for others. She is more likely to bring to mind Egon Schiele's *Child with Halo in a Flower Meadow* than images of gilded Catholic saints, however.

**Requirements:** Ghost

#### Effect

- Anyone, living or dead, facing a breaking point or a crisis point around the ghost enjoys a +1 bonus on the roll. The ghost loses 1 Essence when this happens.

### Immaculate Heart (•)

An exposed heart, not gruesome but biological. The center of her chest has ribs missing to allow the heart to be seen. It beats and throbs with low light, either red or purple in most cases. She brings to mind the waxwork of Eleanor Crook or Sigrid Sarda, if you can stomach it.

**Requirements:** Ghost

#### Effects

- Suffer -2 to hiding your feelings.
- Enjoy a +3 to invoke or inspire trust.

### Pierced (•)

Her body is pierced by knives or arrows or bullets and the wounds lightly weep. If the weapon is large, like a spear, it is broken off close to her body. The tines piercing her cannot be removed. She most assuredly died by violence. She brings to mind the suffering of Saint Sebastian or lurid images of fallen soldiers.

**Requirements:** Ghost.

#### Effects

- The ghost has a permanent -1 wound penalty (p. XX).
- The ghost ignores the first instance of damage she suffers in each scene.

### Shackled (•)

She is chained, though to nothing in specific. The weight of the chains slows her. Her mouth may be gagged, but she can still speak. If they are ropes instead of chains, they bite into her skin and look painful. She died of neglect or obsession. This binding has no sexuality to it; that's a different iconography. She brings to mind Jacob Marley.

**Requirements:** Ghost

#### Effects

- Once per chapter, the ghost regains 2 Essence for spending a day in proximity to an Anchor.
- The ghost's Speed is reduced by half (round down).

### Veined (•)

Black or dark red veins, maybe blue, crisscross her body but also seem to extend out past her skin, suggesting a connection between her veins and other ghosts. The veins have a visible pulse. She died without a support network, and because of it. It might be gruesome, or oddly beautiful, such as the works of Frida Kahlo. Specifically, she brings to mind *Las dos Fridas*.

**Requirements:** Ghost

#### Effects

- The ghost is treated as 1 Rank higher for the purposes of how much Essence she can spend per turn.
- The first instance of damage the ghost suffers in a scene inflicts an additional point of damage of the same type.

### Waters (•)

The ghost is ever-wet and dripping. When angry, water floods from his mouth as he speaks. He may move slowly, his hair and clothing floating just a little around him. He died in the water. He brings to mind Ophelia in the river.

**Requirements:** Ghost

#### Effects

- Spend 1 Essence. A portion of a body of water no smaller than a bathtub, no bigger than six by six by six meters, gains the Anchor Condition for the rest of the scene.
- If she enters a body of water that has the Anchor Condition, the ghost cannot be coerced or forced out, magically or otherwise.

## Death and Dying: Making Ghosts

*You have this image of us in your head. We're these white, floating sheets just waiting for you to see us so we can put on our song and dance. You act like we exist only when you summon us. Bullshit. Just 'cause we're dead don't mean we ain't got shit to do. I'm talking to you now as a courtesy. So stop wasting my fucking time. I gotta meet a guy.*

—*Moth-Dick*

## The Character

The Absent use simplified character creation, like any other ghost (p. XX). Their uniqueness as player characters, Absence, follows in the next section.

### Aspirations (p. XX)

The Absent have three Aspirations: two short-term and one long-term.

### Virtue and Vice (p. XX)

The dead have Virtue and Vice selected just as the living do, though one or both may have changed since their crossing to Twilight. However, their interactions with Willpower have changed.

Once per chapter a ghost can indulge in his Vice and fill his Willpower pool. Once per scene she may do the same with Virtue. Everything is stacked against the dead, seems like.

## Memories (p. XX)

Detail four Memories your character has with short, evocative phrases. Put a star next to Memories that are personal memories from the ghost's own life. Not all have to be. For each Memory, choose two associated Skills.

## Nickname

When you think of ghost stories, it's always Baby Blue, not Elisabeth Franklin; or the Man in White, not Franky Delgato. Unless they were famous, and not even frequently then, the Absent don't tend to use their real names when dealing with each other or the living. It's not only rude and overly intimate, it can be dangerous. Confronting an unprepared ghost with their real name can trigger a breaking point. Nicknames usually come from another ghost or the Bound when the ghost is discovered, though rarely an isolated ghost names herself or gets named by the urban legends that pop up around her.

## Traits

The Absent use the same basic Traits as other ephemeral entities (p. XX). A brief summary is reprinted here.

## Attributes (p. XX)

The Absent start with nine dots divided between three Attributes (p. XX). Each Attribute starts at 0 before dots are applied, and cannot rise above seven dots.

## Skills (p. XX)

The Absent begin with no Skill dots except for the 12 dots of Memory Skills described previously (p. XX).

## Skill Specialties (p. XX)

The Abiding don't have Skill Specialties.

## Merits (p. XX)

Choose 10 dots' worth of Merits, either from Chapter Three, this appendix, or other **Chronicles of Darkness** books. The Absent cannot take Merits that reflect biological traits of living bodies, like Iron Stamina or Hardy, or supernatural Merits.

## Rank (p. XX)

The Absent begin play at Rank 2.

### Drink Deep

Can player-character ghosts become geists? Reach Rank 3? Sure, why not? If the players are down, a damn good story could be spun around an adventure into the Underworld to bring some ghost buddies to the River. If they can manage it, they



can raise their Rank. This is not a casual job, but the culmination of a huge story arc and not to be expected more than once a character in a normal chronicle. It's either a chronicle-ending climax, or the ghost becomes a Storyteller character — or possibly the geist of your next Bound character.

### **Integrity (p. XX)**

The Absent start with an Integrity of 7.

### **Willpower (p. XX)**

Willpower dots equal Finesse + Resistance, to a maximum of 10.

### **Corpus (p. XX)**

The Absent's Corpus is Resistance + Size. The ghosts of typical adult humans are Size 5.

### **Defense (p. XX)**

Defense equals Power or Finesse, whichever is lower.

### **Speed (p. XX)**

Speed is equal to Power + Finesse + 5.

### **Ban (p. XX)**

The Absent have a Ban appropriate to a Rank 2 ghost. The Bans of Rank 2 ghosts are personal, different from ghost to ghost, or something a little tricky to arrange for. A cat meowing live, not recorded. Legit holy water. The ghost's photo. That kind of thing.

### **Bane (p. XX)**

The Absent have a Bane appropriate to a Rank 2 ghost. The Banes of Rank 2 ghosts are difficult to obtain but still "natural." Water from the lake they drowned in, a cigarette from a cancer patient's pack, or a minivan that has transported at least three children at once during the last month.

### **Influence (p. XX)**

The Absent have two dots of Influences. At least one dot must go to an Influence related to one of their Anchors. They may begin with more dots of Influences by sacrificing starting Numina at a rate of one Numen per dot.

### **Anchors (p. XX)**

The Absent start with a number of Anchors equal to their Resistance. One of those Anchors is usually their mortal remains, but the others can be people, places, or things that were important to the ghost in life. Consider selecting at least one portable Anchor, something tangible to facilitate ghost characters traveling with other characters. All Anchors can and should be included as possible points of drama in a story, but a Storyteller would be wise to not make these threats limit characters, but motivate and challenge them.

### **Numina (p. XX)**

Absent get three Numina to start and can learn more with Experiences. They may start with additional Numina by sacrificing starting Manifestations at a rate of one Manifestation per Numen.

## Manifestations (p. XX)

The Absent pick two Manifestations from the list on p. XX, in addition to Twilight Form. They may start with additional Manifestations by sacrificing starting Numina at a rate of one Numen per Manifestation.

### Rare Manifestations

The Materialize Numen is extremely rare, but not unheard of, in Rank 1 and 2 ghosts. Keep this in mind when creating Absent characters, but there's no restriction on choosing it. Players' characters are, by definition, exceptional.

## Ghost Advancement

The Absent have Aspirations and earn Experiences like living characters do, but their simplified Traits require different Experiences costs.

[TAB TABLE]

<b>Trait</b>	<b>Experience Cost</b>
Attribute dot	6
Numen	3
Manifestation	3
Influence dot	5
Skill dot*	2
Merit dot	1
Specialty	1
Rank**	5

[END TABLE]

\* Skill dots purchased with Experiences are Skills the ghost has learned herself, not Memory Skills.

\*\* To increase Rank, a ghost must have the Experiences needed to buy both the Rank dot and purchase dots in Attributes, Numina, Manifestations, and Influences to bring herself up to the minimum for the new Rank as soon as it increases. Then she must drink from a River (p. XX.) If she survives, her player may spend the Experiences to raise Rank and buy the other attached Traits.

# Appendix Two: Conditions & Tilts

## Tilts

### Conditions

#### Addled

Something's wrong with your memory. You remember faces but not names, and your sense of time is shot — you're sure you broke your leg falling off the swings just yesterday, but that happened 20 years ago and you have no memory of the guy with the hobbling post who caused this break. You don't forget skills or most facts (though you might slip up on the president's name); it's just that your memories are jumbled. Any rolls to remember specific events are reduced to a chance die. Any Composure dice pools suffer a -2 penalty.

**Possible Sources:** Progressive mental deterioration, some Haunts

**Resolution:** Walk into a dangerous situation or otherwise suffer significant difficulty because of your lack of memory.

#### Bonding

You had a brief moment of understanding with your geist, and you have an inkling of where it is coming from or what it wants. Your relationship is improved by one step. Resolving this condition grants a Synergy Beat.

**Possible Sources:** Succeeding at a crisis point roll

**Resolution:** Face another crisis point, improve your geist's Remembrance, or gain a dot of Synergy.

#### Dead

Something's killed you, and now your geist is free in the world until it can bring you back.

- Your geist is Unleashed (p. XX) for the rest of the scene. Play as the geist until this Condition is resolved.
- If the geist is destroyed or consumed, the Sin-Eater dies with it.
- Resolving this Condition grants a Krewe Beat, as the Sin-Eater better understands the mysteries of the Underworld.
- Resolving this Condition reduces your Synergy by 1.
- When you resolve this Condition, you return to life with all your Health boxes filled with lethal damage, all Tilts removed, and 1 Plasm. The Plasmic caul she tears free of may be consumed for 2 Plasm.

**Possible Sources:** Suffering fatal damage

**Resolution:** Return from the dead at the end of the scene.

#### Defiant (Persistent)

The character has broken an Old Law, intentionally or otherwise, and she is stained with the pall of the lawbreaker. All can sense the mark of the Kerberos upon her, and avoid her for their own safety.

### **Effects**

- The character is aware she has broken an Old Law.
- The character takes a –2 modifier to all Social actions in the Dominion.
- The Kerberos of the Dominion is aware of her location.

### **Possible Sources**

- Violating an Old Law
- The Boneyard Haunt (p. XX)

**Resolution:** Receive punishment from the Dominion’s Kerberos.

**Beat:** Experience consequences or difficulties because of your transgression.

### **Echoes**

You have echoes of being able to do something despite never learning how, fragments of your geist’s experiences lingering in your mind. You suffer a –1 penalty each time to all actions involving a Remembrance Trait until this Condition resolves.

**Possible Sources:** Using a Remembrance Trait

**Resolution:** Buy a dot in any Merit or Skill you have used as a Remembrance Trait while possessing this Condition. Gain an exceptional success on any roll using a Remembrance Skill without boosting it with Plasm.

### **Ferry-Bound**

The character has taken on the mantle of the Ferryman, tying herself to the Rivers and her vessel. In doing so, she attunes herself to the ebb and flow of the Underworld, to the rise and fall of Dominions, and the twisting skein of entropy behind it all — and how to exploit it.

### **Effects**

- Automatically succeed on Underworld navigation rolls.
- Must collect a price from all passengers, commensurate with the length and peril of the journey. Prices may be in Essence, the acquisition of Persistent Conditions or Tilts, or even more esoteric things.
- The journey always deposits passengers in a situation they are suited to destabilizing.
- Carrying a passenger without payment or leaving the ferry ends the Condition without resolving.

**Resolution:** Carry a passenger or passengers to a destination they will ultimately help to destabilize.

### **Flatlining (Persistent)**

The relationship with your geist has broken down completely; you’re not able to communicate enough even to threaten or cajole one another. You suffer the following limitations:

- Cannot gain Synergy Beats or spend Synergy Experiences.
- Cannot use Haunts or Keys.
- Cannot spend Plasm.
- Do not come back from the dead.
- Cannot interact with beings in Twilight.
- Automatically fail rolls involving crisis points, and cannot prevent your geist from responding.
- Cannot access Remembrance Traits or Unleash your geist.

**Possible Sources:** Hitting Synergy 0

**Resolution:** Die for the last time, improve your geist's Remembrance, shatter your geist's Touchstone.

**Beat:** Face a crisis point.

### Fugue (Persistent)

Something terrible happened. Rather than deal with it or let it break you, your mind shuts it out. You are prone to blackouts and lost time. Whenever circumstances become too similar to the situation that led to the character gaining this Condition, the player rolls Resolve + Composure. If you fail the roll, the Storyteller controls your character for the next scene; your character, left to his own devices, will try to avoid the scene and get away from the immediate area.

**Possible Sources:** Psychological trauma, encountering a breaking point, some Haunts

**Resolution:** Regain a dot of Integrity, lose *another* dot of Integrity, or achieve an exceptional success on a breaking point.

**Beat:** You enter a fugue state as described above.

### Ghost-Marked (Persistent)

Something has marked you, and you're no longer entirely a creature of the living. Perhaps one of your hands has had its flesh burned away yet remains intact as an animate skeleton, or your eyes have rotted away even though you can still see just fine. While you can hide the mark, and people who see it at a distance might mistake it for makeup or a prosthetic, those who get up close will not make that mistake. Social actions with the living who have seen the ghost-mark are reduced to a chance die for a week after, and suffer a -2 penalty for the duration of this Condition. Sin-Eaters know that one of their own has marked you, even if they don't see the mark itself.

**Possible Sources:** Some Haunts

**Resolution:** Beg the Sin-Eater who bestowed the mark to remove it, receive supernatural aid to restore the mark.

**Beat:** You fail a Social roll as a result of someone seeing the ghost-mark.

### Indebted

Your character feels a distinct tension that tells her things are out of balance. Either the geist grows impatient and displeased or you're starting to wonder who really benefits from your second shot at life. Every night that passes with this Condition, levy a cumulative –1 die penalty on invoking Haunts, Remembrance Traits, or managing crisis points.

In addition, you must spend a point of Plasm to “prime the pump” for a scene to spend more.

**Possible Sources:** Neglecting one Touchstone for another

**Resolution:** Regaining Willpower by defending or supporting the neglected Touchstone

**Beats:** n/a

## Lawbreaker (Persistent)

You have been branded a lawbreaker by the Kerberos of a Deep Dominion. The Dominion itself is raised against you, and you may only shed the label by completing the task the Kerberos sets you.

When you gain this Condition, note it as Lawbreaker (Dominion), with the Dominion in which you broke the Old Law.

### Effects

- Your maximum Synergy is reduced by 2.
- Within the Dominion, all of your failed rolls become dramatic failures.

### Beat

- Your reputation as a lawbreaker negatively impacts you.

### Resolution:

- Complete the task set for you by the Kerberos of the Dominion.
- Resolving this Condition grants a Krewe Beat.

## Memento Collector

Your collection is turning heads.

### Effect

- When interacting with other Sin-Eaters, treat your First Impression as one level higher.

### Possible Sources

A Sin-Eater shows off an impressive collection, such as:

- Five Mementos with matching Keys.
- A complete set of nine Mementos, each with a different Key.
- One exceptionally famous Memento (at the Storyteller's discretion).

### Resolution

- The collection is lost or removed.

## Regalia

You are crowned with the mythic power of your krewe's mysteries. When your group creates a Regalia, you should rename this Condition and spend a moment or two thinking about how that particular Regalia appears.

### **Effects**

- Improve your reaction level (p. XX) with other Sin-Eaters by 1.
- One Regalia Effect (p. XX).

**Possible Sources:** The Bestow Regalia Ceremony

### **Resolution**

- Act in opposition to a krewe Doctrine, Virtue, or Creed. Gain the Guilty Condition.
- Resolve the Condition as described in the Regalia Effect description (p. XX).
- Resolving this Condition grants a Krewe Beat.

### **Spooked**

You have seen something supernatural — not overt enough to terrify you, but unmistakably otherworldly. How your character responds to this is up to you, but it captivates her and dominates her focus.

**Possible Sources:** Facing a breaking point, encountering the supernatural, being in a flared liminal aura

**Resolution:** You do something that hinders the group or complicates the situation (goes off alone to investigate a weird noise, spends all night researching, runs away instead of holding her ground, etc.)

### **Theophany (Persistent)**

It was all well and good when it started — faith, works, and a bit of miracle mixed in to spice things up. It was easy enough to understand the little things, the proof of life after death, the ectoplasm, the apparitions. It was less easy to cope with helping family members you thought long gone move on, less easy to ride through the realization that you, too, were probably going to be stuck in that hellish place. Now the faith has torn an archetypal specter from the shadows, set it and all the deaths like it free, made real changes in something ancient, monolithic, and evil. This shit is real, and it's working. How do you cope with something like that?

### **Effects**

- The krewe gains 8-again on all Resistance rolls.
- Individual krewe members gain +1 Willpower (maximum 10).

**Resolution:** The krewe experiences a schism, grounding their expectations.

**Krewe Beat:** The krewe suffers harm or a major setback due to their own overabundance of confidence.

### **Unleashed**

You are loose, free to act upon the world directly rather than through the powers of the Bargain. An Unleashed geist is a powerful force, but that power comes with increased vulnerability.

## Effects

- Immediately Materialize (p. XX), ignoring all requirements of that Manifestation.
- Gain the following Advantages: Size 5, Corpus (Size + Resistance), Initiative (Finesse + Resistance), Defense (lower of Power or Finesse), Speed (Power + Finesse + 5).
- Share Plasm and Willpower pools with your bound Sin-Eater.
- Treat innate Keys as Influences with dot ratings equal to your Rank.
- Use any Haunts your Bound knows with a dice pool of Power + Rank + Haunt.
- Use Down and Dirty Combat against lower-Rank ghosts and living people without a supernatural template.
- This Condition ends (without resolving) at the end of the scene.

**Possible Sources:** Unleashing

**Resolution:** The geist's Corpus track is filled with lethal or aggravated damage. When this Condition resolves, the Sin-Eater takes a Synergy Beat and loses all remaining Plasm.

## Wavering

You did something to piss off your geist, and now it doesn't want anything to do with you. You can still communicate, but getting it to work with you is harder. You must spend a point of Willpower in order to roll any dice pool, including Synergy. Resolving this condition grants a Synergy Beat.

**Possible Sources:** Failing a crisis point roll or otherwise annoying your geist

**Resolution:** Make a significant physical or material sacrifice when following your geist's Passion.

## Weakened Bond

You have unleashed your geist upon the world, and it is focused on acting out its own agenda in the world of the living. While this is a powerful state for the geist to be in, it strains the link between both halves of the Bound, leaving the Sin-Eater in a weakened state.

## Effects

- Cannot spend Plasm.
- This effect ends (without resolving) when the Unleashed Condition on the Sin-Eater's geist ends (without resolving).

**Possible Sources:** Unleashing your geist

**Resolution:** The end of the scene *after* the geist resolves the Unleashed Condition.

## Ephemeral Influence and Manifestation Conditions

If something falls into a ghost's sphere of influence, this is handled mechanically by declaring an Influence Condition. Influence Conditions resemble Tilts and character Conditions.

The different forms of the Manifestation Effect are also Conditions applied to the location, object, or character the ghost is Manifesting into or, in cases like Materialized, to the ghost.



Unlike many Conditions, Influence and Manifestation Conditions are tiered and interrelated; Manifestation Conditions have Influence Conditions as prerequisites and vice-versa. The lower tiers are naturally occurring, while the later ones must be created by ghosts using Influences and Manifestations.

In the most advanced forms of Influence and Manifestation, ghosts may attempt to create a long-lasting Condition that has a prerequisite of a very temporary one. When one Condition is advanced into another, the remaining duration of the prerequisite Conditions is “frozen.”

If a prerequisite Condition is removed from a character (for example, a Possessed character’s Open Condition is removed by exorcism) any Conditions relying on it, any relying on them, and so on are immediately removed. The most advanced remaining Condition then resumes its duration.

## Anchor

The subject of this Condition — usually a location or object, though it can be a person in rare cases — is within the sphere of influence of a ghost. Ghosts in or within (Rank x 3) yards of their Anchors do not suffer Essence bleed.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is immediately created when a new ghost is formed, based on whatever subject anchors the ghost’s identity. Summoning rituals intended to release ghosts from the Underworld or call them from elsewhere temporarily create this Condition in their target. Finally, a high-Rank ghost can use a Create Influence to mark a target as an Anchor.

**Ending the Condition:** The easiest way to end an Anchor condition is to destroy the subject. Some ghosts cling to Anchors that represent unfinished business, in which case resolving those issues can remove the Condition. Ghosts without Anchors bleed Essence until they fall into dormancy, at which point the Underworld Gate Condition is created and the ghost is banished to the Great Below.

## Bound Geist

The ghost is now a geist, partnered with one of the Bound thanks to the Bargain. While Bound, a geist’s Attributes are replaced with those derived from the host as per p. XX. Bound geists may not use any Influences, Numina, or other Manifestations, but do not need to spend Essence to remain active or suffer Essence Bleed. They use the host’s Willpower and Plasm instead of their own Willpower and Essence pools.

### Causing the Condition

This Condition is created by a ghost using the Bargain Manifestation.

### Ending the Condition

Although low Synergy can cause the Bargain to waver (see p. XX), the bond between Bound and geist is only destroyed by the host’s final death.

## Claimed

A Claimed object, corpse, creature, or person has been permanently possessed and merges with the ghost involved. Unlike Possess, living Claimed aren’t put into a fugue state, but remain mentally active while their soul and the Claiming ghost merge together over the course of several days. During the period of fusion, the subject is under all the effects of the Urged Condition, described on p. XX. Once per day, starting with the moment the Claimed Condition is created,

add one dot of the ghost's Attributes to the host's, permanently raising them. Power may be assigned to Strength, Intelligence, or Presence, Finesse to Wits, Dexterity, or Manipulation, and Resistance to Stamina, Composure, or Resolve. The host's physical form begins to mutate, taking on an appearance influenced by the original host and the ghost.

Claimed corpses add points to Attributes as above, but start with all Mental and Social Attributes at 0. Inanimate objects use the statistics appropriate for their type (Adding Resistance to Structure and Durability, Power to Acceleration and Finesse to Handling) instead of Physical Attributes, and also start the claiming process with all Mental and Social Attributes at 0. Corpses and inanimate hosts don't spend the claiming period under the Urged Condition, having no minds of their own to warp.

Claimed may use the ghost's Influences, but not Numina or Manifestation Effects. They may develop supernatural powers as Merits. From the moment the Claimed Condition is laid, the ghost is safe from Essence Bleed. The hybrid being that results has the ghost's Essence trait, Virtue, Vice, Fate, Ban, and Bane, but is a material being. Claimed that were once spirits may cross the Gauntlet at a Locus with a successful Intelligence + Presence roll. Claimed that were inanimate objects are fully animate, fusions of spiritual power, metal, and plastic.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by a ghost using the Claim Manifestation Effect.

**Ending the Condition:** Claim is permanent in living hosts unless the ghost decides to detach itself, rolling its original Power + Finesse penalized by Rank in dice and contested by the Claimed hybrid's Resolve + Composure, including any dots gained from being Claimed. If the ghost succeeds, the ghost and host are separated. Former hosts are physically and mentally scarred — the physical appearance changes back at the same rate it mutated and the extra Attribute dots fade at a rate of two per day. The Essence trait and any supernatural powers the Claimed developed immediately vanish. Former Claimed, however, retain the Virtue and Vice of the ghost that took them over.

In nonliving hosts, Claim is only temporary — once the Claim has fully formed, the host loses one dot of a Physical Attribute (or equivalent for formerly inanimate objects) per three days. When any of these Attributes reaches 0, the host disintegrates and the ghost is released into Twilight.

## Controlled

The object, creature, or person covered by an Open Condition has now been so conditioned that the ghost may attempt to Claim it, permanently merging with it.

**Prerequisites:** The intended subject of this Condition must have the Open Condition, tagged to the ghost attempting to cause it.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is the result of repeated use of the Possess Manifestation effect by a ghost. She must have succeeded in possessing the subject on a number of separate occasions equal to the Willpower of ghost or subject (whichever is higher). If any Possessed Condition is removed before its duration ends, progress is lost on building to the required number of possessions.

**Ending the Condition:** Successfully ending the Claimed Condition against the ghost's will, for example by forcing the Claimed subject into contact with the ghost's Bane, removes this Condition and reverts the subject to Open.

## Engulfed

The ghost has been imprisoned within another ghost's Corpus. While Engulfed, the victim enters hibernation as though she had lost all Corpus, but cannot regain Essence. Anything that would cause an Engulfed ghost to gain Essence grants that Essence to the captor instead. The captor may also commit ectophagia (p. XX) on the target without resistance.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by a ghost using the Engulf Manifestation Effect on another ghost.

**Ending the Condition:** Engulfed lasts one day, but the engulfing ghost may pay the Essence cost spent to engulf the victim again to make it last another day. When this Manifestation ends, the victims are expelled from the engulfing ghost and begin regaining Essence.

## Fettered

The ghost has secured itself to an object or creature. As long as it remains Fettered, the ghost is safe from Essence Bleed. The ghost remains in Twilight and must stay within five yards of the Fetter. Most entities Fettering themselves literally hide inside their Fetters if they are small enough.

The ghost pays one fewer Essence for using Influences on the Fetter, but may not use them or Numina on another target as long as the Fetter lasts.

**Prerequisites:** The intended subject of this Condition must have the Open Condition, tagged to the ghost attempting to cause it.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by a ghost using the Fetter Manifestation Effect.

**Ending the Condition:** Fetters are permanent unless the prerequisite Conditions are ended, or if the subject of the Fetter is destroyed or killed (if a living being). The ghost can voluntarily end the Condition by using the Unfetter Manifestation Effect.

## Materialized

The ghost has shifted from ephemeral to material substance, manifesting in physical form. All the rules for ephemeral entity's traits still apply except for the effects of being in Twilight. This Condition protects the ghost from Essence Bleed for its duration.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by a ghost using the Materialize Manifestation Effect on an Open Condition. If the Open Condition used is on an object or person, the ghost must materialize within its Rank in yards.

**Ending the Condition:** Materialization lasts for one hour per success on the activating roll. When the duration ends, the ghost fades back into Twilight. Physical contact with a Bane or removal of a prerequisite Condition can cause the Condition to end early.

## Open

The place, object, animal, or person covered by Anchor has now been conditioned to accept a ghost. That ghost can now attempt to Fetter itself to the subject of the Condition, or, if the Condition is on a location, Manifest.

**Prerequisites:** The Anchor Condition for the same phenomenon to which this Condition is tagged.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is usually the result of fine-tuning the Anchor Condition as part of an extended action, involving the subject and ghost acting in concert for a number of scenes equal to Rank or a living subject's Resolve, whichever is higher. Using a Control Influence allows a ghost to temporarily create the Open Condition as an instant action, and Plasm created by Manifestation causes Open on anything it covers until it decays.

**Ending the Condition:** The Condition ends if the Anchor Condition is removed or the Plasm creating it decays.

## Possessed

This object, corpse, or living being is temporarily controlled by a ghost. Living hosts are put into a coma-like state while being possessed — they experience the possession as missing time, except for flashbacks that might come out in dreams or times of stress such as losing Integrity. The ghost may not use Numina or Influences while controlling the host, but is safe from Essence Bleed as long as the possession lasts.

The ghost may pay 1 Essence per turn to heal one lethal or bashing wound or a point of structure lost to damage. Corpses that died through damage begin Possession incapacitated and must be “healed” with Essence.

Entities possessing inanimate objects or corpses have a great deal of control over their host. A ghost controlling an object can't make it do anything it couldn't do while being operated, but it can turn switches on and off, operate machinery, use keyboards, and turn dials. Use the ghost's Finesse if dice rolls are necessary.

Corpses and other articulated hosts capable of movement, such as shop mannequins or industrial robots, use their own Physical Attributes but the ghost's Attributes in Social or Mental rolls. By spending a point of Essence, the ghost can use its own Attributes instead of the host's for Physical tasks for a turn, but doing so causes one point of lethal damage or structure loss to the host.

Living hosts require more time for the ghost to gain full control and always use their own Attributes. The ghost may read the host's mind with a Finesse Roll at a -4 die penalty, use the host's Physical Skills at a -3 penalty, and the host's Social and Mental Skills at -4. These penalties are all reduced by one die per day that the ghost has been Fettered to the host. Most possessing entities Fetter themselves to their intended hosts and use the Possess Manifestation Effect to take full control only in emergencies.

To possess a host, the ghost must remain in Twilight, superimposed over the host. This means that if the host touches the ghost's Bane or is injured by a weapon made of the Bane, the ghost will suffer wounds to its Corpus.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by a ghost using the Possess Manifestation Effect. The object or victim must be under the Open Condition, tagged to the ghost.

**Ending the Condition:** The possession lasts for a single scene, unless the ghost abandons it early or the host is killed or destroyed.

## Underworld Gate

The location has an open gateway between the Underworld and living world, which ghosts may freely use to cross between worlds. All ghosts on the living world side lose 1 Essence per scene that they are in the gateway's presence.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition can be created by using the Avernian Gateway Manifestation Effect on an Open Condition. Existing Avernian Gates may be opened by anyone utilizing the proper Key (p. XX).

**Ending the Condition:** At the end of the scene, the Condition fades.

## Urged

This animal or human host has been used as a Fetter by an ephemeral being. The ghost may read the subject's thoughts with a successful Power + Finesse roll, contested by Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance. Success reveals surface thoughts. The ghost may urge the host to take a specified action with a successful Power + Finesse roll contested by Resolve + Composure with an extra die. If the ghost wins, the urge is created. Following it rewards the host with a Beat.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by a ghost using the Fetter Manifestation Effect.

**Ending the Condition:** The Urged Condition ends whenever the linked Fetter ends.

## Haunt Conditions & Tilts

### Actor

You have become part of a Memoria, taking on the persona and actions of someone involved in the events. Your character doesn't gain any knowledge of who their persona was or what they were thinking, but nonetheless your character finds themselves compelled to do what their persona did and say what they said during the Echo.

#### Effects:

- Your actions are dictated by the Echo in which you are participating.
- If an action the character is compelled to take would be a breaking point (or a crisis point, or equivalent), or if you suffer lethal damage, you may attempt to break the spell with a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll. Being reminded of your true identity by someone not involved in the Echo also allows an attempt to break the spell.
- While you have this Condition, the phantasmal memories *are* real and solid to you. You can walk up the image of a staircase that collapsed 80 years ago, pick up an illusionary gun, and be injured by phantom bullets.

**Possible Sources:** Some Haunts, the influence of some ghosts or haunted places

#### Resolution:

- The illusion plays out to completion.
- The character succeeds at a roll to break the spell.

- The character fails a breaking point roll caused by her persona's actions.
- You are confronted by the Ban or Bane of the inflicting Sin-Eater's geist.
- When this Condition resolves, the Sin-Eater who created it also takes a Beat.

## Boneyard

### Environmental

**Description:** The Bound's consciousness suffuses the haunted landscape. The walls imperceptibly shudder and shake as if they were breathing. Plasm in the environment seeps into inanimate objects, infusing them with a small amount of the Sin-Eater's awareness and allowing them to move with a life of their own. Pianos play as if automated, lights flicker to life, and doors fling themselves open or lock tight of their own accord. The animated objects are too clumsy and single minded to directly harm someone in the Boneyard, but in some locations, such as old factories or warehouses just the illusion of life can be hazardous enough to harm an unwary trespasser.

### Effect:

- The Sin-Eater has perfect awareness of the layout and architectural details of the area they control.
- Characters within the Boneyard cannot hide their presence or location from the Sin-Eater. Supernatural beings attempting to use magic to hide themselves must make a Clash of Wills against the Bound.
- The Sin-Eater may create minor, cosmetic poltergeist effects within the Boneyard, such as flickering lights, slamming doors, or strange sounds as reflexive actions. These effects can't be used to attack, but if someone sticks their hand into a garbage disposal or industrial press, that can inflict damage.
- The area of the Boneyard gains the Open Condition for all ghosts.

### Causing the Tilt:

- Using the Boneyard Haunt.

### Ending the Tilt:

- Creator leaving the area of the Boneyard, falling unconscious, or dying.
- Creator is confronted with her geist's Ban or Bane.

## Caul

You have invited your geist inside of yourself, merging flesh and Plasm into one horrific being of malleable, protean flesh controlled by a single gestalt mind.

### Effects:

Caul has a number of charges determined when it is placed upon you. Spend a charge for one of the following effects. (Other Haunts may add additional options to this list.)

- Gain an exceptional success on three successes instead of five when your viscous body would aid you (e.g. grappling, squeezing through tight spaces, intimidating the living).
- Ignore wound penalties for one turn.
- Substitute one of your geist's Attributes for yours in the same category for an action. Power may substitute for Strength, Intelligence, or Presence; Finesse for Dexterity, Wits, or Manipulation; and Resistance for Stamina, Resolve, or Composure.

The Condition ends, without resolving, when all charges have been spent.

**Possible Sources:** The Caul Haunt

**Resolution:**

- The character dies or is otherwise rendered unconscious.
- The geist is dismissed from their body either willingly or unwillingly.
- The geist suffers a crisis point.
- You are confronted with your geist's Ban or Bane.

## Curse

A Sin-Eater has lain a Curse on you, and the universe is out to get you because of it. Bad luck is out to get you at the best of times.

**Effects:**

- The Curse has a number of charges determined when it is placed upon you. Each charge can inflict the following effect, as a reflexive action by the Sin-Eater who cursed you. Only one effect can be applied per turn. (Other Haunts may add additional options to this list.)
- Impose a -2 penalty on one roll.

This Condition ends (without resolving) when it runs out of charges.

**Possible Sources:** The Curse Haunt

**Resolution:**

- Another Sin-Eater counters the Curse (p. XX).
- The Curse mark comes into contact with the Ban or Bane of the creating Sin-Eater's geist.
- When this Condition resolves, the Sin-Eater who created it also takes a Beat.

## Dirge

You have been caught by the siren song of a Sin-Eater's Dirge.

**Effects:**

- You are compelled to listen to the Sin-Eater's song, and you understand what emotion or action the Dirge is meant to evoke.
- If you act in concert with the intent of the song, you get a +2 bonus on all rolls.

- Acting in opposition to the song's intent costs 1 Willpower per action.
- This Condition ends (without resolving) when the Sin-Eater stops singing.

**Possible Sources:**

- The Dirge Haunt.

**Resolution:**

- You suffer damage or a breaking point.
- A character without the Dirge Condition uses an instant action to shake you out of it.
- You are confronted with the Ban or Bane of the inflicting Sin-Eater's geist.
- When this Condition resolves, the Sin-Eater who created it also takes a Beat.

## Marionette

A Sin-Eater has tangled you with Plasmic strings and can manipulate you according to her whim.

**Effects:**

- Your actions are under the control of the Sin-Eater who inflicted this Condition on you. Any time the Sin-Eater makes you take an action, you lose your next turn.
- If you are conscious and capable of thought, you may contest puppeteered actions by rolling Strength + Stamina vs. Synergy + Marionette.
- This Condition ends (without resolving) at the end of the scene.

**Possible Sources:**

- The Marionette Haunt

**Resolution:**

- Come into contact with the Ban or Bane of the inflicting Sin-Eater's geist.
- Suffer lethal damage or a breaking point due to a command given by the Sin-Eater. Inanimate objects (including corpses) ignore this.
- Break line of sight with the Sin-Eater who created this Condition.
- When this Condition resolves, the Sin-Eater who created it also takes a Beat.

## Memoria

Your character is haunted by visions of the past at every turn. While the Condition persists, the character experiences hallucinations of the past, replaying again and again.

**Effect:** Memoria has a number of charges determined when it is placed upon you. Spend a charge for one of the following effects. (Other Haunts may add additional options to this list.)



- The character gains 8-again on one roll related to investigating the event or working to resolve the unfinished trauma, using the revelation of the past as insight into how to put things right.
- You learn something from the memory that could be used as soft leverage in a Social Maneuver. When you use this leverage, remove one Door in addition to improving the impression level.

Events in the vision can trigger crisis points or Remembrance tableaux as though they were really happening.

This Condition ends (without resolving) when all charges are spent.

**Possible Sources:**

- The Memoria Haunt

**Resolution:**

- You are confronted with your geist's Ban or Bane.
- You fail to intercede in a crisis point caused by the memory.

**Oracle**

Your body has died — mostly — allowing your ghost to range far and wide and answer questions put to it.

**Effects:**

- This Condition comes into play with a number of charges equal to Plasm spent on Consulting the Oracle.
- When someone asks you a question from the list below, expend one charge. The Storyteller will answer it truthfully, along with the suggestive imagery that provided the answer.
- When you gain this Condition, you may specify a number of characters up to your dots in the Oracle who are permitted to ask questions, or you may allow anyone to ask.
- While you have this Condition, you are insensate and can take no actions except to answer questions asked of you.
- This Condition ends without resolving when all charges are spent.

**Possible Sources:**

- The Oracle Haunt.

**Resolution:**

- You suffer damage.
- You are confronted with your geist's Ban or Bane.

**List of Questions**

Other Haunts may add additional options to this list.

- What here is most touched by death? *Thick, red blood dripping from the hands of a person present. The sound of furious scratching and writing coming from an old journal.*

- What here most feels the Underworld's pull? *Illusory chains constricting the body of another ghost present. The ancient groaning of a building in Twilight as it begins to collapse under its own weight.*
- Who here will help me get what we desire? *The sound of fluttering bird wings and the cooing of birds around an easy mark. A glowing aura and the sound of church bells around the target.*
- What here is most treasured by someone? *An item glowing or becoming as new before the Sin-Eater's eyes. Ephemeral chains tying someone present in the room to the object.*
- What here has gone unseen? *The frenzied clawing and screaming from under the floors that follows the Mayor's son. The untanned line on the ghost's finger where once a wedding ring rested.*

## Rage

Your unnatural fury is released in the form of terrifying spectral weapons conjured by your geist.

### Effects:

- Your unarmed attacks gain a weapon damage rating equal to Plasm spent on Vent the Rage. Ghosts suffer lethal damage from these attacks.
- You may substitute your Rage dots for Brawl when making unarmed attacks. If you have no dots in Brawl, you don't suffer the untrained penalty.
- This Condition ends without resolving at the end of the scene.

### Possible Sources:

- The Rage Haunt

### Resolution:

- You are confronted with your geist's Ban or Bane.

## Servant

Your actions are not your own; an engine of Plasm controls your body.

### Effects:

- You obey any command the Sin-Eater who controls you gives, but are otherwise free to act and speak as you wish. Corpses and objects with this Condition either repeat their last command indefinitely or stand inert when not being ordered.
- Servants retain their own minds and emotions, if they have any to begin with.
- Servants use their own Attributes and Skills, if applicable, or the Sin-Eater's Synergy + Marionette for inanimate objects. Corpses use the Physical Attributes and Skills they had in life, but suffer a cumulative -1 penalty to all actions per month since death, and can only be ordered to take Physical actions.
- This Condition ends (without resolving) at the end of the scene.

### Possible Sources:

- The Marionette Haunt.

**Resolution:**

- Suffer lethal damage or a breaking point due to a command given by the Sin-Eater. Inanimate objects (including corpses) ignore this.
- Come into contact with the Ban or Bane of the inflicting Sin-Eater's geist.
- When this Condition resolves, the Sin-Eater who created it also takes a Beat.

**Shroud**

Wrapped within a cocoon of Plasm and infused with the power of your geist, you become more like a ghost.

**Effects:**

You do not need to eat, sleep, or breathe. You cannot be blinded or deafened by non-supernatural means.

This Condition also has a number of charges equal to the Plasm spent when activating the Shroud. Spend one charge for the following effect. (Other Haunts may add additional options to this list.)

- Enter Twilight for a number of turns equal to your Shroud rating.

This Condition ends without resolving when all charges are spent.

**Possible Sources:** The Shroud Haunt

**Resolution:**

- You are confronted with your geist's Ban or Bane.
- You do something to draw significant attention to yourself (e.g. attack someone, scream loudly, use another Haunt).

**Tomb**

Memory and Plasm have woven form out of nothingness, creating a facsimile of what was lost.

**Effects:**

- The piece or symbolic representation of the object becomes a precise replica of the original at whatever point in its history the Sin-Eater desires. This includes any contaminants, fingerprints, or similar — if the Sin-Eater recreates a knife at the moment it was used in a murder, it has the victim's actual blood, and possibly the killer's actual fingerprints, on it.
- People or animals created by this Condition appear as freshly deceased corpses at whatever age the Sin-Eater desires.
- Objects created by this Condition are equally tangible to the living and ghosts.
- This Condition ends (without resolving) after a number of days equal to the Sin-Eater's Tomb dots. The Sin-Eater may extend this duration by spending Plasm equal to the Plasmic object's Size.

**Possible Sources:** The Tomb Haunt.

**Resolution:**

- The object comes into contact with the Ban of the creating Sin-Eater's geist.
- When this Condition resolves, the Sin-Eater who created it also takes a Beat.