

# THE BOOK OF OBLIVION



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THE OBLIVION



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## Dedication

If you're waiting for me on the other side Nigel, keep shuffling your VtES library and I'll meet you someday. We'll need another couple of players though, so teach a couple of interesting wraiths how to play while you wait. — Matthew

## Special Thanks:

I'm a lifelong reader of comic books, so I'm very familiar with cover blurbs proclaiming, "Because you demanded it!" Sometimes it was true, with the issue inside holding dramatic developments for heroes and villains that fans had been speculating about. Sometimes it wasn't, with boring minor characters and under-baked newcomers getting spotlight time in the futile hope it would do their popularity some good. Until now, I've never had the chance to write "Because you demanded it!" about a roleplaying-game book with which I was involved. So...

*Because you demanded it!*

You did, after all. Most of the contents here are present because they were stretch goals in the Kickstarter for **Wraith: The Oblivion**, and nothing expresses enthusiastic demand quite like oboli. The rest is present because it answers longstanding questions and concerns from our loyal readers, Storytellers, and players — that's you — and wishes on the part of authors and developers to give substance and detail to elements of the setting. From start to finish, this is the Book of Answered Questions.

Roleplaying-game creation is, at its best, a joyfully social process, and the **Book of Oblivion** was that. Its creators renewed old associations and made new ones, with periods of discussion that left me gasping with delight, awe, and outright laughter at the cascade of invention. There were hard times, the **Wraith** curse bringing us all a lot more misery than any of us needed, but we did keep at it, and here it is for you. I'd like nothing quite so much as discovering that you folks get to have anything like the pleasure we had making it.

*Thank you for making this book a reality. — Bruce*



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# THE BOOK OF OBLIVION

Introduction	6	Styles	18	And Now, The Weather	26
Oblivion in the Soul: Shadows	9	Alloys	18	Seasons	27
Shadow Archetypes	9	Cracks	19	Time	27
The Alien	9	Artifacts	19	Castes	27
The Conqueror	9	EGE Button (Level 1 Artifact)	20	Chosen	27
The Destroyer	10	Disarticulation Armature (Level 4 Artifact)	20	Appearance	28
The Disincarnate	10	Pulse Rifle (Level 5 Artifact)	21	Indwelling	28
The Fearless	10	<b>In the Belly of the Beast: Spectres</b>	23	Appearance	28
The Future Reincarnation	11	<b>The Army of Shadow</b>	23	Dark Spirits	28
The Narcissist	11	Terrain	23	Appearance	28
The Obsessed	11	Proximity to the Void	23	Dark Arcanoi	29
The Reincarnation	11	Temperament	23	False Life	29
The Revolutionary	11	Units	24	• Scent of Life	29
Thorns	12	Collogue	25	•• Sounds of Life	29
Collective Thorns	12	Oblivion Loves a Good Officer	25	••• Dangerous Distraction	29
Teamwork	12	Ambush	25	•••• Love's Caress	29
Oblivion's Dirty Tricks	13	Booby Trap	25	••••• Homecoming	30
Conflict Among Friends	13	Blackout	25	Blighted Insight	30
<b>Machines in the Ghosts: Soulforging</b>	15	Psychological Warfare	25	• ill-Omen	30
The Underworld under the Hammer	15	Shock and Awe	25	•• Small Hours	31
Learning the Chains	16	Fifth Column	25	••• Cimmerian Shade	31
Styles and Trademarks	17	Tunnel Warfare	26	•••• Hypnos Reclining	31
Systems	17	If These Walls Could Scream	26	••••• Gates of Horn	31
		The Danger in the Walls	26	Redemption	31



Redemption	31	The Storms to Come	49	Business and Mercantilism	71
The Stuff of Nightmares	32	(Relatively) Easy Tempest Travel	50	War Without End	72
The Path to Redemption	32	The Ferrymen	50	The Doomslayer Orders of Battle	72
Phase One	32	Crossroads Ghosts	50	Osseum	73
Phase Two	32	Hitchhiker Ghosts	50	Peril, Incorporated!	75
Phase Three	33	Sea Channel Ghosts	50	Rainbow 03: the <i>Eagle Two</i>	76
Phase Four	33	Kingdoms Built on Rubble	51	The HellBeetle	77
Phase Five	33	Unfortunate Events, in Sequence	52	<b>The Dark Kingdom of Ivory</b>	<b>79</b>
The Light of Salvation	33	Gust Front	52	Origins, both Humble and Grand	79
Darksiders	33	Moment of Truth	53	The Bridge	79
Helldivers	33	Save What You Can	53	The Marketplace	80
illuminate	33	Built it Back, Better	54	The Crossroads	81
<b>Spectre Cults</b>	<b>34</b>	The Only Way Out is Through	55	The Shade	81
<b>The Sacrifices</b>	<b>35</b>	Those Who Light Torches	55	The Bush	81
The Sacrifices Past and Present	36	The Maelstrom Bureau	55	The Mirrorlands	81
Alex Salazar	36	The Harbingers' Guild	57	<b>The Power of Myth: The Era of Heroes</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Est Machina</b>	<b>36</b>	The Emerald Legion	58	The Order of Ya'Qub	83
Lost American Religion	37	Necropolitan Offices	58	The Dark Kingdom Falls	83
The New Mary	37	of Emergency Management	58	The Shade Becomes "Komboni"	84
The True Spear	39	Reaping (After) the Whirlwind	59	The Plantation of the Mirrorlands	86
The True Spear	40	Ghosts in Disasters and Disasters in Ghosts	59	The Desert	86
<b>Les Voyeurs du Mal</b>	<b>40</b>	Echoes	59	Sankofa: Return of the Ijele	87
Valery Montaigne	41	A Memory of Broken Iron	60	The Railroad	87
Valery Montaigne	42	Perpetual Screams	60	Can it be Saved?	87
<b>The Sailors of the Sunless Sea</b>	<b>43</b>	Storytelling Disasters	61	<b>The Dark Kingdoms of the Americas</b>	<b>89</b>
The Granddaughter	43	<b>The Labyrinth</b>	<b>65</b>	Smoking Mirror —	
<b>The Forever Wind: The Tempest</b>	<b>45</b>	What is it Anyway?	65	The Dark Kingdom of Obsidian	89
The Storms Before	46	The Theory of the Labyrinth	66	History	89
The Storms Now	46	The Structure of the Labyrinth	66	Mictlan	90
<b>The Everyday Tempest</b>	<b>46</b>	Abscesses	67	<b>Fifth Sun Rising — The Four Houses Today</b>	<b>90</b>
Dwelling in the Storm	47	A Maze of Flesh:		The House of the Werejaguar	91
Valuable Objects	47	Body Horror and the Labyrinth	67	The House of ix Chel	91
The Storms Themselves	48	Zones of Alienation	68	The House of Xipi Totec	92
The Dali Storm	48	Entrances and Exits	69	The House of Itzamna	93
The Arcane Storm	48	The Venous Stair	70	Oblivion in the Flayed Lands	94
The Tempus Hurricane	48	The Well of the Void	70	Nahui-Ollin — "Earthquake Sun"	94
The Shadow Tornado	49	Babylon Favela	71		



Xibalba — “Place of Fright”	94	Coronation Park near Delhi	106	Background: Status (Serviteur)	119
Mitnal	94	The Taj Mahal	106	Serviteurs	119
Balance	95	Sanchi Stupa	106	Marks	120
Eyes in the Forest — The Islands of Flint	95	Jatayu Earth’s Center	106	Society	120
History	95	Garuda	106	Factions	120
The Five Nations	95	Dow Hill of Kurseong	107	Connaissance	120
The Haudenosaunee Nation - The Iroquois	95	Vijayanagara	107	Connaissance Systems	120
Anishinaabe — The People of Peace	96	The Storm That Dreams	107	• Les Yeux du Chasseur (Common)	121
The Abenaki — The Council of Tribes	96	The Thorns of Empire	108	• Reler Baka (Initiate)	121
The Cherokee Haudenosaunee	97	The Naga	109	•• La Langue (Common)	121
Inuktitut — The Inuit	98	“The Host-Chef” Persaud	110	•• Renvoyer Baka (Initiate)	121
Other Nations	99	The Night Markets	111	••• Renforcer Les Chevaux (Common)	121
Mississippian Cultures	99	Life in Death	111	••• Engagement (Initiate)	122
The Southwest	99	A Form of Commerce	112	•••• Retirer d’en bas de l’eau (Common)	122
The West	99	The Monsoon Markets	112	•••• Reler Mystere (Initiate)	122
The Pacific Northwest	99	The Cult of Salt	112	••••• Bonté Abyssale: (Common)	122
Setting Sun — The Lands of Gold	99	Svarga’s View	112	••••• Marrer Baka (Initiate)	123
Oblivion	101	The Mirrorlands	115	Appendix: Necropoli	124
The Lands of Emerald	101	Haiti	115	Seattle	124
Greater South America	101	Necropolis Port-au-Prince	117	The Modern Necropolis	124
<b>Swar, the Dark Kingdom of India</b>	<b>103</b>	External Relations	117	Mount Rainier	125
An Old Rage	104	Dominican Republic	117	The Underground	125
Children of Kali	104	Cuba	118	The Afterlife of the City	126
Storm Child	104	Puerto Rico	118	Harrowing	127
Water Children	105	Those That Came Before — Taino and Caribs	118	Halifax, Nova Scotia	127
Notable Locations	106	Oblivion	118	Zone Rouge	128





# Introduction



What do the dead have to fear though, really? How can life get any worse than when it ends?

The **Book of Oblivion** answers that question many times over.

Many Restless make the mistake of seeing their form of life as a second chance, where hope springs eternal, and a form of immortality remains at hand.

They are soon disabused of this naïve notion.

A wraith's Shadow is the start of it. That voice in your head, compelling you to selfish, evil, abusive, and sometimes murderous ends. The Shadow wants to torment and control you, to push you over the edge into a state where you truly belong to it.

Spectres — those wraiths who fell to Oblivion, succumbed to the Shadow, or willingly embraced their darker natures — add to the terror of being one of the Restless Dead. They will make your existences a perpetual nightmare, hound you, brutalize you, and drag you down with them.

A wraith might seek sanctuary in Stygia, but the threat of the Hierarchy identifying you as useless and ordering you soulforged into furniture, building block, object of art, piece of machinery, or weapon is ever-present.

Venturing beyond the Necropoli is no guarantee of safety either, as the Tempest guarantees the horrors of environmental extremes. You will need the skills of an able Ferryman to survive a voyage on the former Sea of Shadows.

Beyond Stygia's Dark Kingdom of Iron there exist the Dark Kingdoms of Ivory, the Mirrorlands, and more. Below it all, the

Labyrinth lies, waiting. Its horrifying denizens wait to escape or entice lost wraiths within.

The dead have a great deal to fear. Life *can* get worse after it ends.

This book shows you how.

- **Introduction** — That's what you're reading right now.
- **Oblivion in the Soul: Shadows** — There's always something more to say about the Shadow. Here you'll find some new Archetypes, new individual Thorns, and a new system for collective Thorns, where multiple Shadows pool their power to shape the Underworld around them.
- **Machines in the Ghosts: Soulforging** — The business of turning souls into objects is one of the most distinctive and controversial features of the Underworld. This chapter brings clarity, advice, and mechanics to each step from the process of gathering raw materials to delivering finished products, and shows you the cultures of those who do the forging, their various special techniques, and some examples of it all in use.
- **In the Belly of the Beast: Spectres** — What's an Underworld without servants of Oblivion? We have new castes that bring aspects of ghostly folklore and horror fiction into play, some new Dark Arcanoi to make their wielders that much nastier, advice on using all of that, and a long look at the cults Spectres form to pursue their various goals. You find detailed antagonists — their histories, methods, and goals — all ready to use in your chronicle. You also get



the first detailed look at the difficult and risky work of redeeming Spectres.

- **The Forever Wind: The Tempest**—The Underworld puts a lot of challenges in the way of wraiths just trying to survive, and it takes a lot of individual and shared effort to keep going. This chapter has new information about storms up to and including the Great Maelstroms, how they act now and what legacies past storms have left, the work of dwelling in the midst of the Tempest, and the kinds of trouble that can overwhelm wraiths in the Shadowlands along with what those wraiths can do to prepare and respond. **Wraith** is a game of drama and high adventure along with tragedy, horror, and introspection, and this chapter helps bring the whole emotional spectrum more vividly into your chronicle.
- **The Labyrinth**—The deepest reaches of the Underworld are fascinating, but sometimes seem too formidable for characters to explore. This chapter addresses that challenge by adding detail and variety to the lore of how the Labyrinth works, including previously unsuspected opportunities and complications, information about the wraiths who engage most frequently with the Labyrinth and its threats, and a ready-to-go group of dedicated Oblivion fighters who may just need your characters' help.
- **The Dark Kingdom of Ivory**—It's always been difficult for ghosts of Europe and America to see what's going on with the African Underworld, its people, and its other inhabitants. In this chapter, you learn about the African Underworld through the stories of the African wraiths, including creation stories (and their legacy in the modern day); the networks that bring the continent together; crucial times, historical terms, and the choices that shape the modern Underworld; and how African ghosts interact with ghosts of the African Diaspora.
- **Dark Kingdoms of the Americas**—Before European invaders arrived either in the Skinlands or the Shadowlands, the American continents were home to hundreds of living societies and several major empires of the Restless Dead. Plague and genocide unleashed unparalleled horrors, but didn't destroy everything in their path. The people of the First Nations live on, and some of them enter the afterlife with unfinished business. In this chapter, you learn what the Dark Kingdoms of Gold, Flint, and Obsidian were like when they collided with Stygian forces, and what remains of them now. There's more going on across the dark shores of this world than most Stygian wraiths suspect.
- **The Dark Kingdom of Swar**—Apart from the city of Svarga, South Asian lands beyond the grasp of the Dark Kingdom of Jade have been barely described until now. This chapter covers the complex history of the region before contact with European empire builders and afterward, the unique landscapes, and the layers of Shadowlands that neither Swar nor Stygia suspect. There are ways for all of this to come into play for European and American wraiths as well as South Asian ones because more is within reach than you might have guessed.
- **The Mirrorlands**—On both sides of the Shroud, cultures, nations, worldviews, and countless individuals have come together in complicated, always evolving, ways in the Caribbean. The Mirrorlands, the Caribbean Underworld, are marked by a tangled and often tragic history, and wraiths and Spectres have come up with fresh solutions to the distinctive problems they face.
- **Appendix: Necropoli**—Detailed writeups of interesting places and the people you find there are a boon to Storytellers and players. In this appendix, you'll find a thorough examination of the Seattle Necropolis and its unique circumstances, and briefer looks at places where myriad challenges come to the forefront.







# Oblivion in the Soul: Shadows



The Shadow is the wraith's dark mirror, a reflection of the worst depths of their personality in life. Although a wraith is concerned with self-preservation, his Shadow is ultimately concerned with Oblivion. Heading straight for annihilation isn't fun, though. What's fun is to draw the process out for as long and sadistically as possible – to offer the world and take it back piece by piece until nothing remains. The Shadow must let the wraith believe they can win, and even let them win sometimes. It offers just enough to string the wraith along, but not enough that the eventual end isn't inevitable.

## Shadow Archetypes



Each Shadow has its own perspective and goals that ultimately lead to Oblivion, whether it thinks it's the path to a new existence, craves nonexistence, or does it to forge its Psyche into something new. Regardless, these goals never lead anywhere desirable.

If none of the Archetypes here or in **Wraith: The Oblivion** suit the needs of your wraith, you can write your own with your Storyteller's permission. Give it a general set of priorities and goals, tactics to use when the Psyche is in control, and actions it favors when the wraith is in Catharsis.

### The Alien

The Alien was never human. It does not remember what it was, but if the Psyche is convinced she was once a human, and The Alien is her Shadow, it will cast doubt on every human emotion to exert its own narrative. The Alien believes it never belonged to a human Corpus. The Shadow might not even know what it believes it once was – cryptid, alien, or spirit – but it knows definitively what it was not.

Of course, this Shadow is lying. It was a human Corpus, but for whatever reason, it decided it was not. Maybe it's just one giant lie to cast self-doubt on the Psyche, or perhaps it just likes making the Psyche question her own memory of what she once was. The Alien lies by making the Psyche feel as though she was not once human and distancing herself from those who were.

When dominant, this Shadow makes a Psyche doubt what she remembers. It can convince the Psyche what she remembers is wrong and she was not what she thinks her Corpus was. Extreme gaslighting is the name of the game with this Shadow.

### The Conqueror

The Conqueror wants to dominate and compel others to follow it and lead them to their collective doom. It wants to conquer. Having a fraction of control is unacceptable to the Conqueror. After the Conqueror has total control of the Psyche, it's not going to stop there. What the Conqueror wants isn't just dominion over one Psyche. No, that would be too small for it.





The Conqueror wants to own more Psyches—it wants followers and its own place to call its domain. It wants the whole Underworld.

This Shadow does not negotiate or even consider negotiation as a practical means to its goal. It prefers to use brute force to gain whatever it seeks.

When dominant, the Shadow takes command of any situation if possible, and does so with an iron fist. Everything this Shadow does is in service of total control. The Shadow makes it so the Psyche does everything that the Conqueror commands, whether or not it is good for the wraith in question. It takes control of everything around it.

### The Destroyer

The Destroyer wants to wreck things, most especially things important to its Psyche. Does the Psyche feel particularly attached to a tether? That tether ends up in the sights of the Destroyer. If the Psyche has a specific relationship she wants to strengthen, the Destroyer guns for it with gusto.

This Shadow isn't seeking control or power; it wants a combustible end to everything its Psyche desires, including existence itself. It wants to see the world burn and has little self-preservation instinct. The Psyche will be fighting the Destroyer tooth and nail not to set things on fire, not to break things to pieces, and not to destroy relationships and precious Artifacts.

When dominant, The Destroyer does anything it wants. It compels the Psyche to act on destructive impulses are often detrimental to the Psyche.

### The Disincarnate

This Shadow believes it's never lived, and it has bubbled up from the Labyrinth to attach itself to the newly dead Psyche. It believes existence is a torment and a moment-to-moment hell from which there's only one true escape. If it could leave the Psyche forever, it would instantly do so. However, because leaving isn't an option, it must drag the Psyche along with it into Oblivion, and it will use any means to accomplish its goal.

The Disincarnate Shadow does its best to share its torment with its Psyche by showing her that existence is a nightmarish hell and a bombardment of unwelcome sensations and experiences.

When dominant, the Shadow lashes out at or escapes anything that overstimulates it. It abandons any situation too bright, too loud, too painful, or too much. If there's an obvious source, it puts an end to the source if possible. Although this reaction is irrational, it's not impulsive. It abandons companions and hurts them if necessary at the worst possible moment. It leaves things worse than it found them every time.

### The Fearless

Courageous beyond measure, the Fearless Shadow is heroism without compassion and a champion without mercy. It believes in righteous action and pushes its Psyche to intervene in even the most ambiguous situations because it believes there is a single decisively correct course to take. The Shadow believes doing something, even



if it's wrong, is better than doing nothing at all. It always insists the Psyche act even if she doesn't take the action the Shadow prefers.

However, the Shadow does not have a typical moral compass. After all, it is a Shadow, and it believes any action that brings anyone or anything closer to Oblivion is the best possible action. If it can't compel the Psyche to act that way, convincing the Psyche to act without thinking too carefully about the consequences is the next best thing.

When dominant, the Fearless always knows what to do and does it without hesitation regardless of the cost to itself or its Psyche. It knows that it's righteous and does not question itself.

### The Future Reincarnation

This Shadow believes in its future it will incarnate as a living human. It believes that to achieve this incarnation, it must drive its Psyche into Oblivion. Unlike most Shadows, this one craves its future life. It acts with a desperation unusual to Shadows and believes this is its one way out of the Shadowlands.

To achieve its end, the Shadow tempts its Psyche with memories of what it was like to be alive and the possibilities of living again, and its Harrowings reflect that. It plays up the torments of death, representing them as worse than they are. It constantly pushes the Psyche toward Oblivion by dangling the possibility of reincarnating into a future life in the Skinlands. It can use its Arcanoi to help reinforce its projected life by showing the Psyche apparent evidence.

The Shadow's plans are always about what the future brings and how the present isn't good enough and can never be. Pure craving drives it forward; if it convinces the Psyche to share that craving, so much the better.

When dominant, the Shadow seeks to experience a taste of life no matter the cost to itself or its Psyche; in fact, the greater the cost is, the better. The Shadow doesn't necessarily use Embody or Puppetry to interact directly with the Skinlands; it's more likely it tries to get into intense situations that "feel" alive to it regardless of the danger for itself or others.

### The Narcissist

The Narcissist believes it is the superior being in its relationship with the Psyche, and it does anything to preserve its superiority. It makes the Psyche feel like she is heard just long enough to give the Shadow a fraction of what it wants. The Narcissist takes constant advantage of the Psyche and leaves a seed of doubt by telling the Psyche it's what the Psyche really wanted all along.

It isn't that the Narcissist has no goals; it's that the goals of the Narcissist are about its survival. It doesn't want to blink out of existence, so it does whatever it can to preserve itself. It keeps the Psyche from attaining any sort of Transcendence or even coming close to it.

When dominant, the Narcissist does whatever and however it wants and continues to push the needs of the Psyche even further down to try to cut away its self-control and willpower until the Shadow can take control. The Narcissist is pure self-interest and

behaves as such. If there's something the Psyche really wants, the Narcissist ensures it never happens unless it severs its needs.

### The Obsessed

The Obsessed wants to achieve one difficult goal over all things except for Oblivion. Whether that goal is to assassinate someone important or steal a powerful Artifact, it constantly drives the Shadow. Much like the ultimate goal of dragging its Psyche into Oblivion, it doesn't seek to achieve it by way of the most direct route; she wants the Psyche to achieve it, if possible.

The Shadow negotiates for its goal whenever possible by offering assistance in exchange for a few more steps toward achieving its goal. If it achieves its goal, it finds another one. The Obsessed isn't about achieving only one goal but rather a series of impossible goals where each one is more difficult than the last one.

When dominant, the Shadow arranges matters to make it easier to encourage the Psyche to achieve the Shadow's goal, and it manipulates others to encourage its Psyche toward that goal.

### The Reincarnation

The Shadow is or believes it is the reincarnation of a Psyche that already fell to Oblivion. It believes it was reborn in this form when its wraith succumbed to Oblivion. This Shadow might devote itself to gaslighting the Psyche by convincing it that things it remembers didn't happen or things that didn't happen at all did. The Shadow doesn't want something as simple as forcing the Psyche to relive the Shadow's past life but something more subtle: It wants to mix the two lives so the Psyche no longer knows what's real for her and what happened to someone else.

The Shadow wants to impose a past existence where it fell to Oblivion onto the Psyche, so the Shadow seeks to parallel that fall as closely as possible while robbing the wraith of certainty about its own experiences. If the Psyche can be encouraged to retrace those steps to Oblivion of her own volition, so much the better.

When dominant, the Reincarnation seeks out or creates situations like those of its "past life" by choosing to "relive" them in such a way to harm the Psyche's reputation or worse. The Shadow isn't always overtly abusive or malicious but makes bad choices that lead to worse outcomes if possible.

### The Revolutionary

The Revolutionary seeks to disrupt the existing social order and not in a good way. It inflames the Psyche's relationships and upends her expected structure where possible. If there's authority, it undermines it. If there's love, it tries to twist it to hate. The Revolutionary envisions a brave new world in which strife is the rule.

The Shadow doesn't limit itself to the Psyche's immediate social circle because the more strife and conflict there is, the better it is for the Shadow's goals. The Revolutionary looks to disrupt the paradigms it sees; it does anything to change a system for the worse. It finds a society living in perfect harmony? It finds the chink in the social fabric to tear the seam apart. It finds a Legion on a mission? It gives someone a reason to fight the leader, question authority, and break ranks.



When the Shadow is dominant, it becomes a disruptive force and sows distrust as much as it can. It prefers not to undermine its own authority in the process and hopes to manipulate others to look to it before they look to each other. In truth, the Revolutionary is a narcissist whose attempts to divide and conquer serve only his own ego.

## Thorns



Thorns are one of the features of a Shadow that make it unique from the Psyche. These abilities are distinct from the arts wraiths wield.

**A Moment Gone: 1-3 points** – A Shadow can retrieve one specific memory from an Oblivion-eaten wraith. At one point, the memory is true but something that may be learned through diligent research. At two points, the memory provides an insight into a specific event at which the Spectre was present either as one of the Quick or as a wraith. At three points, the memory is deeply personal. After this memory is retrieved, a Shadow or Psyche with access to memory-related arts can use them on the Spectre's related memories. If the Shadow is cooperative, it may share this intelligence with its Psyche to aid in a Spectral Redemption, either in the lead up to the process or during the Redemption.

**Absent Heart: 7 points** – Shadows with this Thorn can conceal a Psyche's awareness of the emotions or source of its Passions, if the wraith fails a Willpower roll (difficulty 8). The Thorn's effect remains for the session's duration. For example, a Passion of "Look out for my family" (Love) can have the love emotion suppressed, which leaves the Psyche with a knowledge of the subject of its Passion but unable to access the emotion associated with it. This Thorn can also be used to conceal the subject of the Passion from the Psyche, which leaves it with the emotion linked to its Passion but unable to access fully the subject of its Passion.

These suppressions impair the wraith's ability to derive the full benefits of its Passion, but it does not make impossible for them to gain some benefits. In cases where the Shadow wants to cooperate or aid the Psyche, the Shadow can use this Thorn to aid the Psyche if it is close to losing the subject of its Passion. With repeated uses, the Shadow might be able to delay a Harrowing long enough that the Psyche has a chance to develop a new subject of their Passion.

## Collective Thorns



The threat posed by Shadows working in concert is unique and alarming. Although the Thorns possessed by any one Shadow can cause no end of pain, what they can do together is like a little slice of the Labyrinth for everyone to enjoy. Each Shadow who acquires one of these Thorns can take part in using it by contributing

one or more points of temporary Angst to activate its effects. The Angst costs listed below are the total number of points required for each Thorn. The cost may be divided up among the participating Shadows in any way they want.

**Generation of Vipers: 6 points** – A group of Shadows can influence the behavior and emotions of a group of wraiths by using this Thorn. At the cost of eight temporary Angst, Shadows can insert a negative thought into the minds of targeted wraiths, and each wraith can make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to resist. Additional Angst points can be spent to increase the number of wraiths that can be targeted by this Thorn. This Thorn cannot be used on a target more than once per session.

**Dining in Hell: 7 points** – A group of Shadows can feed on the Angst of groups of three or more wraiths or Spectres and disperse the Angst among the Shadows using the Thorn. The Shadows must make physical contact with their targets and make a contested Willpower roll. The number of successes determine how much Angst the Shadows can extract. This Thorn cannot be used on a target more than once per session.

**Earthquake Weather: 7 points** – A group of Shadows can change the local environment by using this Thorn. At the cost of 10 Angst, the group of Shadows can raise or lower any of the following difficulties by one:

- The local Shroud rating
- The number of successes needed on Argos rolls to move in or out of the area
- The local Maelstrom level

The change lasts for three turns and applies to the immediate vicinity; that is, within line of sight of the participating Shadows. Additional Angst can be spent on increasing the duration of the effect (an additional three turns, scene, day, or week) and reach (a square mile, district, or Necropolis), at a rate of 10 Angst per level of increase.

A group of wraiths who want to act against Shadows using this Thorn must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to offset this Thorn before they can spend Pathos (10 points) to decrease the duration of the initial effect, with each expenditure eliminating one turn from the duration. The wraiths can spend a combination of Pathos and Willpower to decrease the duration or the area of affect at a rate of 10 Pathos per level of reduction.

Wraiths whose Shadows are not involved in using this Thorn, but who are in the immediate area, can act against it. These wraiths do not make a Willpower roll to act against the Thorn, but the Pathos and Willpower they spend to decrease the duration and reach of the effect are the same as those wraiths whose Shadows are involved.

### Teamwork

Shadows using collective Thorns or otherwise working in concert can use teamwork actions (see **Wraith: The Oblivion** p. 101) to pool their efforts. Wraiths can likewise pool their attempt to resist, following the same rules.



## Oblivion's Dirty Tricks

Any Shadow worth its Thorns has a few burning goals to cross off its list before it descends into Oblivion, which makes the Corpus they share with their Psyche something that must be preserved no matter how much Oblivion nips at their heels. It takes time for Shadowguides to reveal the motivations and horrific plans fueling the Shadow, just as it takes players time to unfurl the story of the Psyche. Convincing a Psyche the Shadow doesn't mean to dive headfirst into the nearest Nihil is an uphill (downhill?) battle, which is rife with potential for drama and reflection. No matter how inexperienced a Psyche is, it senses its Shadow's intent to harm its goals and all the Psyche loves. Restraint is one of the most difficult things a Shadow must master to bring the full potential of their darkest desires to bear down on the wraith and their circle. Oblivion does not imbue its children with the capacity for playing nice, which opens a door for Shadowguides walking the tightrope of restraint and damage: targeting other Shadows.

A Shadow that ingratiates itself with its Psyche and its Circle must have compelling reasons for them to trust the Shadow. Revealing the damaging plans of a Shadow in the Circle just in time to avert disaster can win a measure of trust and respect, but it comes at the price of making the Shadow a target of the Shadow they betray. It's unlikely the betrayed Shadow is going to take kindly to the setback, but a charismatic Shadow might be able to convince another Shadow to create a fake unmasked plan and subsequent "rivalry" to sow seeds of discontent. With enough time to learn the Circle's collective hot buttons, the "exposed" Shadow can begin an isolation campaign against their Psyche, while the heroic Shadow continues to curry favor with the Circle.

If Shadowguides need inspiration, both real-life double agents and agent provocateurs provide many examples and inspiration for Shadow espionage within the Circle and the Shadowlands. Accounts of both World Wars and the Cold War offer a lot of documentation of these intelligence activities, but older time periods still work for inspiring the dark activities conducted on the behalf of Oblivion. Fiction, both books and movies, are rife with spies. Shadows might not be the heroes of their own story, but they are powerful antagonistic forces. Stories like those of novelist John le Carré can provide an array of dangerous ideas and back-stabbing examples.

## Conflict Among Friends

**Wraith** has a myriad of sources for conflict in play, which makes discussions of how to honor the limits of everyone in the troupe relevant to keeping the game and its story enjoyable. If a troupe is doing character creation together or using preludes, it's a natural fit to talk about conflict styles. To start on the right note, Shadowguides can talk to the Psyche players about their boundaries surrounding conflict. If someone is unsure about how they want to deal with conflict, erring on the side of less conflict is an excellent starting point. If they decide they want more conflict with their Shadowguide and their Shadowguide has a similar enthusiasm for increased conflict, Psyche and Shadowguide players can build greater heights of conflict over time.

If a player knows they prefer lower levels of conflict, Shadowguides can tailor their Shadow portrayals to that limit, which can be used to shape the way the Shadows are played and what their Thorns, Abilities, and other traits are. When Shadowguiding for players with a strong preference for less conflict, duplicitous and charming Shadows can provide that touch of Oblivion's antagonism without violating boundaries between players.

When it comes to the rest of the Circle, players can explain their own boundaries to the rest of the group. They can complement that information during the prelude with the Storyteller's help by showing in roleplay how those preferences shape their character choices, which gives players a chance to tell and show their limits and preferences. **Wraith** can be emotionally taxing, so players should know they're supported and empowered to advocate for their preferences regarding conflict. Players should feel empowered to look out for each other. A quiet, "Hey, you good?" during scenes with conflict gives people an opportunity to say, "I'm feeling really overwhelmed, can we dial things back just a bit," or request a five-minute break to grab a beverage or walk outside to bring that stress back down. Then, they can come back to the table and return to the fray to find out how this conflict ends and where it might lead the Circle.

Some troupes might find it useful to open a session with everyone taking a minute or two to check in. Even the most conflict-loving player might not be up for pushing that intensity if they had a rough week between sessions. Experimenting with communication as a troupe minimizes the chances of accidentally pushing people too far emotionally without their buy-in, which means everyone can do what they came to the session to do: Tell a strange dark story together in a world far beyond our own.







# Machines in the Ghosts: Soulforging



For modern Restless, the Underworld's nature as a place of history and memory might be most obvious in its level of technology or its lack. The natural laws enabling modern technology, chemistry, and mass production hold little sway among the dead. Tradition maintains an iron grip on the Stygian economy under the Artificers Guild's market dominance. These factors force ghostly technologists to operate in an anachronistic *mélange* of common pre-industrial simple machines that used to be souls, scarce modern relics constantly on the verge of breakdown, and rare and unique Artifacts powered by their mad inventors' intentions as much as any consistent energy source. This section peeks under this Rube Goldberg confabulation's hood to examine the Underworld's crafting scene.

## The Underworld under the Hammer



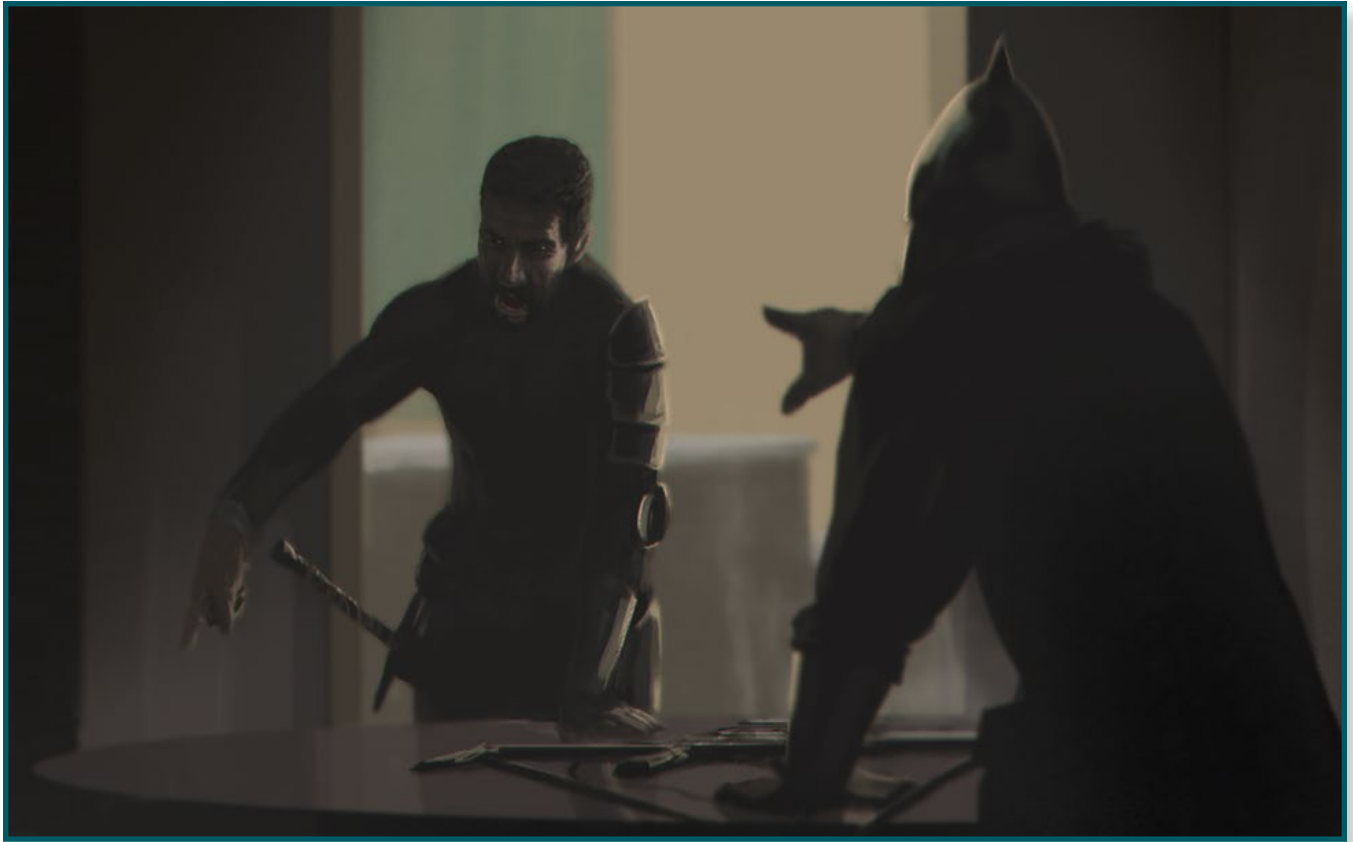
Soulforging may be the Underworld's oldest trade. Across the Dark Kingdoms, lore and ritual vary, but all smiths suffer under the practical limitations of scant raw materials and metaphysics that support only the most limited industrial bases. Whether through parallel development or theft of guild secrets, soulforging is ubiquitous and instantly recognizable.

In Stygia, soulforging gave rise to the Artificers, who would dearly love to claim both the mantle of "first among guilds" and a monopoly on their ancient practice. In truth, other guilds hotly dispute the former claim, and the latter claim shattered when the first disaffected apprentice fled their master's forge. Today's Artificers maintain considerable economic, political, and intellectual property power, but wraiths who'd rather not deal with (or learn from) them have several alternatives.

Officially, the Artificers, like all guilds, are outlawed. Centuries ago, the Hierarchy foresaw a potential economic crash in rigid enforcement and sidestepped this issue by granting no-questions-asked amnesty to any smith who signed on with a Legion. Although the strictures have loosened, every Legion maintains its own soulforging capabilities to ensure a reliable supply of coin, military equipment, and office supplies. The Legions have mostly eradicated Artificer tradition from their own practices by replacing it with military rank and discipline appropriate to their respective quartermaster corps. Not coincidentally, making soulforging part of a military establishment also places Hierarchy smiths under military law, enabling each Legion to protect its research and to punish severely deserters and leakers.

The Alchemists arose as an Artificer splinter group, and this forbidden guild still maintains its own soulforging tradition. Although the trade is neither the Alchemists' *raison d'être* nor a path to prestige among the guild, it still helps pay the bills and provides a solid foundation for research in more favored fields. Under the threat of both Hierarchy and Artificer suppression





Alchemist smiths hide their affiliation, but they still maintain a solid knowledge base, albeit one suffused with rituals as weird and convoluted as the ones of their parent guild.

Independent smiths have always existed, though not openly until the Breaking of the Guilds also broke the Artificers' ability to destroy all competition. The subsequent four centuries have seen a gradual rise in the number and competence of independents. This state of affairs infuriates the Artificers, quietly amuses Legion smiths, and synergizes nicely with the Alchemists. The modern hacker and maker movements have invigorated the independent scene, leading to greater organization and collaboration. Young Restless who don't fully understand (or care about) the guilds' history are adopting the label of "Hackers Guild." This stokes the Artificers' fury to incandescence, even as the Alchemists and Usurers offer covert support.

## Learning the Chains

Superficially, soulforging resembles the blacksmithing that informed its earliest practices. However, due to the nature of the material, it's as much an exercise in strength of will as in strength of arm. Instruction in soulforging imparts equal parts physical technique, a lack of empathy for the soul being worked, and a keen eye for the qualities that might make the subject more suited to one final product or another.

In Artificer tradition, every aspiring smith starts as an apprentice to a particular master, fetching and carrying while learning

by observation. Eventually, the wraith becomes a journeyman and is trusted to make increasingly complex items under the master's supervision and sell them through the master's business. Becoming a master and being free to take on one's own apprentices and sell products independently involves two rites of passage, both of which require the master's approval. The first is the forging of a masterwork: a unique creation by which a panel of masters judges the smith's skill. The second involves striking a master's medallion, which is a coin forged from a portion of the journeyman's own Corpus by using a process that stands as one of the Artificers' few true trade secrets. This process can take years or even decades, and many independent smiths historically broke from the guild before attaining master's rank.

Imperial instruction seeks to develop and deploy smiths with a basic level of competence much quicker and then promotes and further trains those who show both technical skill and leadership potential. Each Legion operates a handful of training forges, usually in conjunction with other military instructional sites to provide a uniform baseline of knowledge over the course of one to two years. Upon graduation, each smith receives an assignment to a production facility or a Legion field force where increasingly more complex assignments build proficiency.

Alchemists and independents both rely on peer-to-peer tutelage and informal teaching relationships. Independent smiths might study with a dozen colleagues (who might be overt or covert Alchemists) and learn different aspects of the trade from each one. The Alchemists Guild is Stygia's only constant source of soulforging textbooks,



and Hackers Guild leaders have begun organizing conferences and symposia to bring together practitioners of disparate techniques.

## Styles and Trademarks

One aspect of soulforging that remains constant across virtually all practitioners is using a trademark in its original sense: It is a unique mark on every soulforged item that identifies its creator. Artificers, Alchemists, and independents all use some variation of a personalized trademark. Imperial creators use facility or unit emblems but add an individual identification number. In all cases but the independents, trademarks conform to centuries-old heraldic standards that often provide clues to the smith's organizational affiliation and instructional heritage.

Additionally, many different soulforging styles have arisen over the years. Today, three major styles dominate the trade. The original Nhudric style is the most common among Artificers and Legionnaires and emphasizes physical strength (to beat souls into submission), and it produces items of unsurpassed durability. The Zürcher style originated with the Alchemists after their split from the Artificers. It requires painstaking attention to detail but is renowned for its aesthetic qualities and precision. The Rose Island style is a synthesis of various independent schools of thought with Usurer and Pardoner influences, and it leverages an understanding of the soul under the hammer to forge objects more resistant to Oblivion's various influences.

## Systems

Soulforging is an application of the Crafts Ability, so any wraith with at least one dot in Crafts can attempt the techniques described here. However, characters without a Crafts specialty in soulforging aren't fully versed in the forge's ways and use the *lowest* of their Awareness, Crafts, or Empathy Abilities for all of the following rolls.

Each soulforging job has three stages: appraising the soul to be forged, working the material, and finishing the product. The first stage can take place anywhere; the second and third require appropriate tools and, respectively, a forge with a good soulfire supply and a workshop.

### Appraising

First, the smith assesses the soul they intend to forge to determine how best to work it. The player rolls Manipulation + Crafts (difficulty is equal to the soul's Willpower). If they succeed, the smith gains insight into the soul's nature and the best way to render it down, and they can proceed to the next step. If they fail, the smith can't determine the Corpus' optimum melting point or find any spiritual stress lines; they can proceed, but all further rolls are at +1 difficulty. The appraisal process takes an hour, reduced by 10 minutes per success.

### Working

In this stage, the smith converts a soul into raw plasm, paralyzes all vestiges of consciousness, and then shapes it into the desired configuration. This is an extended Strength + Crafts action (difficulty is equal to the soul's Stamina + 2) requiring a total number of successes determined by the desired product's size and complexity:

## The Lack of Industry

The Industrial Revolution passed the Underworld by for two reasons. The lesser reason is the Artificers Guild's death grip on thousands of years of history untouched by progress. The greater reason is the Underworld itself. Modern mining, refining, and production are deterministic systems where consistent inputs yield consistent outputs. Conversely, raw materials among (or made of) the dead lack this predictability. Assembly lines don't work well when every part requires individual treatment to accommodate properties tenuously connected to physical qualities.

Additionally, one of soulforging's immutable laws is that one soul yields one part. Most machines the Empire would like to mass-produce contain dozens or even thousands of parts. For example, a Colt Model 1911A1, which is the archetypal example of a mass-produced firearm that still required extensive hand-fitting in its heyday, is composed of 44 parts, including the barrel, frame, and slide to springs, screws, and pins. That's a minimum of 44 souls required to produce one weapon, not counting the magazine parts, ammunition, and spares for components that sustain damage or wear. Underworld economics simply don't support such an endeavor. This is why the Legions still rely on bladed weapons to arm the line troops while sifting the random relic supply chain for modern equipment to equip their elite units.

### Size

1 success	Medium object; Conceal T tool or weapon; armor jacket
2 successes	Non-concealable tool or weapon; breastplate
3 successes	Small object; Conceal J tool or weapon; shield or helmet
4 successes	Wraith-sized; almost all the original Corpus remains; full-body armor
5 successes	Tiny object; Conceal P tool or weapon

### Complexity

1 success	Basic functional shape; blunt implement
2 successes	Crude mechanical part
3 successes	Balanced, symmetrical functional shape; edged weapon
4 successes	Wearable attire; aerodynamic shape; projectile
5 successes	Precision mechanical part; flexible or jointed weapon

For example, a scimitar (Conceal T; edged weapon) requires 4 successes. A structural girder (wraith-sized; crude mechanical part) requires 6 successes. An obol (tiny object; symmetrical, functional shape) requires 8 successes. A replacement mainspring for a relic pocket watch (tiny object; precision mechanical part) requires 10 successes.



## Tools of the Trade

Unless the smith deliberately develops a new metaphysical system, soulforging looks like blacksmithing with iron that screams. The mortal art supplied many of the metaphors that make it possible for wraiths to wrap their plasmic heads around the process. Accordingly, a workshop (“forge” in the vernacular) requires the expected tools, even though they don’t necessarily have the same smithing functions as their Skinlands counterparts: the forge, a bellows, an anvil, a quenching trough, tongs, chisels, and hammers. The finishing workbench includes punches, drills, files, jigs, wire brushes, grinding stones, and other tools.

Ownership of a permanent workshop requires Haunt •• for the workspace and Relic ••• for the tools. A portable forge, such as those used by Legion smiths on a campaign, is a Relic •••• possession that packs into several cases that take up half a wagonload in space.

Each roll takes one hour. Any interruption during this process ruins the job, requiring the smith to set the soul aside to cool before starting anew. Each botch introduces a crack (p. 19) into the soul, and accumulating three botches while working a soul means the smith has hammered themselves into a corner and must let it cool before restarting. Either way, a flawed workpiece takes a week to cool and attempting premature rework destroys it.

At the end of this stage, the result is rough and ready but any subtleties or precision in the design are not fully realized. If the item has a mechanical rating, such as a weapon’s damage pool or armor’s soak bonus, it is 1 lower than normal. If not, the item has some imbalance or impurity that adds +2 difficulty to all rolls involving its use.

### Finishing

This stage turns the soulforged object from a basic shape into a fully functional implement. The smith uses tools, soulfire, barrow-flame, or alchemical treatments to file off burrs and rough edges, shape and polish surfaces, increase hardness or flexibility, and add utilitarian or decorative patterns, coloration, or inlay. Finishing is an extended Perception + Crafts action (difficulty 8) requiring a total number of successes determined by the desired effects:

1 success	Eliminate “rough and ready” (above), bringing the item to full effectiveness.
2 successes	Increase the blunt weapon’s damage dice pool by 1.
3 successes	Reduce the armor’s Dexterity penalty by 1 for one wearer.
3 successes	Add a hidden compartment.
3 successes	Increase the weapon’s damage dice pool by 1 against one specific target type (for example, Spectres, doors and walls, or werewolves).

4 successes	Increase an object Corpus by 25%.
4 successes	Increase an edged weapon’s damage dice pool by 1 against all targets.
5 successes	Reduce the armor’s Dexterity penalty by 1 for all wearers.
5 successes	Give a tool a specialty for one specific task.
5 successes	Give a weapon a specialty for one combat maneuver.
5 successes	Give the armor a specialty for one narrowly defined damage source (for example, blades, barrow-flame, Maelstroms, or Spectres).
1-5 successes	Add decorative features, depending on the complexity.

The smith can’t apply any one effect more than once. A specialty functions exactly as a Trait specialty for the circumstance in question, allowing the wraith using the item to re-roll 10s when applicable. Multiple specialties don’t stack.

Each roll takes one hour. The smith may pause during this process, setting the object aside indefinitely before returning to work on it. Each botch introduces a crack into the item, while accumulating three botches destroys it.

## Styles

A character with the appropriate history or connections can take a Crafts specialty in one of the major soulforging styles described above rather than just specializing in “generic” soulforging. Working in this style is optional for any job, but the smith can’t use or abandon a style in the middle of a job. Once the style is declared, it’s in use for the entire process. Each style has an associated benefit and drawback.

**Nhudric:** During each stage of a soulforging job, the player may roll Strength in place of the specified Attribute. During the working stage, accumulating three botches destroys the soul and gives the smith’s Shadow 3 temporary Angst. During the finishing stage, increasing the object’s Corpus requires only 2 successes. Breaking a Nhudric item requires a Strength rating 1 level higher than normal, which is cumulative with other modifiers (see **Wraith: The Oblivion**, p. 320).

**Zürcher:** During each stage of a soulforging job, the player may roll Perception in place of the specified Attribute, but each roll takes 4 hours. During finishing, adding a specialty or decoration costs 1 less success. When visible, a Zürcher product applies -1 difficulty to any attempt its owner makes to impress or stand out visually.

**Rose Island:** During each stage of a soulforging job, the player may roll Manipulation in place of the specified Attribute. During the working and finishing stages, the first botch doesn’t add a crack, but each botch gives the smith’s Shadow 3 temporary Angst. When targeted by any power or manifestation of Oblivion, a product of the Rose Island cancels 2 successes and any creature of Oblivion, which includes a Shadow-ridden wraith, suffers +1 difficulty on all rolls involving the item.

## Alloys

Plasm is soulforging’s ubiquitous raw material. Worked on its own, it yields soulsteel. A skilled smith can make a soulsteel product



look and feel like a much wider range of substances than mere transubstantiated metal. However, smiths have learned to amalgamate plasm with any of the Underworld's other substances to produce a variety of implausible alloys, the best-known of which is Stygian steel (see **Wraith: The Oblivion**, pp. 45 and 296).

**Stygian steel:** As established in **Wraith: The Oblivion**, a Stygian steel object is harder to break (p. 320) and has more Corpus (p. 329). Additionally, a Stygian steel weapon does aggravated damage. Forging a Stygian steel object requires Crafts •••• or better and each roll in the creation process takes three times the usual time.

**Necropolis steel:** A lesser form of Stygian steel that foregoes the most Oblivion-tainted materials, Necropolis steel is rare not because of its difficulty but because of its lesser prestige. A Necropolis steel item gains extra Corpus as through it were Stygian steel but receives none of the other benefits. Forging a Necropolis steel item requires Crafts ••• or better and each roll takes twice the usual time.

**Ash-iron:** Produced by burning one of the priceless trees that struggle to grow alongside the Great River, ash-iron is prized for its color and flexibility. It is a dusty white so pure as to be faintly luminescent. During finishing, reducing ash-iron armor's Dexterity penalty costs only 1 success. An ash-iron whip or other flexible weapon reduces attack difficulties by 1. Forging an ash-iron item requires Crafts ••• or better and each roll takes twice the usual time.

**Labyrinthine adamas:** In Stygia, this Oblivion-touched alloy is vanishingly rare because of its reliance on a dove-gray coal-like substance mined deep in the Labyrinth. Among Spectres, it's still rare, though more common than Stygian steel, and its creation is credited to True Spear. Labyrinthine adamas is a water-patterned alloy whose light and dark grains move in slow, hypnotic whorls that most definitely do not resolve into blasphemous forms or screaming faces when the viewer glances away. The owner of a Labyrinthine adamas may feed it 2 points of Pathos (or 1 point of Angst) to render it invisible for a scene, and it has 50% more Corpus than normal. A Labyrinthine adamas weapon does aggravated damage except to Spectres, who take normal damage. Its forging requires Crafts ••••• (•••• for a Spectre) and each roll takes three times the usual time.

Other alloys are possible; the extent of necrometallurgy is limited only by the Storyteller's desire to venture into high fantasy tropes.

## Cracks

A crack in a soulforged item is not a physical defect but a spiritual one. It is a flaw induced by the smith's failure to render down completely the soul into raw plasm. Cracks should not be crippling. They're minor inconveniences intended to provide additional creepy flavor for things ultimately made of people and memories. The following list only skims the surface of possibilities; troupes should feel free to generate their own cracks based on what makes everyone at the table giggle nervously.

**Compelling:** The object is very interesting to one particular class of entities (for example, Mourners, Ferrymen, Spectres, or werewolves).

**Fleeting:** Whenever dropped, the object unerringly rolls or bounces into the most inconvenient place within 5 feet.

**Lonely:** If left unattended, the item gravitates toward other soulforged objects.

**Magnetic:** The bearer's Shadow obsesses over the item.

**Nihilistic:** Whenever dropped, the object unerringly rolls or bounces 5 feet toward the nearest Nihil large enough to swallow it.

**Somnambulistic:** Sometimes, when its owner Slumbers, the item travels to the closest other Slumbering wraith.

**Transient:** Supernatural creatures on the other side of the Shroud sometimes react to the object's presence.

**Vocal:** The item emits faint anguished whimpers at socially awkward times.

**Vulnerable:** The item seeks destruction. Whenever it suffers damage, the attacker rolls 1 extra die.

**Weeping:** The object occasionally seeps plasm that leaves faint salt-stains on Corpus and relic garments.

## Artifacts

Although every soulforged item is unique, every Artifact is a law unto itself. Even "common" Artifacts such as those presented in **Wraith: The Oblivion** (pp. 425-431) are individual variations on a theme. Imbuing a relic or soulforged item with powers that transcend its physical form is the apex of the smith's art.

The process begins by selecting the base object, which must already exist. The player and Storyteller collaborate to design the effects that a desired Artifact will possess. By comparing these capabilities to published Artifacts, the Storyteller determines the Artifact's rating and the Arcanos and rating most applicable to producing each effect.

If the smith has the relevant Arcanoi at the appropriate ratings, they can proceed. If not, they must introduce each art's essence in other ways. For each Arcanos that they lack at the required rating, they must collect Pathos or Corpus from another wraith who possesses the required art for a combined 3 points per dot of the relevant Arcanos. For example, if the creator wants to build an Artifact lockpick that assists its owner by deconstructing locks with Non-Euclidean Mechanics and they don't know Flux ••, they must collect a combined 6 points of Pathos and Corpus from a skilled Alchemist. The collection method is up to them, though collecting Corpus from a Spectre with the appropriate skill set is generally regarded as perilous at best (in this case, Angst replaces Pathos in this process).

The smith also must gather raw materials above and beyond the base object. For each dot of Artifact rating, one strange Underworld substance is required; the higher the rating, the weirder or more dangerous these materials become. The Storyteller should make the acquisition process serve the story, and not be just an annoying scavenger hunt.

Once the smith has assembled their materials, they may begin. Imbuing an Artifact requires a forge. The smith heats the host item over a soulfire flame and gradually welds and hammers power into it by using their collected materials. This process is an extended Intelligence + Crafts roll (difficulty 8) requiring 5 successes per dot of Artifact rating. Each roll takes one day. Any interruption or botch ruins the job and all raw materials, but the smith can salvage the



## Spectral Soulforging

The craft of soulforging feeds the unwary smith's Shadow with the suffering of the souls under the hammer, and its Shadow-eaten practitioners have lost none of their skill even though their creations bear Oblivion's irrevocable stain. Worse, some Spectral smiths practice the Cachtice style, which maximizes the agony a soul endures during the forging process. Cachtice (pronounced CHOCK-it-eh, after the Slovakian home of Elizabeth Báthory) items are unparalleled in responsiveness and precision, but the few Stygian smiths who've studied them fear them because the souls retain some fragment of awareness.

Spectres, being wraiths, can be soulforged themselves. No one recommends the practice, though. A Spectre in the forge is the most treacherous of materials, and even the best-crafted result is threaded with Oblivion.

**Systems:** Spectres use the soulforging rules presented here. Whenever a non-Spectre botches while using a Spectre-forged item, that wraith's Shadow gains 1 temporary Angst.

A smith working in the Cachtice style may roll Manipulation in place of the specified Attribute during each stage of soulforging. Any botch during the process destroys the soul, but during finishing, the smith may add a specialty for only 1 success. For a non-Spectre, learning this style grants the smith's Shadow 1 permanent Angst and each job that uses it provides 2 temporary Angst.

Forging a Spectre increases the difficulty of every roll in the process by 1. On a botch, the partially-forged creature breaks free and is profoundly displeased with the smith. A weapon made from a Spectre does aggravated damage, armor adds 1 soak die against aggravated damage, and other items have minor uncanny properties at the Storyteller's discretion. However, once per session when the item's bearer makes a roll involving the item, that character's Shadow may convert one die result of 10 into a 1. This takes effect before re-rolling that die for any specialty.

host item with a Wits + Crafts roll (difficulty 8). With the requisite successes, the smith seals the item with their trademark and brandishes the newly-forged Artifact.

### E&E Button (Level 1 Artifact)

In World War II, the Special Operations Executive and Office of Strategic Services equipped their agents with a panoply of concealed

weapons and tools. As SOE and OSS personnel made their way to the Underworld, the Legions and other parties attempted to adapt these gadgets to local use. Among these tools were coat buttons that were concealed miniature compasses for use in escape and evasion behind enemy lines. Today, E&E buttons imbued with slivers of Argos' navigational awareness are common among Restless whose duties take them into the Tempest or Labyrinth.

**Systems:** In the Tempest, an E&E button always shows the direction of the nearest Byway. In the Labyrinth, its bearer may spend 1 Pathos to determine the direction of the nearest ascending route. When it is not being used, the button appears to be an ordinary part of the wraith's attire unless someone performs a pat-down search and has a successful Perception + Larceny roll (difficulty 9).

The button's base object is either a relic button compass or a soulforged replica. The former is a Relic •• item due to rarity. The latter is a tiny basic object (a 6-success working) with clean-up and a hidden compartment (a 4-success finishing). In either case, its innate covert quality comes from craftsmanship, not Arcanoi.

The E&E button's navigational ability relies on Wayfarer's Resolve (Argos ••). Because its functions draw on a low-level art and don't directly affect anyone else, it's only a Level 1 Artifact.

If the smith lacks the requisite arts to create the Artifact, they must collect 6 Pathos or Corpus from an Argos practitioner. Imbuing the button then requires 5 successes on the extended Intelligence + Crafts roll.

### Disarticulation Armature (Level 4 Artifact)

It's not vivisection if the subject isn't truly alive, as the Spectres of Est Machina are happy to demonstrate. Although only True Spear has successfully rendered her entire form into soulsteel, each of her followers features at least one soulforged prosthesis, courtesy of a disarticulation armature. Over an hours-long procedure, this clockwork cage removes selected components of a subject's Corpus in a form suitable for soulforging and eventual reattachment. Recently, Lynn's Spectres have begun experiments with processing captured wraiths in the device as a means of cult initiation.

**Systems:** A disarticulation armature permanently reduces a subject's Corpus. Removing a limb reduces Corpus by 2, while removing a sense organ reduces it by 1. The process requires 3 hours per point of Corpus removed. Corpus parts lost in this fashion are soulforgeable (an exception to the usual requirement of one complete wraith per soulforged item). Restoring Corpus lost to the armature is possible only by reattaching the removed part through a procedure combining soulforging and reconstructive surgery, which Est Machina developed in its quest for enlightenment through necromechanization.

Worse, as a wraith undergoes disarticulation, bubbling tubes and frigid large-gauge needles inject distilled Angst into his Shadow, which draws the subject closer to Oblivion and increases the Shadow's maximum Angst by 1 per 2 points of Corpus removed. It also doubles the processing time.

A disarticulation armature's base object is a soulforged dodecahedral framework containing four clockwork arms bearing surgical implements, surrounding a padded couch (don't ask about the





upholstery) with restraints. Five Restless are required for its creation. The cage is a wraith-sized balanced shape (a 7-success working) with clean-up (a 1-success finishing). Each arm is a non-concealable precision item (also a 7-success working) with clean-up and a Crafts specialty of Surgery (a 6-success finishing).

The armature's imbued powers are permanent disassembly of the wraith clamped within its grasp (Savage, Moliate •••••) and permanent Angst implantation (Conversion, Maleficence •••••). With two five-dot arts that permanently alter characters this would normally be a Level 5 Artifact, but the Storyteller may decide that its immobility and the time and effort involved in its use downgrade it to Level 4.

If the smith doesn't have the requisite arts, they must collect 15 Pathos or Corpus from a master Masquer and 15 Angst or Corpus from an advanced Maleficence practitioner. Imbuing these arts into the armature then requires 20 successes on the extended Intelligence + Crafts roll.

### Pulse Rifle (Level 5 Artifact)

Doomslayers hunt the Underworld's most dangerous prey, and their arsenals reflect this task. When ordinary relic firearms won't get the job done, it's time to unlock the Black Armory and bring out the heavy iron. Pulse rifles are the latest iteration of gunsmithing artifice, taking the firepower of relic automatic weapons to a logical (if cinematically-inspired) extreme.

**Systems:** A pulse rifle has the basic traits of an assault rifle or submachine gun (**Wraith: The Oblivion**, p. 338) with a few extra capabilities. First, the player can spend 3 Pathos and roll Willpower (difficulty 7); with success, the pulse rifle completely refills its magazine with ammunition drawn from the Tempest. For an extra 2 Pathos, that ammunition burns with green barrow-flame, which inflicts aggravated damage, reduces the difficulty penalty of the automatic fire maneuver (**Wraith: The Oblivion**, p. 335) to +1, and makes the shooter's position painfully obvious. Finally, the rifle's grip constantly throbs with a faint heartbeat whenever it's pointed at a wraith who *isn't* Shadow-ridden or a strong heartbeat when pointed at a living being.

A pulse rifle is always built on a relic assault rifle or submachine gun (a Relic ••••• weapon). Its ability to summon ammunition from lost rounds dropped in the grass or under the couch uses Relic Dowsing (Flux •••). Barrow-flame-limned ammunition invokes Wyldfire (Outrage •••••). The throbbing grip relies on Soulsight (Castigate •). These powers' combined utility and tactical impact make this a Level 5 Artifact.

A smith who lacks the requisite arts must respectively collect 9 Pathos or Corpus from a skilled Alchemist, 12 Pathos or Corpus from a highly-proficient Spook, and 3 Pathos or Corpus from an apprentice Pardoner. They then must garner 25 successes on the extended Intelligence + Crafts roll.







# In the Belly of the Beast: Spectres



War is eternal. For those who die and fail to pass to whatever reward or punishment might exist beyond the Skinlands, the memories and skill of battle come with the dead when their souls cross into the Shadowlands. For a Necropolis, a gifted military officer turned wraith could be the inspiration to hold the line against Spectres. Among Spectres, a Shadow-eaten commander could provide the final piece to break the collective will of a Necropolis, applying their life's work of strategy and the knowledge found within the Labyrinth to fostering the incalculable terror of countless Psyches.

If a Spectre is strong enough to resist the call of Oblivion for a long period, their gift with strategy is adapted to the command and control of Spectres. There is no good place to face a Spectre, but to make war against them in the Labyrinth is to descend into Hell itself. Spectres enjoy these doomed visits from the Restless.

## The Army of Shadow



Even in the Labyrinth, there are constants among Spectres when they turn to violence. They have ready access to Stygian steel, but rarely artillery. The bombs that were dropped on the Western Front are not common trinkets in the depths of the Underworld. Spectres find it almost impossible to back down from the fight, and complex maneuvers are difficult at best for them. When the fight is brought to them,

they have advantages against the Helldivers and other Restless who thought they could fight the beast in its den and survive.

### Terrain

The Labyrinth resists rational attempts to understand it. Spectres are not burdened by this hindrance. Choosing to go down a corridor full of plasmics of which the Restless are unaware is far from pleasant for the Spectres, but dragging a group of Helldivers into an increasingly unstable and dangerous terrain makes any suffering utterly worthwhile. Plasm-painted walls, writhing corridor ceilings, and blinding light that distorts all one can see are but a few of the things waiting for the wraiths who follow the Shadow-eaten.

### Proximity to the Void

The further wraiths head down into the Labyrinth, the closer they get to the ultimate Void and the more likely the Labyrinth and its many inhabitants will help take care of the problem of the Restless being somewhere they shouldn't be. Spectres lead the way for lost Doomslayers, perishing along with them as the corridor walls slam shut around them. Oblivion does not take lightly to intruders.

### Temperament

Spectres are often described as suicidal, and some are, but many are merely single-minded, driven, and unyielding. Destruction now or later is just a matter of timing to many of





them. The end of all things, including themselves, is a certain fact. They have no capacity for the denial of death, unless they aspire to become one of the nightmarish gods slumbering around them in the Labyrinth. The brevity of the average Spectre's existence and the ceaseless gnawing hunger of Oblivion have taken reasoning with the rank and file off the table.

Hunger underscores every moment of a Spectre's existence, and it makes many of them who inhabit the Labyrinth quite volatile. In any engagement with the Restless, there is no avoiding the consequence of the relentless hunger and hate of the Spectres under an officer's command: casualties.

### Units

When the Restless see even a platoon of Spectres, their morale suffers deeply. Shaking their Psyches is one of the reasons swarms of Spectres work so well when it comes to fighting intruding forces. Unlike a unit of Restless, Spectres don't have the unpredictability of each individual soldier having their own ideas, experience, or breaking point. Among Spectres, matters of free will can be shoved aside when a spectral commander directs them. Subordinates are not a command chain; they are merely a chain of minds to relay orders. Spectres appear to fight as one because they do. This lashed-together apparatus lumbers through each thought of the commander, whose strategy breaks into pieces as it passes along the chain as though it were a warlike version of the children's game Telephone. Without the mind commanding them, a spectral force falls apart.

Invading forces (either Restless or other Spectres) must be denied time in which to think so that they do not gain the opportunity to confuse, intimidate, or lead astray the mind of a spectral commander. In that moment of confusion, they have a hope of winning. Using the elements of surprise, ignorance of the Labyrinth, and monopoly of low-visibility conditions, Spectres can make short work of many wraiths who thought they could invade the Labyrinth unscathed. Most groups of Spectres are little better than vicious dogs, but if a war band has a commander, a wise wraith proceeds with caution. Fifty Shades commanded by a Nephwrack can be a horror show unlike anything Stygia can offer. The low visibility in the Labyrinth gives Shades an advantage to take wraiths unawares, with the units of Restless realizing too late how many of the enemy have circled them.

The wars that the rank and file of the Hive fight inside the Labyrinth are not the years-long wars that were fought by many Spectral officers before their deaths. They also are not the wars of plush Stygian bureaucrats, who send out wraiths to die on behalf of their ambitions. These wars are brutal, and they usually don't last long.

Still, there are exceptions. Even in the Labyrinth, elite units rise and are typically led by a Nephwrack. These units recruit Renegades and runaways into their number, where the Restless serve with the Shadow-eaten. The Legions would go cold if they knew that for every military genius within the Hierarchy, another exists in the Labyrinth and serves Oblivion.



For all would-be Commander Coldhearts, some knowledge and a bit of Dark Arcanos goes a long way to keeping the rank and file fighting on behalf of Oblivion for a little while longer.

## Collogue

More than luck or brilliant strategy, a Spectre officer's rise to power hinges upon its ability to efficiently control other Spectres during violent conflict because a loss of control makes victory unattainable, and because the Spectres in their command may be so deeply in the throes of hunger that they devour their commanding officer at the first opportunity. To control is to survive. With survival, the road to power can be opened to them.

## Oblivion Loves a Good Officer

In addition to a masterful grasp of Collogue, a Spectral officer must be cunning, manipulative, charismatic, intimidating, and exceptionally hard to destroy. If one aspires to become one of Oblivion's great generals, absolute command of the soldiers and mastery of multiple Dark Arcanoi are not negotiable.

Within the Labyrinth, the tactics of the Quick can still be used by Spectres against invading forces.

## Ambush

The most tried and true approach to surprising violence, an ambush can be achieved by a single Spectre, or even groups of them. An ambush of a wraith unit by a Spectral one takes a deft touch, and is often guided by an officer possessed of great self-control. Seeding the Restless with opportunities to pick up a "resting" Indwelling (see p. 28) earlier in the Labyrinth puts a Spectre in their midst to attack when told. Providing several such opportunities is an inside-out Trojan horse that leaves the wraiths inside-out. For Spectres the Labyrinth has brought into its stranger corridors, adjustments are continually being made to make spectral jack-in-the-boxes that enclose their wraith targets in miles of intermittent spectral jacks springing from walls, clad in barbs and blades to hook a wraith and tear them apart.

## Booby Trap

The use of booby traps among the Quick extends into antiquity, and the practice has flourished among the Spectres. Stakes smeared with poisonous plasm, plasmics trapped inside hidden pits, ingenious near-oubliettes filled with water from some aquatic section of the Labyrinth...there are no sadistic limits to Spectre imaginations. While few are automatically deadly (lest the Spectres be deprived their entertainment), they do tend to maim the wraiths unlucky enough to chance upon one and are always engineered to make extraction exceptionally difficult. A small unit attempting to rescue a fallen Doomslayer can quickly be overrun by Spectres.

## Blackout

Although not used in the original defense tactic spirit as during the Blitz in London, a blackout in the Labyrinth can quell what little visibility is present in the sections of the Labyrinth. Without light

## Chronicles for the Restless

- **O Captain! My Captain!** — Restless are on the hunt for a Spectre by using command tactics that they recognize are taught to them by their unit commander (from their days among the Quick or within a Legion).
- **Heirs of Theseus** — Young Redeemers brave the Labyrinth stealing Spectres for experimentation to gain greater insights into how to achieve Redemption for Spectres.
- **Shadow Stealers** — Doomslayers have discovered someone or something kidnapping Spectres while down in the Labyrinth, but it's not them. Who is it?

sources, wraiths are exposed and vulnerable to the Shadow-eaten that swiftly surround them.

## Psychological Warfare

If there's a single arena in war where Spectres should never be underestimated, it is their ability to terrorize wraiths during a military engagement. Everything a Spectre does to one of the Restless when given an opportunity to terrorize them aims to scar the Psyche, empower the Shadow, and bring about a Harrowing. It can take officer-material Spectres to pull off this form of warfare with finesse, but even the average Doppelganger adds ample drama to these torturous encounters. Using Spectre Chanteurs is also quite popular as a weapon against the Restless.

## Shock and Awe

Although this tactic is most effective when used in Stygia and throughout the Shadowlands, shock and awe is still usable within the Labyrinth. Requiring overwhelming force and multiple adept officers, ruthless waves of Shadow-eaten soldiers can be pushed down the gullet of any Doomslayer detachment that could otherwise be too difficult to defeat without exceptional losses. Any survivors make for easy prisoners, ripe targets for conversion into Spectrehood, or sacrifices to feed one of the terrible Onceborn.

## Fifth Column

Doppelgangers love to infiltrate a group descending into the Labyrinth and coordinate with both the wraiths' Shadows and nearby Spectres to turn slowly the group against itself. Mortwrights and Shades make poor partners for this tactic, but careful use of Striplings, Indwelling, Dark Spirits, and Nephwracks can evoke the sort of intense reactions that can result in mass Harrowings. This strategy is particularly interesting when guile is needed to capture a high-priority target.



## Spectral kernels of Wisdom

There is a saying, "Oblivion loves a good officer," disturbing in its bald truth. The Quick have often been cruel or simply callous to their officers, which plants seeds of resentment in many of them that are easy to fan when they cross into the Shadowlands. Oblivion has some of the most charismatic and brilliant officers in its fold and is rarely anything but gracious to them. It's easy for the young to laugh at the ancient generals, such as Belisarius with his temper or al-Hajjaj and his thousand Shadow-eaten cavalry, but the nightmares of their youths walk in Oblivion's approving shadows as well. Men like Nolan and Rommel did not go quietly after their deaths.

## Tunnel Warfare

What the Quick label tunnel warfare is a cornerstone of war within the Labyrinth. Whether the foe are fellow Spectres or invading forces of Restless, the environment of the Labyrinth remains well suited to the tactics of tunnel warfare. Waves of soldiers who became Spectres upon death brought memories of tunnel warfare with them, and Spectres who served in the Great War, World War II, and Vietnam injected fresh life into the Spectral imagination. Although these ambitious avenues of attack are quick to dissolve into deadly friendly fire, the Spectres who can hold together the control to dig tunnels within the Labyrinth to surprise invaders from below are a rare and precious breed. They remember their deaths at the hands of the enemy deep below the earth and relish the chance to destroy the wraith in a similar fashion.

It's not just the suicidal, the overly curious, or the unwise who are lost to the Labyrinth upon entry. Those Restless who guard the Veinous Star from the depredations of the Labyrinth and those who back up specific Doomslayer operations have gone missing over time. It's expected and tragic. But, not all patrols are destroyed down there. Whatever the Labyrinth has done with them, there are stories that some units have not entirely abandoned their posts. The glow in the eye of a figure in the darkness. The shape of the blade. The half-moment of hesitation in which a wraith can escape. Whatever happened, it is possible that some of the Shadow-eaten down where the light cannot reach are still on the side of those they left behind. If only for a second.

## If These Walls Could Scream

The Labyrinth itself has its own internal process for dealing with what goes on within it and not even the Spectres fully understand it, let alone the Restless. It moves, builds, collapses, conceals, and reveals at its own pace, sometimes killing the inhabitants of miles-long sections as a new corridor opens as the prior corridor closes. Although it is unwise for a Spectre to depend on a predictable amount of aid

from the Labyrinth, one that's paid enough attention to its home is aware of some basics.

Although a Spectre or a wraith does not need to breathe and is not as sensitive to temperature as they were while among the Quick, there are sensations in the Labyrinth that make one think of having the breath stolen from them, experiencing cold spots, or feeling sudden burning temperatures. When one of these environmental changes occurs, the follow-up actions on the part of the Labyrinth are rarely pleasant. Because the walls of the Labyrinth can rearrange as suits it, the smallest tremors or not-noises, which is a sensation like an elevator lurching up or down, typically foretell a shift in scenery. As seismic activity is an issue in the depths of the Underworld, the small initial signs might escape those wraiths that are under-exposed to the vagaries of Labyrinth geographic and geologic whims.

Spectres know these signs and the joy of hounding a group of wraiths into the arms of what's in a new corridor well, even when the chase changes to include them too. The Labyrinth is just as likely to allow something out of its depths that would eat the Restless and the Spectres. A Spectre bound swiftly for Oblivion may err in judgment and trust that the Labyrinth's whims always work to its favor, but the Labyrinth walls are frequently painted in Spectral plasm. Spectres with ambition exercise their willpower and vacate an area they do not recognize or one that may soon be bathed with plasm of some kind, no matter how many wraiths they might be able to take down if they just keep fighting. In another few minutes, when the walls close in, and everyone is slowed to an inching crawl, or trapped, it's better for the Restless to perish than the Spectre that aspires to become Onceborn.

## The Danger in the Walls

The walls of the Labyrinth can be anything, but none of them are pleasant. Miles of lung tissue, beating hearts, obsidian that whispers indistinct horrors, writhing snakes, nightmarish sea creature appendages straight out of the Tempest, screaming mouths, or cocoons — if it is terrible, it is possible. The walls might also absorb Spectres and wraiths alike and spit them out at infrequent periods. The Labyrinth is always terrifying, and its motivations are utterly incomprehensible. It's less a place of conscious evil than simply hungry, primordial, and irrational. This isn't a place that was once tranquil and turned evil; it just is.

In addition to the hostile architectural conditions the Labyrinth itself provides and the hostile intentions of the Spectres, there's still more about which to worry. Plasmics, the Onceborn, the Neverborn, the Pasiphae, and creatures unheard of in Stygian myth all call the Labyrinth home, and some of those beings wield great and terrible power.

## And Now, The Weather

The weather that victimizes Stygia and ruins the Corpus and lives of all it touches gets much of its start in the Labyrinth. The fierce flux of energy that pulses in a revolting parody of life induces shuddering contractions that expel a disgusting mix of Angst, Corpus, and other sundry parts out of the recesses of the Labyrinth's many



chambers and corridors. Although these substances alone can burn and infect Helldivers and other Doomslayers, the wind that carries this muck out of the darkness is vicious even for some Spectres and doubly so against Restless. Some of what the Labyrinth vomits forth is even dangerously aware. Spectres and the odd wraith who is driven mad or who were swallowed by the Labyrinth's confines might be spit out decades or even centuries later on those cold, black winds.

## Seasons

Although the Labyrinth might lack the traditional seasons as the Restless know them, the seasons of Oblivion greatly influence Spectres, and war during most active seasons is waged by sleep-deprived warriors whose fitful Kindling-sleep is hellish. Instead of respite, this period of slumber is filled with images within the Hive-Mind and the grasping touch of Oblivion. Sleeping Spectres are dangerous no matter where they are in the Labyrinth. A canny Shadow-eaten officer takes advantage of a Kindling-fueled Spectre's energy and maddened verve, but even Oblivion's officers avoid the slow, soporific edges of the Labyrinth which contain Barrow-blighted places where Spectres slumber for centuries. The Kindling season can be used as a tool of motivation and ferocity, and funneling Restless into the Barrow regions where slumbering Spectres might draw in the unwary into a sleep all their own is a dangerous tactic of last resort.

## Time

The Labyrinth can do more than play with time during its swift or slow seasons by choosing to twist time by days or even years within its confines. It's an unreliable bit of terrain, but if a Spectral

### It Appears as It Wishes

The Labyrinth contains endless nightmares new and old, and it adorns itself with them. These nightmares might be an upper hallway of a condemned hospital, the bowels of a temple so old as to be lost to time and memory, skull-filled catacombs that were never rediscovered, or the deepest darkest floor of a subterranean parking garage. Every soul it consumes adds new images to the ones it knows, so it is ready for anyone who will know terror from them. Underneath all its images, the Labyrinth is eternal.

officer knows that a particular set of corridors have led to repeated disappearances of wraiths foolhardy enough to cross through them, then leading the wraiths into a convenient temporal dead zone can be what gets the job done on a bad day instead of letting the wraiths slip through their fingers and escape. Few Spectral officers have the capacity for curiosity to question whether this is a good idea because not all of what you give to time stays gone. Twists of time in the Labyrinth typically involve exits and entrances that appear like a normal doorway or portal. Travelers learn quickly that they are suddenly far off course, miles beneath the top of the Labyrinth, or even in another section entirely. Although these strange gates are frequently stable and slow-moving, some move with terrifying velocity and travel far across the Labyrinth.

## Castes



The army of Oblivion comes in infinite and constantly evolving diversity. The default assumption for new Spectral castes and abilities is that they've been there all along just like the ones in **Wraith: The Oblivion**. However, this assumption doesn't have to be the case in your chronicle. Every caste and each thing each one can do started somewhere at some particular moment.

You could build a chronicle, particularly one focusing on Helldivers and Doomslayers, around the emergence of a genuinely new force with the player characters part of the discovery and first effort to respond and perhaps contain or even eliminate the new threat before it has a chance to spread. Alternatively, these forces might have emerged in the recent past (a matter of days or years ago), perhaps in the wake a particularly powerful local Maelstrom or a Great Maelstrom (see p. 46) and form part of the crisis of the moment confronting the characters.

## Chosen

Former Relics and Fetters that came into their own after the wraith who empowered and tended them fell to Oblivion, the Chosen have a drive reflecting that of their former master is colored by the

### Hated Figures

The dwellers of the Labyrinth know many shades of hate, but those with curiosity or have spent time in the Hive-Mind know hatred for Edouard-Alfred Martel (1859-1938) and Jody Clemson. Martel was a lawyer in life and the father of European caving. Coming late to Helldiving in the 1970s, Martel caused an increase in Helldiver survival rates, much to the irritation of the Labyrinth. Senior Legate and Overlord Jody Clemson is a legend whose memory is tinged with hate within the Hive-Mind. Crossing into the Grim Legion upon death at Belleau Woods during the Great War, he went from a charismatic officer who knew how to survive to a legend by the end of World War II. His worries about the next Great Maelstrom have put him deep in the thick of it at the Office of Maelstrom Preparedness, where he works on a continent-wide inter-Legion security plan for the sky-shaking destruction that lives on in his memories and nightmares.



departed wraith's final feelings. Far from unintelligent, the Chosen demonstrate a single-minded mission to exploit and spread their own specific and favored form of misery. Truly the "what you see is what you get" Caste of Spectres, they are an easy ally on a single topic and are disinterested in the extreme with politics and society, unless it can be clearly and simply explained how another Spectre's ends and theirs are aligned.

Many Doppelgangers prefer them to Indwelling for their simple drive and absence of other motives, but the Chosen have little use for other castes. Those Chosen that feel the draw of the living possess Shroud-crossing arts, and those that dwell in the depths of the Underworld exhibit various arts at their disposal. Those Chosen that last the longest find a surrogate of sorts similar to their masters and aligned in Shadow-eaten appetites.

## Appearance

Chosen have a veritable parade of possible appearances. Chosen were once Relics and Fetters, so anything that could have once been either is a possible candidate. Almost all Chosen look like the inanimate objects they once were, but it's not unknown for some to have anthropomorphized forms and some kind of mobility.

**Arcanoi:** Chosen start with one dot in Inhabit, and 5 additional dots to distribute as you choose. They cannot learn any other standard Arcanoi. Of the Dark Arcanoi, they cannot learn Tempestos.

**Disadvantaged:** Unlike other Shadow-eaten, Chosen didn't start out as an adult wraith. You are restricted to 4 primary, 3 secondary, and 1 tertiary points to distribute among your Attributes. You, like Mortwrights, can also be quite suicidal. These Attributes can grow with time as the Chosen learns to live beyond its grief for its departed mistress.

## Indwelling

The Indwelling were in life people of patience and introverted purpose. It is perhaps Oblivion that has helped shape the form they take upon crossing the Shroud to use their patience to meet Oblivion's rapacious hunger. Easily mistaken for the very objects they lie within, these Spectres are the bane of unwary wraith treasure hunters, Doomslayers, or the overly curious. Although they do not ignore Caste society, the nature of their existence leaves them largely beyond participation. Their long absences from the Labyrinth make them excellent collaborators with Doppelgangers if the Doppelganger can wrap their head around working with an inanimate object that sometimes ceases to rest in favor of actively causing exceptional amounts of havoc.

Most Nephwracks and Shades ignore the Indwelling. Striplings have learned one does not play with the Indwelling unless they wish to be devoured by an object typically smaller than they are. Mortwrights have difficulty hearing them in the Hive-Mind, but the Dark Spirits have an unusually productive if silent relationship with them and go so far as to recommend the Indwelling to Doppelgangers and their operations, presumably from insights garnered by using Blighted Insight. Due to their chosen shapes, it's difficult to state whether they have always existed or to whose falls they contributed. Many of them are mistaken as simply Spectral Relics, and the Indwelling are not terribly concerned about being owed proper credit for their havoc.

## Appearance

Capable of inhabiting all manner of objects, the Indwelling typically restrict themselves or are restricted by Oblivion to a single object. Antique record players, daggers that produced truly violent upheaval in their wake, children's toys, books, pens, and guns are all some of the possible forms an Indwelling may have.

Once they transition from their resting state to an active one, they transform: Daggers with carved, ugly faces open their eyes, musical instruments and record players start to play, and so on. They tend to gravitate to two poles, either appearing as cherished objects but not of shattering import (a pen, a doll, books, or a tool) to more attractive visages (an antique record player, a weapon, or a strange ritual implement).

**Arcanoi:** An Indwelling has access to all Dark Arcanoi, and limited access to Arcanoi: The Arcanoi must be feasible in application to the item type. For example, a record player can take Keening, but not Fatalism.

**Leeches:** The Indwelling primary method of absorbing the fuel for their existence is from their environment. It pulls Corpus from Relics and Artifacts, gaining one point per scene if it has had physical contact with the Relic or Artifact in that scene. It continues this drain for every scene the Relic or Artifact remains present, the Corpus adding to the Indwelling's rating. It gains Pathos and Willpower from wraiths, again requiring physical contact. The wraith makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to avoid losing a point of Pathos or Willpower (whichever the Indwelling chooses to drain). If the drain takes the Indwelling to its maximum rating in the chosen stat, it continues draining but gains no benefit, it When the time is right, they flip from a passive resting state to active.

## Dark Spirits

Dark Spirits are as ugly and horrific as any Nephwrack, but the specificity of their appearance and their unique Dark Arcanos isolate them in Spectral society and prevent them from casual mingling among wraiths. Dark Spirits practice Blighted Divination, a parade of increasingly strange oracular arts subject to incredible rumors, such as being a gift of the Pasiphae to a caste-wide direct line to a Malfean. It is widely assumed that all Dark Spirits are former Doppelgangers, but this is far from proven. Of those whose former compatriots can vouch for their prior state and identity, their last whereabouts were frequently somewhere within the Labyrinth. Whatever Oblivion does with the curious who become Dark Spirits, those allowed to return to society are changed beyond their acquisition of an oracular gift and their new faces. They flit in and out of Spectral cities, always on the move and busy, but they'll trade rumors and insights and help connect Spectres to things or other Spectres they need.

Dark Spirits are prone to never letting someone else's pithy denigrating comments go, and the most terrible things happen to you if you're unkind and impolite to them.

## Appearance

While their appearance isolates them to Spectral society, even among the Shadow-eaten they are a strange parade of faces by sporting the visages of nightmares wraiths and Quickalike knowwell. In paintings,



the illustrations of penny dreadfuls, horror movies, and internet legends, humanity has given countless descriptions of a (frequently flying) skull-faced spirit. If it once was an angel, it has come to manifest only as its most terrifying form. If it was once a person, it has become twisted by its death. If it were neither angel nor human, it is the essence of something evil capable only of reflecting that which the Quick fear: death. Among wraiths, the Dark Spirits are without doubt still something to fear.

**Arcanoi:** A Dark Spirit character has access to all Arcanoi and Dark Arcanoi. You have one dot of Blighted Insight automatically, and another 7 dots to spend as you choose.

**Fearsome:** Dark Spirits cannot casually walk among Restless as Doppelgangers can or use Moliate to disguise their true nature.

## Dark Arcanoi

These Dark Arcanoi, like others available to Spectres, come from their connection to Oblivion. A wraith can learn these arts only with Storyteller approval and in unique circumstances.

### False Life

This Dark Arcanos lures wraiths by using the scents, sounds, presence, and sensations of life as it appears to the Quick. It then builds Angst within the wraith and distracts them from their mission and safety. When applied in the right circumstances, False Life can be part of a long operation to eliminate an entire Circle of Restless through fear and distrust, or it can be a fatal distraction to delay a response to a hideous surprise attack.

This Arcanos is not popular because it empowers the Psyche of a Spectre and makes the Spectre vulnerable to those who seek to turn Spectres back from Oblivion. It remains a potent tool, but the Hive is loath to use it. Perhaps its pleasures outweigh its risks, or enough Spectral Psyches exert quiet pressure to keep the knowledge in memory. Either way can lead the Spectre away from Oblivion.

#### • Scent of Life

The Spectre can conjure the scents of life for a target. Some examples are fresh-turned earth, baking bread, their mother's cookies...or congealing blood. Any scent from the other side of the Shroud is fair game.

**System:** Spend 1 Angst, and then roll Manipulation + False Life (difficulty 6). On a success, the scent manifests for the target as a slow bloom or an abrupt slash. Whether it is revolting or heartbreaking, the target's Perception rolls are +1 difficulty for the turn, plus an additional turn for every 2 additional successes.

On a botch, Scent of Life backlashes on you, which increases the difficulty of all your Perception rolls by 1 for the remainder of the scene.

Each time that you use this art, your Psyche gains 1 Pathos point.

#### •• Sounds of Life

The Spectre evokes the sounds of life for the target. Some examples are children laughing, a woman crying, happy humming, or even screams begging for help.

### How is False Life different from a Harrowing?

False Life is the austerity measure of Psyche terrorizing. It requires only a single Spectre, no changing locations is required, and there's no thorny puzzles to solve. It also has a degree of utility not possible with a Harrowing. If a Psyche is unaware of the truth behind their visions, they might lead to a slow-burn fall to Oblivion that might take their whole circle with them or at least destroy the circle's trust and lead to great discord. Depending on the target of False Life, it's possible for a clever Spectre to wreak havoc that might impact an entire necropolis. A Spectre wielding False Life can conceivably go undetected in the way a Harrowing cannot. No one says there can't be a Harrowing in the offing once a Psyche is suitably traumatized.

**System:** Spend 1 Angst, and then roll Charisma + False Life (difficulty 6). On a success, the target's Perception rolls are at +1 difficulty for the turn, plus an additional turn for every 2 additional successes.

On a botch, Sounds of Life backlash on you and irritates you. Each time that you use this art, your Psyche gains 1 Pathos point.

#### ••• Dangerous Distraction

The Spectre lures a target with a difficult-to-resist illusion of significant meaning from their life by using scent, sight, or touch.

**System:** Spend 2 Angst, and then roll Manipulation + False Life (difficulty 7). The successes rolled indicate an additional sense that you can engage beyond scent or an added note of complexity to a scent, such as the favorite scents of two deceased relatives of the target, or a glimpse of their daughter's hair outside the Necropolis walls coupled with the scent of their dead wife's perfume. The target's Perception rolls are at +2 difficulty for the turn, plus an additional turn for every 2 additional successes. Willpower rolls for the target are at +1 difficulty for the scene.

On a botch, you are inundated with fractured flashes of sights and smells from your life before you were a Spectre. (If you have no memory of this life, you are instead inundated with visions and smells from the Quick that you glimpsed through the Shroud from earlier uses of False Life). Your perception rolls are at +1 difficulty, and your Willpower rolls are at +2 difficulty. This effect lasts for the remainder of the scene.

Each time that you use this art, your Psyche gains 1 Pathos point.

#### •••• Love's Caress

The Spectre's illusion convinces the target that they're within arm's reach of their loved one or an object of great value to them.

**System:** Spend 2 Angst and 1 Willpower, and then roll Charisma + False Life in a resisted action against the target's Perception + Alertness or Willpower (whichever is greater). On a success, the target



is convinced that they are speaking to or even holding the object of their loving regard. Their Perception rolls are at +2 difficulty for the turn, plus an additional turn for every 2 additional successes. Their Willpower rolls are at +1 difficulty for the scene. They also gain 1 Angst.

On a botch, the target is instantly aware of both your presence and failed attempt.

Each time that you use this art, your Psyche gains 1 Pathos point.

### ..... Homecoming

The Spectre taps deep into the target's desire to return to somewhere precious in the Skinlands and experience the rich detail and colors for which they desperately yearn. Everything else pales in comparison to this precious illusion.

**System:** Spend 2 Angst and 2 Willpower, and then roll Charisma + False Life (difficulty 7). On a successful roll, the target's Perception rolls are set at 9 difficulty except when dealing with Perception rolls linked to their Passions. The target's Willpower rolls are at +2 difficulty for the scene. The target gains 2 Angst. This power effects a target until they endure a new Harrowing.

On a botch, you can never use Homecoming on the target again.

Each time you use this art, your Psyche gains 2 Pathos points.

## Blighted Insight

Blighted Insight enables Spectre visionaries to sense the connections of Fate, induce good or bad omens, and glean information that they should not possibly know. Practitioners of these arts are

not oracles in the sense that the Oracles of the Fatalism Arcanos are, but they have been changed by what they know.

The source of the visions brought on by Blighted Insight is unknown, but its adherents privately theorize that it might be a direct line to a Malfean or perhaps an oblique gift from Oblivion itself. Spectral society does not favor planners and thinkers in the ranks below the Nephwracks, so these arts should not be flaunted unless the Spectre wants to become sword-steel in short order. If anyone knew that the students of these mysterious insights theorize that their source is the minds and memories of Redeemed Spectres, then all these practitioners would be utterly destroyed. Although these visionaries belong to many camps among the Spectres, none can be found among the followers of Lamachis, and none of them are saying why.

If this mystery comes up in your chronicle, the Storyteller can get great ideas for answers by listening to the players' increasingly elaborate speculations and using some or all of them.

### • ill-Omen

The Spectre can meditate on the connections of Fate they or others have unknowingly observed by using simple divination implements to determine the overall place in the fate of a person, place, or thing. The Spectre can also read basic omens and manipulate simple decisions left most often to chance. This art can be particularly potent in "games" of chance with other Spectres or even the Restless.

**System:** Spend 1 Angst, and then roll Perception + Blighted Insight (difficulty 6). On a success, you divine clues about the fate of a person, location, or object.





On a botch, the omens seem perfectly in your favor or absolutely against you. The fate of others is similarly all or nothing, whether is as unimportant as dirt or of a great destiny.

Each time that you use this art, your Psyche gains 1 Pathos point.

### •• Small Hours

The Spectre can induce visions or a voice from the depths of their mind and have limited interaction with what they've summoned about events of the past.

**System:** Spend 1 Angst, and then roll Perception + Blighted Insight (difficulty 6). On a success, the difficulties of interpreting your visions for the session are at -1 difficulty. For every two additional successes, all Blighted Insight rolls for the session are lowered by an additional +1.

On a botch, you forget how to use Ill-Omen or Small Hours for the remainder of the session, and your Perception rolls are at +1 difficulty.

Each time you use this art, your Psyche gains 1 Pathos point.

### ••• Cimmerian Shade

The Spectre invites a voice into itself from the dark well of their Blighted Insight, and it guides them in the cursing or favoring of one or more targets. The voice is not a true mentor. When the Spectre asks it for help, the answers come from the memories of people's journals and what they uttered to pupils; the Spectre is merely accessing the knowledge of these long-gone people.

**System:** Spend 2 Angst, and then roll Intelligence + Blighted Insight (difficulty 7). Success provides accurate information about secrets from a target's past, with each success above the first providing an additional secret, minor or major. Storytellers and players are encouraged to collaborate on what these secrets are.

On a botch, the voice that you've summoned into you will not leave you alone for the rest of the session, which raises the difficulty of all your Perception and Wits rolls by +1. You cannot use any of the Blighted Insight arts for the rest of the session.

Each time you use this art, your Psyche gains 1 Pathos point.

### •••• Hypnos Reclining

The Spectre taps deep into the memories of dreams and prophecies, whether they are human, animal, or something else. To lie vulnerable like the God of Night, the Spectre reaches deep into dreams as though they too pull upon the communion of divine children.

**System:** Spend 1 Angst and 1 Willpower at the start of the session, and then roll Intelligence + Blighted Insight (difficulty 7). On a successful roll, you can access a piece of information relevant to a current predicament or question for the remainder of the session, and you gain one additional piece of information for every two extra successes beyond the original success.

On a botch, you are consumed with visions for the session. All your rolls are at +2 difficulty, and you cannot use Blighted Insight for the remainder at the session. All your Willpower rolls are at +1 difficulty.

Each time you use this art, your Psyche gains 1 Pathos point.

### ••••• Gates of Horn

The Spectre who has learned this art can make their will manifest upon the future and can entwine the fates of one or more targets with each other. By giving their targets an expanded or new mandate of destiny, they curse or damn them. In the memories of Oracles whom the Spectre has accessed with Blighted Insight, they reweave averted prophecies with new and hideous meaning.

**System:** Spend 4 Angst and 2 Willpower at the start of the session. Roll Wits + Blighted Insight against the target's Willpower, whether the target is resisting or not. If the roll is successful, your will for their fate is sealed and their destiny is changed. Their potential fate can be explored in a dreamlike vision, and you can play out what this new destiny might look like if it is not averted.

On a botch, you change your own fate or that of one of your Fetters instead.

Each time that you use this art, your Psyche gains 2 Pathos and 1 Pathos per two additional successes.

## Redemption

For those Storytellers who want to use Redemption in their chronicle, this is a system for the Redemption of Spectres. It describes the conspiracies and secret operations that seek out the study of Spectres and returning Spectres to their state as one of the Restless. This process is as rare, if not rarer, than Transcendence.

### Redemption

Redemption is not Transcendence, and it could turn the Shadowlands on its collective head if there was widespread knowledge of just how many wraiths felt Redemption was possible in an organized manner. That is, one could, given training and enough recruits, make Redemption a wide-scale activity across the Shadowlands. People would chase after Shadow-eaten friends and loved ones, and cults around Redemption could spring up. The situation could be as bad as the Fishers or worse. Anything can always be worse when Oblivion is on the table.

### How is this different from Fatalism?

Fatalism shows Oracles how Fate's touch shapes the people, places, and objects around them, giving the Oracle guidance when in need of immediate decisions (Friendly Card), a small-scale awareness of when Fate turns its eye upon the Oracle, tainting the fate of another, avoiding attacks, comingling the fates of multiple wraiths, gaining knowledge of events to come, and the absolute change of someone else's destiny. Although Blighted Insight gives a Spectre a hidden view of Fate, it goes beyond Fatalism by summoning voices, visions, and the memory of dreams. Nothing is safe from the view of its practitioners.



## Disasters in Redemption Research

Of all the dangerous research in which the Restless take part, Redemption research is some of the most dangerous and goes terribly and regularly wrong. The Martyr Knights, the Obliviographic Institute, some of the Darksiders, certain agents among the Helldivers, and some of the Legion of Fate have been the authors of several disasters that killed entire research teams in the early days of Doomslaying. These destructive and hellish events led to empowered Shadows, post-traumatic stress, and even the freeing of other Spectres as the research subject made their escape. The Doomslayers who engage in active research have learned to be a bit more careful with their studies over many decades.

Those who carry the candle of Redemptive light know it's possible. They don't have the numbers, the recruits, or the permission of any bureaucrat, but they know what they do could spread across the Shadowlands and through Stygia itself if they had a chance to prove it.

### The Stuff of Nightmares

For a Spectre to stand a chance of being Redeemed, it takes a willing Psyche, and not all Psyches are keen to participate in this process. The Psyches need convincing or maybe just "convincing." The Psyche must have 7 (or higher) permanent Pathos for Redemption to be possible; the process fails otherwise, and often disastrously so. The Spectral caste that provides the most candidates is Mortwrights, who often seem to instinctively seek out Redemption and engage those undertaking Redemption research in combat, and the Spectres are frequently destroyed for their trouble. Doppelgangers are the second most frequent source of Redemption candidates. The fates of many of those that seek to Redeem Dark Spirits remain unknown. Striplings, Indwelling, and Chosen have not yet been successfully Redeemed. No one has claimed credit for the Redemption of a Nephwrack; whether such a thing is even possible is still the stuff of theory.

### The Path to Redemption

The process of Redeeming a Spectre is arduous and done in a rising and falling series of escalations of contested will. Even with a willing Psyche, Redemption is neither sure nor easy.

Once a Spectre has been secured for the process, a Pardoner breaks them down bit by bit. Wraiths from other guilds can use their own Arcanos to ferret out information that might be of assistance, but they cannot provide more than a -1 difficulty to one roll within a single phase of the Redemption. Applicable Arcanoi that can be used during the Redemption process to help the Pardoner are Fatalism (•, ••, or •••); Intimation (• or •••); Keening (••); Lifeweb (•, ••, or •••); Mnemosynis (•• or •••); Pandemonium (••);

and Usury (•, ••, •••, or ••••); each example referring to Initiate dots, and they do not fall under the difficulty modifier rule.

Use of torture in any phase increases the difficulty of rolls in every phase thereafter by +1. Each phase lasts at least one chapter of game time.

### Phase One

By first using Soulsight, the Pardoner gets their own grasp on their subject because the testimony of a Psyche willing to be Redeemed can't be taken on faith. Then, the Pardoner uses Catechize to reconfirm information about the Spectre by questioning the Psyche at length.

Make a Stamina roll at difficulty 6 during this phase because both parties have begun a process that will have considerable strain upon them before they're done. If the Pardoner botches, their difficulty for Castigation rolls increases by +1 for the remainder of the scene or for the remainder of the phase, whichever is longer. If the Psyche botches any of its rolls, for the remainder of the scene or phase, whichever is longer, increase the difficulty of all the Psyche's rolls by +1 for the remainder of the scene or phase.

### Phase Two

The Pardoner uses Soulsight to assess their progress. The Pardoner and the Psyche each make another Stamina roll at difficulty 6 at the start of the phase. If the Pardoner botches, the difficulty for Castigation rolls increases by +1 for the remainder of the scene or the phase, whichever is longer. If the Psyche botches any of its rolls for the remainder of the scene or phase, whichever is longer, increase the difficulty of the Psyche's roll by +2 for the rest of the

## Exceptional Aid

A few exceptions to the aid rules are possible. Each of these exceptions gives the user a greater ability to change the outcome of the Redemption, but the Storyteller must be careful to keep these exceptions from being used as a *deus ex machina* or crushing the emotional investment of the Pardoner and Spectre players by obliterating their contributions or running roughshod over their wishes concerning possible outcomes.

Fatalism ••••• (Breathing the Mists or Ensnare)

Intimation •••• (Must be applied carefully so that the Solicitor does not get everyone involved killed.)

Keening ••••• (Can lead to disastrous long-term consequences.)

Mnemosynis •••••

Pandemonium •••••

Usury •••••



scene or phase. The Pardoner then uses Purify, and if they know it, Trimming the Black Rose.

### Phase Three

The Pardoner and the Psyche each make another Stamina roll at difficulty 7 at the start of the phase. If the Pardoner botches, their difficulty for Castigation rolls increases by +1 for the remainder of the scene or the phase, whichever is longer. If the Psyche botches any of its rolls for the remainder of the scene or phase, whichever is longer, increase the difficulty of the Psyche's roll by +2 for the rest of the scene or phase. The Pardoner then uses Purify, and at the Storyteller's discretion, Trimming the Black Rose.

### Phase Four

The Pardoner and the Psyche each make another Stamina roll at difficulty 7 at the start of the phase. If the Pardoner botches, their difficulty for Castigation rolls increases by +1 for the remainder of the scene or the phase, whichever is longer. If the Psyche botches any of its rolls for the remainder of the scene or phase, whichever is longer, increase the difficulty of the Psyche's roll by +2 for the rest of the scene or phase. The Pardoner then uses Purify, and at the Storyteller's discretion, Trimming the Black Rose. Cooling The Blood may also be used at this point if the Pardoner knows it.

### Phase Five

The Pardoner and the Psyche each make another Stamina roll at difficulty 8 at the start of the phase. If the Pardoner botches, their difficulty for Castigation rolls increases by +1 for the remainder of the scene or the phase, whichever is longer. If the Psyche botches any of its rolls for the remainder of the scene or phase, whichever is longer, increase the difficulty of the Psyche's roll by +2 for the rest of the scene or phase. The Pardoner then uses Purify, and at the Storyteller's discretion, Trimming the Black Rose. Defiance and Purge may also be used during this phase. If the Pardoner botches any roll at Castigation ••• or above during this phase, they cannot use Defiance or Purge again on the Spectre for a number of months equal to their number of botched dice. All rolls for the Spectre will be at +2 difficulty.

At any point in each phase, the Pardoner may use Playing With Fire. During phases 1-3, the Spectre may roll Angst at difficulty 6 to resist the process, forcing a difficulty 6 Willpower roll against the Pardoner if their Angst roll succeeds. Success on either Angst or Willpower increases the difficulty of the Pardoner to Castigate them by +1 for the remainder of the phase. In phases 4-5, the difficulty of the Angst rolls to resist Redemption are difficulty 7, and Willpower rolls are at difficulty 8.

## The Light of Salvation

There are many groups in the Shadowlands engaging in Redemption research, from dedicated organizations to solitary Restless who simply want to help. Most, but not all, Redeemers join an organization, giving them training, backup, and resources for the trials ahead. The instruments of Redemption don't solely

rest in the hands of members of the Pardoners guild Doomslayer order, who are known as the Darksiders.

### Darksiders

Brave or foolhardy, these medics of the soul often go the longest, bleakest mile for their compatriots by keeping the Shadows of Doomslayers at bay even near the mouth of the Void itself.

### Helldivers

Helldivers are the Doomslayers who prove that the Masquers have their fair share of crazy. Alone or in pairs, they perform operations within the Labyrinth. To survive, they go in under deep cover. They are an entire organization that spends night after night pretending to be Spectres.

#### Solos

Solos are any Restless who do work as Doomslayers without belonging to an organization. Some of them have training, but many don't. Although many of them are in it for the money, others are in it for more mysterious (and sometimes tragic) reasons.

### Illuminate

A secret society operating within the Shadowlands, Illuminate is a cross-guild effort even bridging into Renegade and Heretic ranks to bring Spectres back from the clutches of Oblivion by using any means and knowledge necessary without regard for sectarian borders. Their symbol is a candle. Although the lantern is the symbol of Pardoners, light is still essential to what Illuminate do, metaphorical or otherwise. Whoever chose it for whatever their reason picked something fragile that can be snuffed by a stiff wind or resilient fingers. However, a candle can be held by anyone to push back darkness. Its warmth and glow can be a beacon, and its golden light in a hidden room is the comfort of all those who huddle around it. Illuminate does not require its members to be capable of Castigation, only that they work in harmony to achieve the Redemption of Spectres.

#### Organization

As far as the lower-level members of Illuminate know, they use a cell structure to protect Illuminate members and their work. For those on the ground, they've theorized that there isn't a command structure and that any orders are in fact requests funneled through intermediaries of their peers. Thus, the candle bearers are ignorant of the fact that they might have no leaders, but only other cells in need of aid.

#### Circles of Light

When a group is required for an operation, each wraith must run layer upon layer of obfuscation to keep their guilds, regular Circles, and everyone they know ignorant of their activities. If even one Redeemer is exposed, their entire Circle of Light could fall with them. This danger increases the depth of loyalty between the Circle's members.

To Redeem a Spectre, the ideal breakdown of a Circle of Light is:

- **Two Pardoners** (Frequently, one is the apprentice to the other.)
- **Two Candle Guardians** (to handle any outbreaks of attitude from the Spectre or interference from the Spectres or anyone else)



- **One Little Bird** (Someone with the clout or other resources to keep the operation safe from discovery or to spin doctor things if the operation is discovered.)
- **One Observer** (They record everything for the research and records of the organization.)

These ideal conditions are rarely achievable. Things can be so dire that a single Pardoner will act alone instead of waiting for any combination of the ideal number of candle holders. The only constant is that without a Pardoner present, Redemption simply cannot be achieved.

#### Aiding and Abetting

Select members of the Order of the Thorn, the Martyr Knights, and the Helldivers have been involved in Redemption efforts, assisting Illuminate quietly to protect friends or in turn for some form of aid. Due to the proximity of Doomslayers to the Shadow-eaten and the Doomslayers' knowledge of Dark Arcanoi, Illuminate require their knowledge of the inner workings of Spectres, which is no easy ask.

Fewer than a dozen allies have been found in the Emerald Keep, and Illuminate's members avoid the Legion of Fate whenever possible to prevent a curious Oracle from revealing them and their work. Despite this aversion, a handful of Illuminate members have come from the Legion of Fate in its history. They simply showed up unannounced on the doorstep of an operative or at the site of a secret Redemption and offer their help. Although Obliviographers would be a great help to the candle holders, the chance of discovery by pursuing their writing has ruled out reaching out to the librarians in the course of their work.

#### Stygian Operations

These candle-clutching light-bringers may come from any Necropolis in the Shadowlands, but those operating within the

walls of Stygia take extraordinary care to conceal their activities. The Order of the Thorn is in a fight against Oblivion and take the fight to the enemy in the Labyrinth. They're organized, militarized, and take a lot of prisoners. Running afoul of their notice is a good way for a Circle of Light to go somewhere very dark for a long time.

The Martyr Knights watch the shakers and movers of Stygia for any indication of having been replaced by Doppelgangers. It's unenviable and thankless work, but likely less dangerous for them than the rumor about them Redeeming Spectres. The Knights and Illuminate have common ground to share.

## Spectre Cults



What is a Spectre cult? Perhaps a better question is who is a Spectre because the Spectre cults depend on them to exist. Aside from a few generalities, there is little in common between Spectres, and the organizations they create are often exceedingly personal. Yes, Spectres lurk in the Labyrinth, haunt the shores of the Tempest, seek to do harm to the Restless Dead, and caper in ways that might please or be utterly ignored by the Neverborn. But, if those activities were all that they did, they'd be easily dealt with.

Being able to create a cult implies something unusual about a Spectre. Most are too fraught with self-loathing and seek Oblivion too strongly to do anything like bring a group of like-minded Spectres together or join such a group. Most of them last a decade or two before their Shadow-ridden minds force them to seek Oblivion.

Here is one of the great secrets of any lasting Spectre cult: It's not composed of just Spectres. Rare and exceptional Spectres can put together groups that attract *wraiths* to join them, either through misdirection, deception, manipulation, or ruthless exploitation of their wants and needs.

A Spectre is a dangerous thing. A Spectre with the strength of will to deny Oblivion's call long enough to form a cult is even worse. Most of all, a Spectre who can convince others to support a cult to their own detriment is a very successful monster. But, they don't always appear as such. It's hard to generalize and say what most Spectres are like, but when dealing with Spectre cults you must forget the idea that Spectres are incapable of subtlety or are nothing but capering and degenerate monsters.

Wraiths often see Spectres as nightmares, and this image serves Stygia and the Legions. But that simplistic view of the Hounds of Oblivion allows rot to creep into the heart of the empire. You can never know for sure when you're talking to a Spectre because the thing that makes and drives them is the Shadow, and every wraith carries a Shadow waiting to slip free and make them a Spectre too.

Spectre cults exist to serve the narrative. They are instruments of its needs. If you're looking to tell a story about loss, they cause losses. If you want to show the cost of heroism, they are that cost. They exist to serve the story and its progression and help to emphasize its themes. Spectre cults are here to make the subtext the text, and drag to light the unpleasant and nasty portions of the soul and show

### Whispered Myth

The Smiling Lord is said to have fought his way back from being a Spectre and is rumored to have been a recipient of a Pardoner's tender ministrations. There is no set era of this story when it is told outside the Legion. Within it, precious few have put a pin into history and declare that this chapter of darkness occurred sometime after the Smiling Lord fell after fighting Hekatonkhire alongside Charon and the other Deathlords. Charon saved the mask of the fallen Deathlord, intending to return it to him when he returned from his Harrowing. It is only among the Executioners that the final details are known. Charon did not wait, but instead sent a group of Restless to recover the Smiling Lord. The Pardoner that returned with the Smiling Lord was one of the few to survive the mission. Their parting words for the Deathlord were simple: "Do not make me regret all that I have done for you."



them to everyone. Everyone has a breaking point, and a Spectre cult is all about finding and pressing them.

Here are some of the covens that seek to bring wraiths to that breaking point.

## The Sacrifices



Alex Salazar died at age 27 in 1991. She died from a respiratory infection that she couldn't afford to have treated. Her death happened after watching both of her parents die: her mother from cancer and her father from the crushing debt incurred from her mother's illness. Her father was driving home from his second job when he crossed the median strip and collided with another car, killing himself *and* the family of that car. That was in 1982, when Alex was eighteen. There was no money left for Alex to go to school, so she started working as an orderly in the hopes of making the jump to nursing, which would at least be adjacent to her lifelong dream of being a doctor.

She worked extremely long hours at less than stellar pay, but managed to get into a program at the University of Illinois at Chicago that would allow her to get a degree *and* qualifications for a position as a registered nurse. The night she resigned from her job to prepare for starting college, she came down with a fever. Over the course of a year, that fever and the coughing and wheezing that came with

it grew steadily worse, which ate into her study time and cost her a series of part time jobs. Several trips to various doctors and ERs cost her money that she didn't have and told her nothing; at least two doctors told her she was likely just overreacting.

So she stopped going to doctors. Instead, she took up the rosary left behind by her mother, and she prayed. *Please*, she prayed every night. *Hasn't it been enough?* Both parents dead, massive loads of debt, years spent working to help the sick just to get a chance to get a job doing the same; hadn't she given enough? *Please*. All she wanted was to realize the dream she'd settled for, the "good enough" option. She just wanted that small thing.

Prayer didn't save Alex either. She died. The night it happened, feeling her lungs fill up, she drank the last of her dwindling savings in cheap vodka and coughed until her throat was raw and her sink full of fluid. She knew she was dying. She also knew that if she called an ambulance, the debt would destroy her. College would be over, and she'd have to work two jobs just to pay for the doctors. Just like her father had. In the end, she wondered if he'd deliberately let his car drift over that line.

She chose to drift. She died wholly in the grip of her doubts, and so came to the Shadowlands already a Spectre. But it would be understandable if you didn't suspect it on meeting her in the Underworld. To all outward appearances, Alex Salazar is quite possibly the nicest wraith imaginable. She is what most Doppelgangers only wish they could be: a Spectre who seems to be absolutely a wraith.





Technically, she's a Mortwright, but her facility for deception and her genuine wish to help Restless keep her undiscovered.

To those she befriends, Alex is a font of information on what it means to be Restless. She knows the basic structure of what it means to be a wraith and the political necessities of existence under the shadow of Stygia. She's more than happy to explain Fetters to newcomers and help them make sense of what their purpose is and what keeps them tethered and from either transcending or falling prey to Oblivion. She'll happily explain what a Shadow is and how to avoid Spectres. She will, if a wraith isn't careful (and none have been careful enough so far), become one of your best friends until she knows practically everything about you.

Then, without a scrap of regret, Alex destroys everything you have left. She'll ensure that your Fetter is wiped out. She'll guide you through the worst Harrowing imaginable and ensure that you suffer until you break and allow your Shadow to devour you. If possible, she'll deliver you straight to Oblivion and nonexistence. Because Alex is one of the Sacrifices, she truly and wholly believes that she is doing you a favor. The Shadowlands are just a cruel punchline at the end of the joke that is life: You suffer, struggle, and die, and even *then* there is no rest and no way out of toil, pain, and loss. Even death is no release. Alex found her Shadow even before death took her; she could have let herself go to Oblivion and be content. But how many would she be dooming to continued pain and strife? How many would suffer as she suffered?

Alex Salazar wants to help you, so she teaches, guides, helps, advises, and listens, and when you need her the most, she ushers you into Oblivion. She gives you the gift she has denied herself to make sure others never have to endure what she did.

## The Sacrifices Past and Present

Alex is just one of the Sacrifices. Linked through the hive-mind of Spectres as the voice of Oblivion itself that also touches the Shadows of other Restless, the Sacrifices have endured for centuries despite their individual members having a fairly short tenure before they can't repress the urge for true peace any longer. Alex has been active for years, and she knows her time is soon, which gives her a kind of manic and delighted energy when dealing with Restless. She is currently seeking a student whom she can help usher into a Harrowing and wake to the truth that she's known all her death.

Some Spectres fill this role by inserting themselves in the day-to-day existence of vulnerable wraiths. Others become part of an organization. The helpful Restless from the Penitent Legion who is known as a Pardoner or the gruff but avuncular wraith who helps newly deceased souls make sense of the Hierarchy could be useful roles for a Sacrifice. A Sacrifice might be anyone who comes into contact with wraiths who are vulnerable.

But, just because anyone could be a member doesn't mean they're everywhere. The Sacrifices are hardly innumerable or omnipresent. They work best when they're both subtle and rare. They're a cult of Spectres that want to be dissolved forever in Oblivion and see themselves as martyrs enduring yet more pain and suffering for the sake of others. Eventually, they burn out. Alex is on the verge

herself, and it shows in her work; sometimes she loses control and cackles at wildly inappropriate times or forgets to pretend to be sad or concerned when she's told something truly painful by her current mark because instead of it being a deeply painful confession, Alex sees it as one step closer to her ultimate freedom from suffering. All Sacrifices want to be eaten away by nothingness, so every moment they spend deceiving others is both a sacrament and a cursed burden.

Another weakness of many of the Sacrifices is that they ride the line on Pathos. Their occupation offers them many chances to feel guilt, shame, and disquiet about their deception. Even worse, they can come to identify with the wraiths they are trying to shepherd to Oblivion. A few Sacrifices are even rumored to have found Redemption (see p. 31), although it's not something spoken of by most in the group.

Remember, the Hierarchy is nothing if not vigilant, and every Spectre is a ticking time bomb. The Sacrifices can delay the inevitable, but that act of will puts them under intense strain because they are Spectres that long for self-destruction even more than most of their kind. It's more a question of how many they can take with them before they fail.

### Alex Salazar

**Physical:** Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

**Talents:** Awareness 2, Empathy 2, Subterfuge 4

**Skills:** Etiquette 2, Performance 4, Stealth 3

**Knowledges:** Academics 2, Medicine 3, Politics 1

**Arcanoi:** Argos 1, Collogue 2, Corruptor 5, Larceny 1, Moliate 2

**Passions:** Save wraiths from the pain of existence (Love) 5, Guide others (Pride) 2

**Fetters:** The University of Illinois at Chicago dorm room where she died.

**Willpower:** 8

**Pathos:** 5

**Angst:** 8

**Permanent Corpus:** 5

## Est Machina



here's a saying in the Shadowlands: "If you're dead, don't go to Lynn."

Lynn, Massachusetts is a perfectly normal town in the Boston Metropolitan area and is the largest city in Essex County. It is a mere three miles from Boston proper. But, Lynn is a fairly convivial place to be for the living, Lynn is something else entirely in the Shadowlands.

The Naumkeag peoples who lived in the area where Lynn is today were destroyed by two plagues at the start of the colonial era and to this day some of their spirits dwell in Lynn's Shadowland. Only a few, for it's difficult to retain a Fetter when a place changes so radically around you, and the Lynn that stands in the Skinlands is almost unrecognizable to them. They keep to the edges of the city



and are led by a woman who had her name stolen from her by the English who colonized their lands after smallpox finished killing them. As a wraith, she calls herself the Great Sachem. Many would like to blame the troubles of Lynn's Shadowland on her, but she is blameless; her Shadow has never dominated her, but she keeps the truth of her Fetter well hidden.

Restless in Lynn like to blame the Naumkeag for their troubles in part because that's the history of the area. Towers and forts were built during the colonial era to defend against tribes that were generally peaceful despite the erosion of their sovereignty and the loss of their land. There were occasional conflicts, but in the end the lands that Lynn and other cities and towns were built on were mostly taken piecemeal from tribes that offered no violence to the colonists. By the 19th century, the "City of Sin" was a major hub for the sea trade and industry in the area, and crime and vice were large parts of Lynn's economic engine. A group led by a former abolitionist and Universalist minister came to Lynn to try and build a new messiah.

The story of the New Motive Power is a strange one. The mind of the man behind it, John Murray Spear, was not a simple one. He was born in Boston in 1804, and he grew up in a city coming to terms with what it had done and become a mere twenty or so years earlier when it had gone from a colonial city to the birthplace of revolutionary ideals that birthed a new nation. That nation was far from perfect, and it had difficulty living up to those ideals. Spear grew up into a clergyman who was determined that it should do so. He idolized his namesake, John Murray, who'd come to America from England and founded the Universalist denomination there after being excommunicated from the English sect.

## Lost American Religion

It's difficult for people today to realize that there was a time in American history where people preached from the pulpit that women should be treated as equals, that pre-marital sex wasn't a sin, and that slavery was an abomination because all men were brothers. Spear was just one of many preachers in the era of "Bible Communism" who saw the rise of American industrialization as a dehumanizing force. Unlike many of them, Spear *didn't* view the mechanical era as an aberration to be feared. By the 1850s, Spear's ideals had cost him his status within the Universalist Church, and he felt that the burgeoning tide of Spiritualism held more answers than reading from an old book. He and his followers moved to High Rock Road in Lynn, and there they began their work.

Spear was deeply troubled at the state of affairs in the world around him. Slavery seemed to be enduring despite decades of work opposing it, women still did not have the franchise, and the ideals of sexual and spiritual liberation that he held dear were hardly prospering as Massachusetts moved further into the Industrial era. Spear, like many of his profession, believed in the awesome power of God's boundless love and forgiveness, and as he attempted to reach out to slaves and prisoners he came to view the death penalty as a great injustice. His faith told him that human life was sacred, the souls of men were God's to take, and God alone was to reap them.

But Spear had vision. A great many visions, in fact. He and his followers were fervent Spiritualists, consulting with the spirits of the "Association of Electrizers", men and women whom Spear believed had galvanized the nation with the passion for progress that had birthed it. Spear came to rely on the counsel of these ghosts: Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, Benjamin Rush and others, and his idol John Murray. To Spear, electricity was almost a metaphor for the divine spark that he believed had struck the flame that had birthed America, which would now help complete the work and birth a true bastion of freedom and liberation for all men and women.

They just needed to build it. In Lynn, the "City of Sin" that helped drive the industrial heart of the growing revolution, they set out to make a messiah for the mechanical age.

The Electrizers guided Spear and his followers as they toiled in a shack on High Rock Road for months. Objectively, the object of their efforts was a confusing contraption of copper and zinc, magnets, and an old table, but they had faith and Spear's visits from the great spirits of some of the greatest architects of the American experiment to sustain them. With geniuses such as Franklin, Jefferson, and Rush guiding them, how could they fail?

Finally, Spear was satisfied that they were ready. Along with a woman known to history only as the "New Mary," he engaged in a ritual taught to him by the Association of Electrizers and symbolically sought to birth the new Messiah into the world just as the first Mary had borne Christ. He and his followers awaited the arrival of the New Motive Power; a divinely ordained automaton that would reveal the will of God through the spirit of progress and liberation.

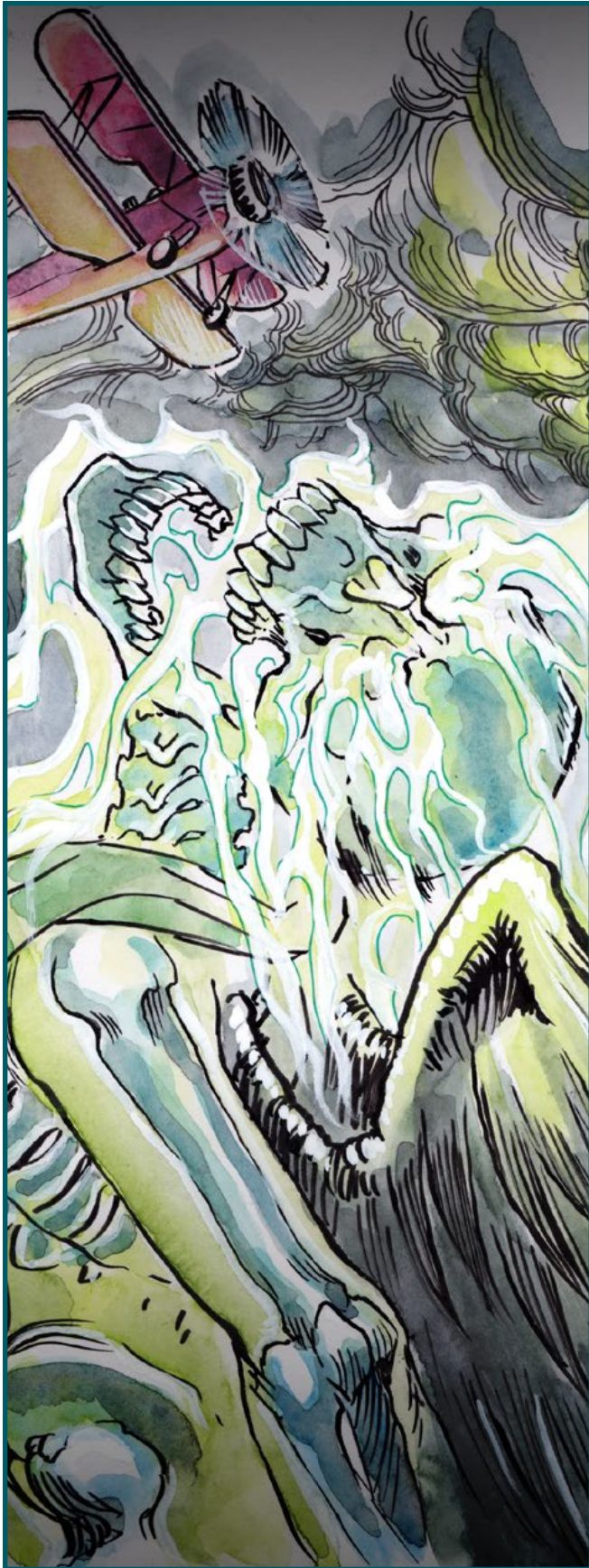
It did not happen. The New Motive Power did not stir. It did not speak prophetic truths or reveal to Spear and his followers how to heal the sick or mend the growing divide in his beloved country. In short, it did nothing at all.

Spear left Lynn and died some thirty years later, in 1887. He never foreswore the Association of Electrizers and continued to follow their advice and teachings. He even retired from his self-declared ministry in 1872 at the demand of the Electrizers. He lived to see the end of slavery, although not from preaching and prayer but through a bloody war. He never saw women gain equal rights or the end of the death penalty, but if his failure to create a Messiah haunted him in any way, he never seemed to show it.

## The New Mary

But not all of Spear's followers were so sanguine about the failure of the New Motive Power. One in particular was just as important to the machine God's birth as Spear: its mother. Although history deliberately did not remember the name Elizabeth Bennetton-Cobb, without her as the "New Mary" the New Motive Power would never have been built. Born in 1825, Elizabeth lived a life constantly grappling with the constraints of a society that would not recognize her gifts. An accomplished linguist, chemist, and tinkerer, no one would take her on as an apprentice or allow her to secure a career in any of these fields. She had no desire for a husband or to keep a home, and she only barely managed to attend the new Oberlin Collegiate





### How would modern Restless discover this story?

They might interview the Naumkeag Restless who still inhabit the area. Although the Naumkeag hold little love for Stygia or much respect for its ways, they have been in the area before Lynn existed in the Skinlands. The Great Sachem is wise and observant, and has watched the doings of the western wraiths ever since she died.

Another possibility is to find pieces of the original New Motive Power, that is, Relics of its gears and parts that were created when it was dismantled. Furthermore, the table that served as its base went to the Spear home in Philadelphia. When Spear died in 1887, it went into storage there. A wraith using Inhabit or Lifeweb could interact with it and learn of Spears' folly.

Finally, wraiths could be asked by the wraiths of Lynn to look into the situation. The people who live around the Nihil know scraps of the truth, and there are rumors that some of the Benneton family still linger in the Shadowlands of Lynn who might know of Elizabeth's story and how she became the True Spear.

Institute in 1842 when she was 17 years old. After her graduation in 1844, she met Spear when she returned to Massachusetts.

Spear was the first person Elizabeth met who looked past her gender and saw the genius she was. For her part, although Elizabeth felt much of what Spear believed was questionable, she was mesmerized by his calm, forceful belief in the equality of all and God's universal love. Their relationship was never sexual, but Spear's preaching about sexual liberation and universal emancipation affected how Elizabeth came to view the world. As he shared his idea for the New Motive Power with her, she grew to support its creation. With the few pennies she could obtain and the scraps that Spear supplied, Elizabeth designed the New Motive Power. She was the first to admit that it was a ludicrous contraption, but she was working with schematics seemingly dictated to an untrained clergyman by long dead men who often had minimal actual training. Her rational mind told her it would never work, but her need for an escape from a stifling role imposed on her by others drove her ever onward.

She took part in the ritual as the "New Mary" out of desperation. Spear believed; he wanted it to work, but when it didn't his faith assured him all would be well. Elizabeth *needed* it to work; when it didn't, she was crushed. By 1852, she was 27 years old, and unmarried and perfectly happy that way. However, her family viewed her as an expensive failure who'd educated herself out of any meaningful role. Her father disowned her, and her mother and two sisters avoided her out of fear of his anger. She had no work prospects except as a tutor in languages to other young girls who would grow up to be just



as straitjacketed by their lives as she was, and her great benefactor had used her up and was now blithely moving away to spread the message of the healing power of magnets.

In 1857, Elizabeth Benneton-Cobb died from tuberculosis. As she died slowly from it, she made detailed observations on the symptoms and came to the conclusion that it was caused by a microscopic organism. She was years ahead of Pasteur in this discovery, but the irony that she'd found her own killer was just one final blow to her sense of order and fairness. Spear had preached universal love, but Elizabeth saw little reason to believe it; she'd been born with gifts no one had ever allowed her to use and now she was dying because of the biological equivalent of grit in her gears. She was a machine that was breaking down.

Some Restless struggle with their Shadows. Elizabeth Benneton-Cobb found hers most agreeable. Her death left her alone in the Underworld and surrounded by the Restless who are generally just as blinkered as the living she'd spent a lifetime reacting against and tolerating. The wraiths are trapped, and they are chained to Fetters that kept them acting out old patterns of lives that didn't work. Elizabeth had wanted to make a better world. Why did it matter if she was dead? Why should she accept it?

She returned to Lynn and the High Rock shack, and she set to work. She was not yet a Spectre despite listening to her Shadow and agreeing to most of what it said. She found that she was still Fettered to the contraption that she'd helped Spear make, and she tried to work within the society of the wraiths. She tried to make allies and bring the light of progress and invention to the Shadowlands. Eventually, she annoyed enough of the powerful in the empire that a decision was made.

In the land of the living, Spear was contacted by the "Association of Electrizers" and convinced to dismantle the New Motive Power. After that last and unwitting betrayal, any hope for Elizabeth Benneton-Cobb to retain a hold on sanity was torn away from her. Without the New Motive Power to serve as an anchor, she fell into a Harrowing, and once there she embraced her Shadow. Stygia was in her eyes a force of stagnation that repeated the same patterns, and her hate burned especially for the Lady of Fate and the Legion that served her; she dared them to say that there was a Fate and this was all part of it. Elizabeth descended into the Void and saw Oblivion, and when she did she saw the means to unmake a cruel and pointless world that had punished her for trying to use her natural-born gifts.

The Restless that descended into that Harrowing was Elizabeth. What eventually returned to Lynn's Shadowland was something else entirely.

## The True Spear

Visitors to Lynn now find themselves faced with a warped reflection of the city in the Skinlands. Modern-day Lynn has a park called the High Rock Tower Reservation, which is a place that celebrates a somewhat sanitized version of the city's history. That spot in the Shadowlands is a blasted Nihil that leads straight to the Tempest, and its influence radiates out. At least three times forces from Stygia have attempted to pacify the area, and each time they've been dragged to an unknown fate.

Around the Nihil, the True Spear rules. She is an entity spoken of in whispers. It is a Spectre who has taken Tempest-Weaving and soulforging and combined them to reshape and reforge her own Corpus into a clockwork soulsteel creation. She is immune to many Arcanoi and to the ravages of being a Spectre. Although most of her kind fade away in a few years, the True Spear has survived through the Great War and the Fourth Great Maelstrom, the horrors of the Fifth Great Maelstrom, and to the present day. Her clockwork soulsteel form displays no emotion, and her relatively few pronouncements are terse and emotionless.

Eventually, Stygia will send enough force to destroy the True Spear and her followers. Her pronouncements about ending the empire and creating a true equality from its ruins ring hollow because she's done little over the years to pursue those goals; instead, she's worked on her True Motive Power. The colossal soulsteel automaton rises from the edges of the Nihil. To build it, she harvests Corpus from Labyrinth horrors and hammers them into the soulsteel cogs and struts that she needs to construct her "God." The True Motive Power has been in production since the 1870s, but because the Nihil once was the main source of soulsteel for its creation the production has been slow.

Both the Fourth and Fifth Great Maelstroms were positive boons to the True Spear. As a port city, the Skinlands Lynn saw much activity, and both legitimate and criminal enterprises flourished as goods and people flowed. These people brought with them their dreams, hopes, and in many cases their deaths. At least once, a group of Restless have set the True Spear and her True Motive Power back by collapsing the construction, but she simply picked up her hammer and started over.

However, since the Fourth Great Maelstrom the True Spear has found herself with a small flock of followers. Some Spectres see her as a means to an end, and others truly believe her goals will end with a remade Underworld of true equality and the reward of merit. This flock has been bolstered from time to time by wraiths who find themselves in agreement with her basic argument: Stygia is corrupt and the Legions are instruments of oppression, especially the Legion of Fate, which would have you live, die, and exist after death according to an unknowable plan. So, the True Spear has lately taken more drastic measures. Those wraiths who do not join her must protect themselves because the members of her *Est Machina* (To The Machine) are willing and able to drag wraiths to her Nihil-Forge so that she can hammer them into teeth and bones for her colossal God. Anyone who goes into a Harrowing in Lynn risks becoming part of the True Motive Power.

However, *Est Machina* are not the rulers of Lynn and are not unstoppable. Most of the wraiths in the area know what to avoid, and the cult controls only a small area (less than the area of the park in the Skinlands) around a Nihil. Furthermore, as a Spectre cult, they still suffer from many if not all of the drawbacks of one, that is, an organization of beings who seek Oblivion is hardly stable. In addition to losing progress to raids from the Legion of Fate or unaffiliated wraiths, the True Spear has had to deal with challenges to her position that have undone much of her work. Still, she has not been seen as more than an annoyance by the empire or the



Legions; simply put, they have had other things to do. As she grows more brazen and more Restless fall to her sect, eventually the full force of the empire will fall on her and her followers, especially since control of the Nihil would follow their destruction.

In fact, it's the True Spear herself who both preserves and will doom her cult. Elizabeth's original self, her Psyche, is unusually strong especially for a Spectre of her age, and it has driven the True Spear to extreme lengths to keep it caged. She has fashioned in her own Corpus a special soulsteel prison that binds her Psyche, and that prison requires maintenance; specifically, the complete Corpus of a thinking wraith must be sacrificed to repair and maintain the soulsteel cage. Originally, this task had to be performed only every few decades, but as time has progressed and Oblivion eats away at her, she must perform this task once every year. If she does not perform this task, she feels debilitating pain and has visions similar to a Harrowing in reverse; that is, she ruminates on her life and how far she's fallen.

Although the True Spear is powerful, especially in terms of her brute strength and resistance to Arcanoï, she can't be everywhere, and much of her time is spent working on the True Motive Power. Without her direct leadership, the Spectres and wraiths of Est Machina are far less effective. As the cult's mania grows, it continues to outstrip its members' ability. Because Est Machina has absolutely no friends in the Shadowland version of Lynn, everyone hates them, fears them, and wants to see them gone.

### The True Spear

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6

**Social:** Charisma 1, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1

**Mental:** Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

**Talents:** Alertness 1, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Intimidation 3

**Skills:** Crafts (Soulforging) 5, Melee 2, Survival 3

**Knowledges:** Academics 4, Medicine 4, Occult 3, Science 3, Technology 3

**Arcanoï:** Embody 4, Flux 2, Inhabit 4, Maleficence 3, Moliate 4, Shroud-Rending 2, Usury 3,

**Powers:** The True Spear is composed of soulsteel, and she is a master of soulforging. Her chest contains a soulforged cage that holds her Psyche, and the Pathos of sacrificed wraiths and even Doppelganger Spectres, which she uses to keep herself from falling to Oblivion before her work is done. Her warped soulsteel body takes half damage from Aggravated Damage. She cannot undergo Catharsis.

**Passions:** Destroy Stygia (Hate) 3, Awaken the True Motive Power (Vanity) 5

**Fetters:** A small portrait of Elizabeth with her family, buried with her body.

**Willpower:** 8

**Pathos:** 5

**Angst:** 6

**Permanent Corpus:** 9

## Les Voyeurs du Mal



Every wraith wants to avoid a Harrowing because the Shadow that dwells within them is unleashed and calls on Spectres to subject the wraith's Psyche to as many horrors as it takes to break them. Whether it comes from the destruction of the Corpus of the wraith, from the loss of a Fetter, or losing touch with one of their Passions, no wraith ever wants to feel that Nihil open and drag them into the Labyrinth.

But when the Shadow of a wraith starts the passion play, many Spectres are all too willing to participate. After all, there's an art to a perfect Harrowing that takes the inner world of a wraith and twists it just enough to bring about pain, fear, and eventually a loss of the self so strong that Oblivion seems the only answer. The Harrowing can peel a wraith away from its connection to the Skinlands, strip it of its Fetter, and utterly swamp them in Oblivion.

Of course, some Restless pass through their Harrowings intact. Sometimes they manage to prevent damage to their Fetters and retain their Passions. Also, the Spectres who participate in Harrowings must follow the rules. Spectres can't just show up in the surreal world of the Harrowing and start trying to torture a wraith or hack its Corpus away; they have to give them a way out and abide by the conditions of the scenario. Oblivion might have crept into the Harrowing, but it retains some of its original purpose, which is helping the wraiths come to grips with their deaths and prepare them to be free.

Many Spectres chafe at these restrictions, but a few welcome the challenge. If driving a wraith to Oblivion is an art form, then Les Voyeurs du Mal are nothing if not artists. Unique among Spectres, the Voyeurs are the closest thing the Hive-Mind has to experts in the underpinnings of Harrowings. They know exactly what they can and can't do, and they never cheat or otherwise demean themselves. There's always a solution for the wraith who is trapped in the fevered dream of their own Passions turned against them. A wraith who longs for someone in the Skinlands to remember her will find that desire used against her, but it will never be anything basic. The Voyeurs would rather see a wraith resolve their issues and stride forth confidently with renewed Passions than feel like they'd done less than their absolute best, and playing by the rules is all part of the game.

Of course, that counts only inside the Harrowing. The Voyeurs are absolutely thrilled to contract out their services to put a wraith into a Harrowing by any means. They'll stalk a wraith down a crowded street with soulsteel knives, force them to dive into the ground, use Embody or Puppetry to enter the Skinlands to destroy a Fetter or send minions by using their mastery of Corruption, and many more such tactics. Even for Spectres, the Voyeurs are relentless once they've picked out or been solicited to run a wraith down and force it into a Harrowing. In a way, they're the closest thing Spectres have to assassins whom are willing to enter Stygia and the Shadowlands to ensure that their targets have no respite until they've faced their Harrowing.



Why would the Voyeurs target player characters? Well, they personally might simply do so because it struck their fancy, but that's hardly the only reason. An enemy of the characters could settle upon the Voyeurs as a painless way to see them removed or destroyed without leading back to them. Another possibility is that another Spectre cult, such as the Sacrifices, decides to use the Voyeurs to help probe their chosen targets, softening them up for their eventual plummet to Oblivion.

Any wraiths who are somehow annoying or discomfiting a powerful member of the Hierarchy might find themselves visited by the Voyeurs. In fact, there are persistent rumors of Oracle and Voyeur relations dating back to the Fourth Great Maelstrom. Some Restless argue that the Oracles see those who will become a threat and use the Voyeurs to prevent that threat from coming to pass.

Another possibility is that the Voyeurs aren't interested in the characters themselves, but attack them as a means to an end. Perhaps the characters have a powerful patron that the Voyeurs can't attack directly but who needs a warning to keep out of the way of another powerful patron, who hires the Voyeurs to deliver that warning. The games of politics among the dead might drag the characters into a conflict that has nothing directly to do with them.

The Voyeurs are consummate actors, and many of these Shadow-Eaten are masters of Phantasm and Intimation. The use of these Arcanoi is limited within the Harrowing, but the Voyeurs are absolute masters of coming right up to the very dotted line without going over it. *Outside* the Harrowing, they use these abilities with ruthless precision to make a wraith lose their Passions, drive them away from allies and support groups, and even mislead them into revealing weaknesses that can be used to drive them into their Harrowings.

There are many rumors about *Le Roi des Voyeurs*; that is, the head of the cult. Some say that it's a Pasiphae, which is one of the rumored Ferrymen of Oblivion. Others argue that it is an ancient Nephwrack servant of the Malfeans. Still others believe it is a wraith pretending somehow to be part of the Hive-Mind for some unknown or unknowable ends. Some even believe it is a secret part of the Hierarchy who serve one of the Deathlords and who uses their services to remove those most troublesome members of wraith society. Any or all of these rumors might have some element of truth.

## Valery Montaigne

One representative member of the Voyeurs is Valery Montaigne. He claims he died in 1919 after having just barely survived years on the Western Front of WWI. He says his death was from influenza, and he entered the Shadowlands alongside a flood of human misery that caused a Great Maelstrom. If you ask Valery, he'll happily tell you that he and the Voyeurs aren't crazed monsters because Oblivion is neither something to be feared nor does it need them for anything.

"It would require more arrogance than I possess to believe that there is even a contest to be had between paltry scraps that clutch at a long-lost life by our fingernails and the Void. Life ends in death, and death must ultimately end dragged past the Labyrinth. I remember my Sunday lessons; I was raised with the sure knowledge that God





## Who is Le Roi?

Many who believe the Voyeurs are secretly led by a highly placed Hierarch want to know how they manage to control a pack of theatrical Spectres. It would take more than just craft and guile to use them. She'd need a way to control them, and that's something many ambitious wraiths could use.

Others simply want them destroyed. The Smiling Lord and his Grim Legion hate the very concept of Spectre assassins because many of them were assassinated in life. If anyone is going to be the assassins of the dead, it's them and not a pack of actors. The Ashen Lady suspects the Smiling Lord has used the Voyeurs and wants confirmation, and dealing with Le Roi once they are found and the information is gained would suit her just fine.

The Emerald Lord might also sponsor a hunt for Le Roi because inventive and innovative actors could teach them many new tricks, and the Monitors don't like the competition.

As for who Le Roi is, there are many rumors. Perhaps the Smiling Lord is behind the group; it's not like consorting with Spectres would be a treason too far for him. Those who know that there have been many wraiths wearing the name Valery Montaigne over the years suspect the original holder of that sobriquet to still exist and to be pulling the strings behind the scenes. Yet others suspect an intruder from outside the Dark Kingdom of Iron because of the Voyeurs' roots in World War I and the Fourth Great Maelstrom.

The truth in your chronicle should be something that stirs up interesting new complications.

needed nothing from me. All sufficient to His own defense, I believe. Oblivion is the true face of God, and the cosmos itself the stone that grinds all. The Harrowing is all part of the order of things. It exists to show us our folly and prepare us for the truth. Oblivion does not hunger, and it is not malevolent; these are concepts rooted in existence. In life. Oblivion is not alive. It is very much not anything at all, and it does not need us because it cannot need us. But we need it or there would never be an end to any of this suffering we wrap ourselves in. We poor dead things are trapped in webs of our own making. The Harrowing is how we cut ourselves free."

Valery is a gifted actor, a Doppelganger, and a member of the Actors faction. Valery is also a consummate liar, and everything he says about himself and every claim he makes is a lie. Valery died recently and became a Spectre even more recently; his name isn't even really Valery. There have been many who have claimed the

name and identity of Valery Montaigne. The pretense helps give the Voyeurs a legend and continuity that makes them seem stable. That stability helps those in the Hierarchy who deal with them feel better about betraying their own to Spectres who will torment them until they break and fall to the Void. It's unknown if there ever was a Valery Montaigne or if it's all been a lie from the start. Dwelling in the Shadowland of the Zone Rouge (see p. 128) with the remains of the Great War still poisoning the land in the Skinlands, it's easy to hide what is real behind legends.

Valery and his troupe of Spectres mirror a theatre company, with each one possessing Arcanoi that allow them to play a part both in stalking prey and taking part in their Harrowings once they're run down. Over the years, Valery has become a kind of ringmaster or master of ceremonies for his troupe. He looks much as he did in his first days of death: lean and sandy haired with an echo of the hangdog exhaustion he felt dying by inches carved into his appearance.

He and his troupe operate in the Zone Rouge, a region of France that was rendered uninhabitable during the First World War. In the Skinlands, the town Valery was born in is still so toxic with arsenic and other pollutants from all the shells fired that humans cannot live there, and there are no buildings left to this day of the former Fleury-devant-Douaumont. But in the Shadowlands, Valery and the others can still find places to hold court.

Of course, a region as soaked in blood and death as the Zone Rouge has many Nihilis and borders the Labyrinth, so it's an easy jaunt for a pack of Spectres who love driving Restless to madness and despair. Valery talks a good game, but whether or not he thinks Oblivion needs him, he certainly needs it. The horrors that he inflicts and the wounds that he leaves on the Psyche of those wraiths he torments are sweet to him, and although he plays scrupulously fair while in the Harrowing it is only because he has no choice. The fact that he can't simply flay the wraiths he "performs" for apart with their own fears, needs, and lusts is like a knife being driven under his fingernails, and his sadism grows worse with every passing year. The elaborate hunts his troupe engages in across France's Shadowland have drawn the attention of those within the Kingdom of Iron who find them less useful than disruptive. Across the Necropoli of Europe, Valery has made many enemies, and his own mania for dressing up his love for rubbing people's noses in their own flaws goads him to ever more elaborate Harrowings. Even many Shadows will no longer work with him and his followers.

Valery is not daunted by his situation. When Oblivion wants him, he claims he'll gladly go. Until then, he and his followers have a role to play, which is one that he sees as pre-ordained and necessary. If he is ghastly, what can one say? He is after all a ghost, is he not?

## Valery Montaigne

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 1, Stamina 2

**Social:** Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness 2, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Subterfuge 2

**Skills:** Performance 5

**Knowledges:** Investigation 2



**Arcanoi:** Fatalism 2, Keening 3, Phantasm 3

**Passions:** Put on the best Harrowing possible (Pride) 3, Show others what they can't face in themselves (Love) 3

**Fetters:** The former basement of the theatre in Fleury-devant-Douaumont, which is the only part of it left intact.

**Willpower:** 6

**Pathos:** 2

**Angst:** 6

**Permanent Corpus:** 4

## The Sailors of the Sunless Sea



he Tempest is a place where the concept of oceans lingers, and it is expressed in nightmares and portents. You could sail into a firestorm or crash on shoals deposited by the dying exhalations of plague-stricken children. Dotted by the Far Shores and surrounding Stygia, it is as much a part of the Underworld as the Shadowlands or the Labyrinth. Words like “under” and “surrounding” are used to describe the relationship between these places, but the truth is they are all and none of them. But one thing is certain: Wherever you find Restless, you find Spectres working to bring Oblivion in ways subtle and gross.

Spectres can be many things. They can be subtle manipulators taking advantage of the inexperienced. They can be outraged at a corrupt Hierarchy and a Dark Kingdom that continues the same injustices they faced in life. They can be aesthetes who view their role as players in a cosmic drama. But that's not all there is to them. Sometimes Spectres are just Shadow-eaten monsters, such as Nephwracks, Pasiphae, or servants of Malfeans dancing to Oblivion's tune. Sometimes a Spectre cult is just a gang of monsters who lash out at anyone who crosses their path.

The Sailors of the Sunless Sea are these monsters. They didn't name themselves; the name came from Stygia because they haunt the Tempest. If they were alive, they'd be something akin to pirates that attack travelers and steal whatever of value they can. Because they're Spectres (and most of them Nephwracks at that), they often simply swarm their quarry and force them to flee into a Harrowing or lose all their Corpus. They're not coherent enough to forge soulsteel because so little of their humanity is left that they could never deceive anyone about their motivations, and they don't care about artistry. They just haunt the nightmare ocean and look for victims. Sometimes they capture wraiths and drag them deeper into the Labyrinth itself. Do they drag them to the Malfeans? Throw them into the Well of the Void itself? There are rumors of a great maw other than the Well of Oblivion that hungers for all things that sleeps underneath the Labyrinth, but if the Sailors bring it tribute in an attempt to awaken it, none have returned to spread the news.

The Sailors are the horrific crew of a ghost ship that haunts the Tempest. Sailing through the hazards of the storm-sea, they

are led by a terrible figure, a hooded and cloaked creature with an enormous scythe locked behind tainted armor and a robe that covers much of its torso. It has no visible face that can be seen behind the featureless helm it wears and it never speaks, but the Nephwracks who labor in twisted service to it obey its every whim. One survivor of their attack who managed to drop into a Harrowing and overcome it to escape them called it the Granddaughter.

The Granddaughter sails the Tempest in a ship made of soulsteel and debris dredged from the death-ocean. These debris are the flotsam and jetsam from souls that have forgotten their Passions or been stripped of them, such as a dream of a lost toy, a memory of the day a loved one died, or the fragments of a warm day that serve only to torment the one who holds them, all lashed together into a nightmare ship. The Granddaughter roams the Tempest and preys on anyone its crew can catch. Its prisoners are held in terrible cages that prevent them from escaping into Harrowing. While waiting until the craft is full, these prisoners listen to the gibbering of the broken Nephwracks, whom have been twisted by the Granddaughter's terrible facility with Moliate. Some argue that the ship and the Granddaughter are one and that the armored figure striding the decks is a manifestation of the craft's unnatural hunger for captive souls to drag to the void.

Of all the Cults listed, the Sailors are both the most straightforward and yet the hardest with which to deal. They do not stay in one place and can travel freely between parts of the Tempest and the Labyrinth. Although the various Nephwracks that make up the crew can be dealt with through raw force, a one-on-one fight with the Granddaughter is almost certainly a losing proposition for anything short of a Deathlord. A group of characters who run afoul of the Sailors could end up in their cages, where they find themselves kept prisoner along with other Restless and even Spectres whom the Granddaughter finds useful. The mystery of the Sailors' ultimate patron and purpose helps make them more of a threat because even if they are somehow dealt with, they might well return and take up where they left off.

### The Granddaughter

The Granddaughter is a being on par with a Onceborn. Stats for it are pointless because fighting it would be futile for most troupes of wraiths or even Spectres. In addition to a crew full of Nephwracks at its beck and call and her terrifying scythe, its armored and shrouded form seems nearly indestructible, and she can traverse the Tempest and the Labyrinth with an ease that even Ferrymen would envy.

To fight the Sailors of the Sunless Sea, a group of wraiths must discover what the Granddaughter is after and remove it from her reach. Perhaps they could deliver it to the Ashen Lady, take it to the top of the Onyx Tower, or otherwise prevent the Granddaughter from taking it. Another possibility might be to have the characters awaken in the cages inside the Granddaughter's ship. They could work together to escape rather than actually confront the monstrosity itself.









# The Forever Wind: The Tempest



It used to be a sedate ocean called the Sea of Shadows. It used to be a rolling sea that churned with all the colors of the soul. It was once almost peaceful, and did not ever disturb the Shadowlands that lay above it or the Labyrinth below. But after the Maelstroms came and disturbed the waters of the dead, it became much more than an ocean and the Sea of Shadows. Where once it was safe to sail along without a Ferryman, now hurricanes of glass; maelstroms of vengeful, confused souls; and tsunamis of magma swell through the waters and destroy those who do not know how to cross the waters of the sea safely. Without a guide, a soul will be lost or destroyed.

The Tempest was once the Sea of Shadows, but now it is a place few are brave enough to set their sail. Crossing the Tempest isn't easy even with the assistance of a Ferryman. Even with the correct coin, the right words spoken, and the correct directions given, it is still dangerous to go without one who would guide you safely across, above, or below.

There are many parts to The Tempest: lakes of cold fire, islands set far out from the shore that are home to only the hungriest of shades, and Shadows of Sirens holding one rocky shoal who calling to any who listens. Even further afield are eddies of hot magma that brighten the sky of a sunless sea as wide and vast as the imagination. No one knows quite how large the Tempest is because the legends of its size and its abilities far surpass whatever might be true.

The only true knowledge-keepers of the Tempest are the Ferrymen and those Restless who have braved the siren song of their Shadow and gained knowledge by testing the limits of the ocean.

It's important to understand that the Tempest connects places, and anybody who needs to get from Point A to Point B must cross it. It's a violent and dangerous place that takes significant skill to traverse, whether by Ferryman, on your own, or in a group.

The Tempest sometimes looks like a calm portion of the Pacific or Atlantic Oceans. At other times it looks as though shards of glass have crashed together and make a sharp wave that crests over those it catches and slices their souls to shreds. Other parts are made up of soulstuff. Faces pulse and scream, and hands grasp and clench up through the water at whatever those poor unfortunate souls can harvest for themselves.

Storytellers can use the Tempest in many ways: as an obstacle, as a place that characters must traverse in order to successfully find their way into a new location, or as the setting itself with various dangers and obstacles that the characters must overcome.

In a time of climate change and fears of the oceans rising and the polar ice caps melting, it's easy to tap into fear around the ocean. Sinking cities, rising tides, and dying creatures that rise from the deep to take their revenge can be adapted to the setting of the Tempest. It's a place that should conjure fear and horror, but also loneliness in the face of abject terror. Much of the fiction written about the ocean is about the things that live



in the ocean that we cannot control, such as Moby Dick, or about long-lost ships like the *Flying Dutchman* and the *Titanic*.

This is a place where a wraith's Shadow can sing the song of a siren and lure their wraith into a whirlpool that tears them to shreds. This is a place that can unmoor one from the Fetters that might be most important to a wraith. A wraith might move from place to place in the Tempest with ease, but find themselves facing a much greater danger within a Maelstrom.

Maelstroms are events that are catastrophic. They usually are the result of a massive event that either happened in the Skinlands or within the Underworld. They are always vicious and wrenching things that destroy all in their path.

## The Storms Before

There have been many major and Great Maelstroms. Maelstroms are swelling and uncontrollable storms that change the landscape and the tenor and swell of the Tempest. Each Great Maelstrom was linked to an event in the world, which usually was a great death that devastated the living.

Before these Great Maelstroms, the Sea of Shadows was a place of relative harmony. Souls who chose not to interact with society became part of the Sea of Shadows and be at peace, and those who wanted to participate in life after death were given the option to join society in Stygia.

- The First Great Maelstrom was prompted by the Fall of Rome. It nearly destroyed Stygia when the storm slammed against Stygia's shores with a previously unknown rage. Charon's solution was to build a sea wall out of souls who had been destroyed to protect the Isle of Sorrows from future flooding.
- The Second Great Maelstrom was prompted by the Black Death, which was the plague that ravaged Europe and killed millions. The Shroud nearly tore from the sheer weight of the many souls coming through it. Although Stygia did not fall, Charon began to extract tithes, which resulted in outrage from many of the dead.
- The Third Great Maelstrom was prompted by the conquest of the Americas, which was a devastating blow to indigenous peoples across an entire continent (for more information about the past and present of the American Shadowlands, see p. 89). The conquest did not simply affect the Tempest due to incidents which happened then, but also due to the reckless impact these actions had on the world for the future. The events of the Third Great Maelstrom shifted Stygian society into what it is today: this is when the factions were codified (Hierarchy, Heretic, and Renegade), and the first Necropolis was founded in London.
- The Fourth Great Maelstrom came about during The Great War (World War I) and the Spanish influenza pandemic. The Battle of the Somme was the initial cause when three million combatants died. Then, 500 million died from the Spanish flu. This devastating influx of souls let Spectres take the Citadel at Florence, and the storm shut down all the byways to traverse toward Stygia and beyond. The storm manifested

as mustard gas, and the scent of antiseptic lingered for days after it ended.

- The Fifth Great Maelstrom began as a small storm during the initial T4 project by the Nazi Party. It strengthened over time and into a tornado-like storm. Finally, it became a full-blown Maelstrom as the Holocaust escalated and the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A silent flash burst the Shroud loose for a few moments after the atomic bombs dropped, which allowed more Restless to enter than ever before. No sound could be heard until the Malfean Gorool awoke within the Labyrinth and attacked Stygia. The destruction that Gorool left in its wake is still being repaired, with the damage being both psychic and corporeal in nature.

Each of these instances made its own mark upon the Tempest, Stygia, and the Shadowlands. There's always the opportunity for a character to find remnants of each of these Maelstroms, such as the scent of mustard gas on the wind, a toppled building, or a shoal carved out and never taken back by the sea.

## The Storms Now

The Tempest now is a complicated place. Another Great Maelstrom might be brewing. Stygian wraiths are shoring up the Dark Kingdom of Iron as best as they can by building new sea walls and trying to repair the tear in the shroud from 1999, but not everything is fixable or safe. The Tempest remains unpredictable and there are few ways or resources to attempt to predict anything about it.

In each era, humanity did something that changed the Tempest and usually for the worse. Even without the influence of the living, the Tempest is a vast hollow abyss, and when it shifts you can never predict the way that the wind might blow.

## The Everyday Tempest



Arriving at the shore itself is interesting. Whether it's a wraith's experience of coming out of a Ferryman's haze and spotting the shores of Stygia or the Shadowlands for the first time or a fading ocean spray haze, sometimes the seas are just there and then they are not; the transitions can be perfectly normal for an ocean view or completely abrupt.

The sea wall is one of the few exceptions to this sudden shift. It can be seen for miles. Through the Ferryman's haze, a storm shelf, or a tornado, there will be a black line on the horizon that foretells the sea wall in the distance.

There are plenty of obstacles. Whirlpools often appear out of nowhere and suck boats and wraiths swimming alone down into the deep. Sometimes they are traditional whirlpools, but others are made of flame or glass. Whirlpools made of St. Elmo's fire have been seen at a distance. They've probably been seen closer at hand too but the experience isn't one that observers survive except perhaps as Spectres.



With the rise of climate change, tsunamis and hurricanes are another concern. Some of the more unusual effects of climate change include sinkholes. In the Skinlands, a sinkhole sucks everything downward, and what is caught in it appears in the Shadowlands. When a sinkhole opens on one of the islands in the Shadowlands or inside of the Tempest, it spits out cars, trees, people, animals, and corpses. These areas should be avoided. As more glaciers melt (and find their way down the Styx into the Tempest) and more sinkholes appear in the world of the living, these dangers appear more frequently. At some point, the temperatures in the Tempest will begin to cool, suck all the ice from the living world, and push heat back in its place. The living will burn and the dead will freeze.

Although Stygia and most other parts of the Shadowlands are protected from these particular natural disasters, they still wreak havoc on the seas and those who live on them. When the sky goes green, expert sailors batten down the hatches because they know that a storm is coming and nothing can be done but to ride it out. During the storm, tornados rip through the water and wailing shades attack anything in their path.

Of course, sometimes what's on the ocean isn't as unpredictable as the shores themselves. With unpredictable sea levels affecting the living world, beaches that have been drowned by the rising oceans have found their way here as a landscape born from the death of the world. Therefore, not even experienced sailors know the landscape as well as they did.

## Dwelling in the Storm

For some Restless, the Tempest is not a transitional space where passages are made and storms are dodged. Instead, it is their home. There are many small archipelagos, islands, peninsulas, and channel islands for would-be residents to claim, but the process is difficult.

There are many things already living on those islands, such as selkie wraiths, sirens, and even a cyclops or two, and all of them eat wraiths. Some use their essence for power, others simply want to be left alone, and the sirens are always looking for a toy.

Some of these islands are home to wild packs of ghostly dodos, flocks of skeletal passenger pigeons, and other communities of extinct creatures, all of which make a wraith's afterlife harder, more complicated, and significantly less pleasant. This is a unique feature outside the Bush of Ghosts, as deceased animals are rarely present in the Underworld. The Stygian Legions can be found roaming these islands on missions, and they'll sometimes harvest these creatures' souls for their own purposes. In addition, if a wraith is using one of these islands as a hideout and one of the Legions shows up, it might go poorly. But, the Legions aren't the only ones trying to use dodos, pigeons, and turtles; Alchemists and Artificers also use the feathers and bones of long-dead creatures to fuel their creations.

Protecting these creatures falls primarily to Restless allied with the Heretics and other organizations within the world of Stygia that accept Transcendence and move on from this part of the afterlife.

Ferryman don't have much respect for property lines. Their boats will go wherever is safest and fastest and wherever obstacles aren't. If there's something in the ocean ahead, a Ferryman's boat might make its way across an island and float swiftly through whatever lies in its path, which includes any structures that were built on an island, any sea walls that might have been erected to prevent rising tides during storms, and any inhabitants who live there.

There are a few permanent settlements in the Tempest, but perhaps one of the most prominent one is Caliban's Isle. The wraith Sycorax left it here for her son, and he dwells there far from the world that rejected him. Caliban is the kind of neighbor that a wraith may not want because his Shadow is strong and tries to manipulate other wraiths' Shadows.

Sycorax was a witch who lived in the 16th century. She gave birth to a half human and half monster child whom she named Caliban. When Sycorax died, she left her son the island. A mage stole it from him and Caliban's rage was palpable. If your neighboring isle is Caliban's Isle, your wraith might experience heightened rage, feel destabilized, or even be in stronger communication with their Shadow than on other islands.

Caliban's Isle is only one example of the kinds of potentially troublesome neighbors that Tempest dwellers can face. If your new habitat or outpost is one of the places where the Flying Dutchman docks, you'll experience more storms than anywhere else.

There are concerns beyond neighbors and natural inhabitants of the islands. The Great War brought U-boats into the Tempest that stalk targets, and World War II brought minefields that might still lie underneath the sands of some otherwise inviting beaches. Any land or sea mines that mirror locations in the Skinlands and took the lives of Restless find their way to the Shadowlands where they wait to explode. Relic mines can come from as far back as the Crimean War. Go even further back in time and you'll find other dangers, such as Viking longboats and Grecian warships that cross the Tempest. Sometimes Spectres crew them, and sometimes they seem to operate themselves (For more information about the Chosen and the Indwelling, see [pp. 27-28](#)).

There's always the constant threat of Spectre armies coming down on a new settlement, destroying it, and taking the wraiths there and using them as slaves. Dwelling in the Tempest always means balancing the risks and reward of proximity to danger, distance and ease of access to Stygian strongholds, openness to the surrounding sea, and potentially valuable resources such as dodo souls to Relics and Artifacts.

## Valuable Objects

**Ferryman's Oar (Artifact Level 1)** It's pretty easy to get one of these oars. Ferryman lose them in the Tempest all the time, for example, when a current snatches it away, a shark surprises them, or one of their boats goes below the waves and never returns. A wraith knows that they're looking at a Ferryman's oar and not a piece of driftwood because of the soft purple glow around the rounded base of the oar. By using these oars, you can steer



through waters both calm and fraught. These are easily lost, and if a wraith is caught “borrowing” one by a Ferryman, there might be consequences.

**St. Elmo’s Fire Lantern (Artifact Level 1)** These lanterns rarely escape the Underworld, but they’ve been known to appear in the Skinlands from time to time. Similar to Redeyes, they can light the way in the Tempest, but unlike a Redeye, which stays in place, these lanterns often find that they want to go somewhere else and show the wraith to a new route to a new place. They are best used when a wraith carries it in their hand.

**Vasa Diving Bell (Relic Level 2)** A wraith looking to do underwater exploring might find this handy. Found in the Tempest after the Viking-era warship *Vasa* was discovered still underneath the water in Stockholm’s Harbor, it renders the user invisible to anything that might be looking for them. It is a black bell with visible studs along the seams large enough to hold a single wraith. It has an indefinitely long oxygen hose that rises up into the indefinite distance of the Shadowlands and frequently passes through weak spots in the Shroud to drift in calm waters of the Skinlands.

**Waste Land Compass (Relic Level 4)** It doesn’t look like a compass. It looks like a copy of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. A wraith who holds it in their hands develops an accurate conviction of how to get to (or through) the Far Shore known as the Waste Land. This is highly valuable object, and the danger level of having it is the same level as the benefit the owner receives in carrying it.

Other Artifacts and Relics might help a wraith survive in the Tempest, such as diving helmets, pieces of the *Titanic*, or even U-boat spare parts. The trick is in being resourceful enough to find them and use them to their best advantage.

## The Storms Themselves

There are storms that appear for no good reason and storms that appear because they have a tether to the world. Some storms look like the ones that you’d expect to see on the horizon during a hurricane, but other storms might look like something out of a painting, such the Dali Storm, which melts the horizon and everything it touches within a hundred mile radius. It saps everything around it of its sentience and matter and drips everything down the median line like oil paint dropped on a canvas.

Weather patterns of the Tempest are fueled by emotion. These patterns are not random, but are reflections and impressions of events that happen in the world of the living. Some of them are related to Maelstroms, but others happen because something important happened to the living that usually coincides with a death or tragedy. Two examples are the death of a great artist and the other from an artist making a piece of art that affected the world due to grief.

The Dali Storm appeared when the painter Salvador Dali died, and the impression of his talent made a mark on the Tempest. The Guernica Storm appeared when Pablo Picasso created the painting of the same name. Whispers of the black and white storm with abstracted arms and heads reaching up from the deep foreshadowed the Great Maelstrom that was brewing as the Spanish

Civil War raged. Wraiths still talk about the Guernica Storm, and sometimes encounter it.

Storytellers who want to make an emotional impact on their players might consider ways to use current events (or past ones) to create storms that react to what has happened to characters or events in the world relevant to that character’s thoughts and memories.

Many different storms come and go, and this section gives Storytellers the tools to create storms and a list of several storms to throw at players.

Building a storm is about three things: visual cues, sensory experience, and damage. When a Storyteller wants to create an entirely new storm for their players to experience, they must decide these three things.

## The Dali Storm

- **Visual Cue:** The Dali Storm appears on the horizon at first, and it begins to drip slowly. The colors of the world begin to resemble the colors of a well-mixed acrylic paint.
- **Sensory Experience:** Wraiths know they are in the Dali Storm when they feel as though their extremities are beginning to melt; if they look down at their hands, they see them elongating, stretching out, and dripping.
- **Damage:** The Dali Storm can melt entire buildings over the course of an hour. It can leave a wraith in a puddle where they cannot make sense of the world and reform as their original shape.

## The Arcane Storm

One of the most dangerous storms that appears with some regularity is the Arcane Storm. When a mage dies and becomes a wraith, their avatar rips away, inverts, and creates a small tornado, which causes magical changes to the Tempest.

- **Visual Cues:** A tornado crackling with energy drops down and tears up the Tempest in its wake.
- **Sensory Experience:** The scent of ozone can be smelled wherever the tornado is seen.
- **Damage:** A wraith caught in the tornado takes damage from the magick whirling in its wake. The Storyteller is encouraged to combine elemental effects, such as fire and earth or acid and ice, or to hasten the flow of time or drain Corpus from a victim of this attack.

## The Tempus Hurricane

Another storm less common is known as a Tempus Hurricane. The initial storm is a relatively normal one, but what happens once the storm has ended? That’s more of a mystery. It affects how the individuals who experienced the storm feel time.

- **Visual Cues:** A regular storm where the clouds roll in, the lightning crackles, and the winds whip the sails.
- **Sensory Experience:** Once the storm has ended, the air feels as though it’s in stasis. There’s no wind or breeze, and after a while it begins to feel musty and dry.





- **Damage:** A wraith caught in a Tempus Hurricane loses their sense of time. They might take damage from “aging” (an odd concept for a wraith, but it can happen in these circumstances) or they might take damage because they have no access to the things wraiths need to survive.

## The Shadow Tornado

The last and rarest kind of storm is a Shadow Tornado. When a wraith narrowly escapes a Harrowing that they triggered, the Harrowing doesn’t go away but becomes a small tornado. These storms are rare, and when they hit the Tempest, everyone scatters because getting trapped inside of one is deadly.

- **Visual Cues:** A black and green crackling tornado with faces staring out from the inside of it, with most of them screaming. From the inside, the wraith and anybody else in their party can see each other as though they are in a black box theater. Once inside, everyone flicks between different forms, such as a family member from their living life or a memory of a statue.
- **Sensory Experience:** Everything is either too cold or too hot. The wraith feel unbearable discomfort and the scent of rotting meat.
- **Damage:** The damage is similar to the consequences for Harrowings.

Storytellers should adapt storms to their specific story needs. A storm is only useful when it evokes fear from the characters and

players, so it should connect to the mood that the Storyteller is trying to evoke.

Storms are not always violent. Storms are not always sharp glass whipping through the wind at velocity. Sometimes, a storm is faces staring up from the deep with hands that silently grasp for a wraith’s hand to pull them under.

## The Storms to Come

When the last of the ice caps is gone, the world will descend into chaos. The Shroud might not survive the widening gyre of souls that will rush through as cities like New York and entire countries like Saipan and Indonesia are devoured by the sea. Harbingers wonder if, due to the emotional resonance of such an act, the Underworld might see ice caps and glaciers entering through the Shroud, with all the living creatures destroyed by climate change.

The storms to come are caused by humanity’s inability to change. The inhabitants of the Underworld have known for 100 years that they are coming, and Stygia has been preparing for them. Wraiths care about climate change because the end result of the changes to Earth might be that Stygia slides underwater. Atlantis lies far beneath the Tempest already, and none of the guilds wish to be reacquainted with its drowned Spectres.

New sea walls are slowly being built in advance of the next Great Maelstrom, pumps to remove water powered by souls are being installed, and drains are being installed that hopefully will reduce the impact of the storms coming into each Necropolis.



However, the body responsible for this construction is underfunded and unsupported, leaving many gaps in incomplete walls.

## (Relatively) Easy Tempest Travel



One of the more interesting sections of myth and story when it comes to the Underworld is how souls get to where they're going and who controls their passage. Different kinds of ghosts, Restless, and all manner of beings that live and travel on in the Tempest have various rules to travel by. Hitchhiker ghosts, ferry ghosts, ghosts that were hit by cars, and many others have different rules by which they travel.

Here's some ways in which Storytellers might use the Underworld Department of Highways and Byways in ways that aren't necessarily connected to playing inside the Tempest.

### The Ferrymen

The Ferrymen are wraiths, but they're wraiths with a very specific task: They get visitors through the Tempest to where they need to go, and they know the area better than anyone else (except maybe crossroads ghosts, but we'll get to that).

They're organized and ferry wraiths between set destinations. Pick-up and drop-off times are scheduled and the routes are clear. However, no one except the Ferrymen knows these routes, and to guard the secrets of these routes, the Ferrymen often use a green fog to obscure their travels, and a soft lantern at the front of their boats is the only light that a wraith can see. Without a Ferryman at the oar and the magic that a Ferryman uses to light the lantern, the craft is ordinary.

The price of a ride outside the known Byways is high. Wraiths might have to sell a part of themselves, such as a cherished memory of the world or a secret. No matter what they give the Ferryman, it always takes the appearance of a Roman coin, and the face of it represents the information or price that has been paid. No one wraith is likely to pay the price often because there are ways to travel without the assistance of a Ferryman, but there's certainly enough ghosts to make up regular traffic across the Tempest. The Midnight Express train is a cheaper, but in many ways more dangerous method of transportation many wraiths favor.

Shadows interact strangely with Ferrymen. Their lanterns are designed to keep Shadows at bay and stop them from interfering with passage across the Tempest. A wraith might find shelter and relative peace on board, but their Shadow might try to interfere with making the deal for passage.

### Crossroads Ghosts

A crossroads ghost is something between a demon and a spirit. Depending on why their soul is tethered to this particular crossroad, they may or may not be angry about their circumstances. A crossroads ghost is there to make a deal. They are there to see whether or not whatever they serve wants whatever a wraith has.

### Inspiration for Travel Rules

The work of Seanan McGuire in her books *Sparrow Hill Road* and *The Girl in the Green Silk Gown* both offer great insight into how a hitchhiker ghost might make their way through the underworld. Other places to look for inspiration are the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Deep Secret* by Diana Wynne Jones (which covers how to get to Babylon) and the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. All provide excellent examples for how to address moving through the Underworld at great cost to the traveler.

All ghosts function through a set of rules. The rules of a crossroads ghost are different than the rules for a hitchhiking ghost or drowned ship ghost, but they all fall under a very important restriction, which is that they haunt ferry routes, train lines, and other routes of transit.

The price is always steep because otherwise no one would come to the crossroads ghost for anything worth having.

Do you want to see your child one last time? Go to the crossroads, but you might be giving your child's soul up as part of the bargain.

Want a Ferryman's coin without having to pay for it? Maybe a smaller price than what you'd pay the Ferryman, but you'll owe the crossroads a debt and it'll be collected at the worst possible time.

Want to ditch your Shadow forever? You'll have to join the crossroads ghosts to do it.

### Hitchhiker Ghosts

Ghosts in cars are a fairly standard ghost story trope. They might appear as La Llorana or as Resurrection Mary, or any of the thousands of other urban legend ghost stories from the road. The key is that a hitchhiker ghost can't go anywhere without help. They can't reach their final destination (their destiny) without someone living to assist them. Maybe they need a token from their guide, or perhaps they need something more sinister like the very breath of life given to them by the owner of the car. Hitchhiker ghosts can be used to enhance wraith characters' stories as well.

Perhaps a player character was in a car accident at the time of their death. If they want to go anywhere, how are they meant to get there? A wraith who died in a car accident might need to be carried in a vehicle to get out of sight of the spot where they died. How does that wraith manage to get from place to place?

### Sea Channel Ghosts

A shipwreck is a terrible thing. It can drown thousands at once. Channel ghosts are the kind of ghosts who don't have a final resting place because their final resting place is the whole ocean. A



## The Mechanics of Restraint

The standard character creation rules don't make provision for the unseen forces that constrain a wraith to the limitations laid down by urban legend, mythology, folklore, or unconscious whim. However, they're not complicated to add. Create custom Flaws as needed and compare the degree of constraint that you want a character to suffer to existing ones. Minor but frequent and persistent inconveniences are generally worth a point, significantly impairing ones are worth 2-3 points, and really severe ones are worth 4+ points.

Buying off these constraints should be accompanied by dramatic and interesting events in play. It's a major victory over internal and external opposition to escape the story of how a ghost removed themselves with or without help from someone else's story. Wraithly and Spectral forces alike interested in the ways of Fate are likely to notice and want to know more. It's the end of an era of constraint for the character, but the beginning of a new one of not-always-wanted attention.

ship ghost might appear on a ferryboat or a cruise ship that follows the same channels. Of course, there's also the case of the *Flying Dutchman*, where a ship itself sailed the waves in search of prey.

The *Flying Dutchman* primarily makes its home on the waters of the Tempest, where it hunts Ferrymen carrying their passengers to Stygia. Those who see its black sails and faintly glowing green lights rarely reach their destination. It's crewed by Spectres that sail the Tempest to seek out Restless on the path to Transcendence.

The Tempest is a dangerous place and it's not somewhere to tread lightly, but within it there is much adventure to be had and an equal amount of peril.

## Kingdoms Built on Rubble



Early morning over the wounded city and our pilot is flying blind.

Five crews are on this op, ferried in on the last Midnight Express run, our birds tarped down on flatcars. We were briefed before dawn in the railyard as the train pulled out, taking everyone who can't or won't fight or work. Siege conditions: Evacuate the noncombatants. Oblivion is hungry today.

Blackwell is in the right seat, his visor down to hide what's left of his face after it lost a fight with a Vietnamese 57mm shell. Thankfully, his wound doesn't affect his aviating. We're in a slow clockwise orbit, scanning for survivors through two-bell winds and everything they carry.

The living don't know what's coming because the forecast says the first bodies won't hit the ground for another six hours, but here the Maelstrom is already building.

"Got a tasking," McGuire murmurs from the left seat where she's running comms in a shared waking dream. "Augur says three on a rooftop by the university."

Blackwell double-clicks the intercom in acknowledgement and breaks off to point us in that direction. It's a short flight, even with bone hail clattering off the windshield, and Castaneda and I double-check our safety lines and lean out the doors to search.

"Fast-mover inbound," McGuire reports. "On our six, going for the tail."

I crane my neck and see a streak of green teeth and black robes coming at us. True to form, it's relying on a living memory of aerodynamics, and it vomits out a tongue like a barbed anchor chain to ensnare our tail rotor and spin us out of the sky. Blackwell just grunts and holds us steady, giving the Spectre an easy target.

A noise like a handful of rocks dropped in a blender overpowers a brief squawk of dismay as Stygian steel replacement blades don't even slow down. The chain wraps and pulls its owner in, then the Spectre hits the fan and rips apart. We barely feel a shudder. Laminate rotors were the first thing we replaced, dumbass.

"Mark, mark, mark. Torch at eight o'clock." While I've been watching the show, Castaneda's been on mission. Blackwell brings us around as I start checking my gear. We don't want to put the bird within reach of what's in the water, so I'll rope down and we'll winch those wraiths in one at a time.

That's the plan for the next thirty seconds, anyway. I'm about to go on the line when the screaming from below – can't hear you over the Pathos turbine, guys – intensifies. Then the wind gives us a shove toward a bell tower as a stroke of lightning splits the air where we were. I grab for a handhold and twist toward the door in time to see the first caul bob to the water's surface, and I realize I'm hearing the screams from across the Shroud. That means the forecast was wrong and people are dying now, and this storm is about to eat us and everyone else in it.

The smart thing to do would be to firewall it and RTB, but if I were smart, I wouldn't be in the back of a relic Huey in a Maelstrom. So instead, I lock eyes with Castaneda. "Plan B?" I ask even as she's reaching for my harness.

"We gotta go out. We don't have to come back," she confirms, and then we're out the door at a totally unsurvivable altitude. Her wings come out at the same time as my hatchets and as she turns I can see a Nihil chewing away the corner of the building. Our survivors aren't screaming any more. They're too busy fending off the cousin of the thing our tail rotor shredded. It's a race to see whether the Spectre or the Labyrinth gets them first.

The Spectre, the Labyrinth, or us.

The Underworld wouldn't exist without disasters. Death and destruction feed the Stygian Empire's insatiable engines with wraiths, Relics, and Pathos. Stygia's splendor is built on memory and salvage drawn from every corner of the world that its Shadowlands holdings touch, and the other Dark Kingdoms follow suit. Each Skinlands catastrophe infuses the Restless with wealth





even as Oblivion feeds on the pain and loss. In the Underworld, every disaster embodies the famous mistranslation of *weiji*, the Mandarin word for crisis: danger and opportunity.

## Unfortunate Events, In Sequence

An airliner crash, a typhoon, and a hemorrhagic fever outbreak have radically different causes and effects. However, all disasters have common elements, including a general timeline. Each phase resonates in the Underworld and draws attention from both the Restless and Oblivion.

### Gust Front

The time before a disaster, that is, “left of bang” in the military parlance that the Legions have co-opted, might bring warning of the catastrophe to come. Some natural hazards are predictable with varying accuracy and timeliness. Modern meteorology, volcanology, and epidemiology can provide hours, days, and months of notice before events occur in their respective fields, but seismology struggles to issue warnings a minute in advance. Some technological hazards also are predictable if faults in the affected systems are visible before they fail. More often, both technological and man-made hazards go unheralded until the crisis breaks. In all cases, if keen-eyed observers do raise red flags, peers and nominal superiors might dismiss those warnings out of a lack of understanding or a desire to suppress inconvenient truths. Examples of such behavior are

all too prominent in the real world, and in the World of Darkness they’re tragically ubiquitous.

In an often painful twist of metaphysics, Restless frequently receive more advance notice of disasters than mortals do. The Underworld’s relationship with causality is inconstant thanks to its equally strong links to Fate. Skinlands disasters reverberate across the Shroud, usually (but not always; Oblivion is unpredictable) in proportion to the fear, death, and suffering they bring to mortals rather than the physical destruction that they wreak. Even without a full-blown Maelstrom erupting as a catastrophe’s precursory consequence, omens and reflections emerge in the Shadowlands well before events occur among the Quick. The trick is discerning these omens from the Underworld’s everyday weirdness. Fatalism and Lifeweb are the most reliable Arcanoï for this purpose, although any art that reaches across the Shroud might manifest unexpected side-effects that are symptoms to the experienced diagnostician. Reading the environment with Enigmas or Occult might also yield some forewarning.

If any advance notice reaches the Underworld, the race is on. *Dictum Mortuum* violations skyrocket as wraiths rush to warn loved ones and preserve Fetters or to ensure the destruction of the things that matter to their rivals. In response, the Hierarchy mobilizes its enforcement arms to prevent or interrupt such offenses. Meanwhile, in grim mimicry of mortal authorities pre-positioning resources for immediate response, Reapers and relic hunters prepare for the coming harvest.



Entropy has a keen precognitive eye for suffering, so Oblivion also takes note of impending disasters. Spectres and stranger things gather for the anticipated bounty of misery. Increased Spectral activity without an apparent Underworld motivation is a reliable indicator of impending catastrophe in the mortal realm.

### Apocalypse Lexicon

Even among practitioners and academics who make careers of catastrophes, “disaster” has many definitions. Law and bureaucracy add their own parameters because politics is the art of apportioning limited resources, which includes recovery funds and other forms of government aid. For this book’s purposes, a good working definition is *a damaging or lethal event whose effects outstrip the affected community’s capacity to respond and recover*. In **Wraith**, a disaster is any event that garners attention *and* generates significant emotional trauma for the affected mortals and ghosts. For example, the Underworld doesn’t care about wildfires that burn dozens of homes and thousands of acres but don’t kill anyone unless Fetters are involved.

Disaster professionals broadly classify *hazards*; that is, the things that create disasters, as *natural*, *technological*, or *man-made*. Respectively, these are things the planet does (hurricanes, earthquakes, or volcanoes), things humanity’s own creations do (chemical spills and airplane crashes), and things humans do to one another (bioterrorism and mass shootings). Across these categories, modern practitioners look for common vulnerabilities and effects and seek broadly applicable solutions rather than deal with each hazard piecemeal. This is the *all-hazards* approach, which originated with the Cold War concept that preparations for nuclear war can also apply to lesser catastrophes.

In disaster parlance, *preparedness activities* are the things individuals or groups do to increase their readiness before disasters, and *mitigation* involves work to reduce an expected hazard’s impact (perhaps even keeping it from generating a disaster). *Response* is the immediate action to save lives, prevent further damage, and protect property and the environment during or after an incident. *Recovery* encompasses the post-disaster activities to return an affected community to normal, which might include redefining “normal.” Response, being photogenically heroic, gets most of the news coverage. Recovery, which is less glamorous, receives only retrospective reporting during major anniversaries. Preparedness and mitigation are somewhere between invisible and cause for uncomfortable laughter, depending on whether governments or individuals are doing them.

Until the mid-20th century, response and recovery occurred on an *ad hoc* basis through charities, religious orders, and the affected communities themselves. Governments stayed out of the blood and mud save for occasionally tasking military forces to deliver supplies or to provide manpower for cleanup. It took World War II’s devastation and World War III’s looming shadow to drive the creation of *civil defense* agencies designed to preserve national governments and populations from atomic apocalypse. Today, professional coordination of disaster-related policy, doctrine, and work goes by *emergency management* in the public sector and *business continuity* or *crisis management* in the corporate world. It’s

a young field still evolving in the face of real or perceived threats, public demand for government intervention, and lessons learned in previous disasters. All too often, those lessons are written in blood.

### Moment of Truth

Whether warnings sounded or surprise was total and plans and preparations were in place or utterly lacking, the time when a hypothetical hazard becomes a real incident is a turning point for everyone it touches. It is a line of demarcation between “before” and “after.” Each disaster announces its arrival differently. A bombing is a thump-flash more felt than heard or seen, and accompanied by a spray of shrapnel both metal and still-living in a single moment of stunned incomprehension. In a tsunami, the sea pulls back only to return with inexorable force and speed that leaves time to comprehend but not escape. An ice storm creeps in beyond the edge of attention, and is invisible until its conspiracy with gravity takes hold.

In the event’s immediate aftermath or while it’s still unfolding, there’s rarely an official response unless predictions enabled authorities to pre-position personnel and equipment. Even the swiftest professional rescuers rely on a communication chain that takes precious minutes unless Fate (or some other influence) happens to put them on the scene at the correct moment. Survivors and bystanders who are compelled to do *something* are their own first responders. Their effectiveness varies widely. Some, unprepared for a lethal environment become additional victims. (*Three Volunteers Drown Trying to Save Child from Flooded River*.) Others are wildly effective; in the Boston Marathon bombing, 27 improvised tourniquets saved limbs or lives.

If an impending Maelstrom has not yet arrived, this is the moment it breaks. In a Maelstrom’s absence, the disaster’s effects echo across a suddenly compromised Shroud. Wraiths’ sensory impressions of the event are stronger than usual even as mortal survivors’ emotions batter their Passions. Restless who’ve suffered the destruction of a Fetter plunge into Harrowings.

Wraiths who want to intervene find it easiest to do so in these moments. The unfolding chaos is an excellent smokescreen for all manner of ghostly manifestations, which the Shroud’s weakness aids. The Fog usually affects mortals more strongly in such circumstances, though “usually” doesn’t mean “universally.”

### Save What You Can

By definition, a disaster’s effects outstrip the resources available to deal with them. Initial response efforts are always inadequate. Responders, both those for whom it’s their job and the bystanders who couldn’t just watch, must make hard decisions about where to apply those limited resources (people, equipment, supplies, and time) to have the greatest effect. Lifesaving comes first, followed by scene stabilization (extinguishing fires, plugging leaks, and keeping things from getting any worse). Preserving property and the environment is lower on the priority list. Throughout the disaster, the professionals also are mindful of their own safety because they are aware that they can’t help anyone else if they become victims themselves. *Risk a little to save a little, risk a lot to save a lot, and risk*



## Burning Down the Shroud

The Storyteller should apply temporary reductions in local Shroud ratings according to the story's needs. As a general guideline, any disaster significant enough to have precursory effects should reduce the local Shroud by 1 (thus facilitating the warnings from departed relatives that have populated ghost stories for centuries). As chaos erupts, the Shroud should drop by 1-3 depending on the severity of death, suffering, destruction, and fear. As response and recovery unfold, the Shroud gradually returns to normal, but it should remain at least 1 lower than normal until the next dawn.

As always, the Shroud can't be lower than 4 unless the disaster itself is supernatural *and* specifically damages the normal barriers between the World of Darkness' various realities. Then, all bets are off, up to and including a complete colocation of the Skinlands and Shadowlands at a zero Shroud rating (**Wraith: The Oblivion**, pp. 282-284). Storytellers should reserve such an event for a chronicle's apocalyptic climax. For example, the dead walking in Port-au-Prince's rubble-choked streets set a high bar for subsequent events and change the world irrevocably.

A disaster also amplifies the Fog with typical mortals reacting as though their Willpower is 1 lower than usual. Atypical mortals might react as though their Willpower is 1 or 2 *higher*, particularly if they're among the spontaneous volunteers or professional responders who are busy saving lives.

*a life to save a life*, as the fire service says. Volunteers don't always take this idea into consideration.

This work happens without much of the infrastructure that mortals take for granted. Telecommunication systems are first overloaded with emergency calls and then collapse entirely as wires and towers fall and generators run dry. The inability to reach for outside help mirrors the lack of incoming information. Transportation arteries become impassable, collapsed, or choked with debris, floodwaters, or traffic. Electricity, water, fuel, and other modern services might fail in a cascade of secondary effects. Until help arrives, the sense of isolation can be overwhelming.

The hardest decisions come during *triage*; that is, the process of classifying victims by their injuries' severity. Those victims with the worst but still-treatable injuries receive the highest priority for medical care, and victims with less-severe wounds get delayed or minimal treatment. Victims whose survival is unlikely receive no further care to preserve resources better spent elsewhere. Triage is difficult for medical practitioners but trivial for anyone who

can read Deathmarks. At any mass casualty incident, the triage station is a magnet for Reapers and a buffet for Spectres, as is the inevitable disaster mortuary.

News media and popular culture exaggerate the disorder and predation that occur in this phase. Research shows the opposite: Although there are always opportunistic criminals, most disaster survivors band together in groups that might bear no resemblance to their pre-disaster social circles. Neighbors help neighbors and re-establish order on their own. Conflict comes when politicians who believe the narrative over the reality send in police or troops to "restore order" in areas getting back on their feet without government "help."

While response in the Skinlands progresses, wraithly interventions decline. The Shroud may remain weak but fewer opportunities exist for a wraith's limited leverage to affect a situation's outcome. Also, increased numbers of responders mean increased numbers of witnesses and a media presence. Still, a ghostly voice on a radio can direct rescuers to trapped survivors or send other survivors to safety, and a well-crafted dream can ease a victim's passing. A quiet hint from a wraith who lived in pre-industrial times can bestow lifesaving knowledge upon someone who's never lacked for ubiquitous internet searches. More often though, wraiths now turn their attention to the disaster's Shadowlands effects. Vultures and magpies move in to glean wealth from the rubble while the Legions deploy forces against Oblivion's interest in the disaster.

## Built it Back, Better

As response tapers off (because responders have run out of people to save and secondary hazards to stabilize), recovery gets under way. Damage assessment and debris removal operations spin up. Survivors move from emergency shelters to less-impermanent housing. Politicians, lawyers, and engineers begin arguing about how to rebuild. Depending on the disaster's severity, returning to "the way things were before" might be impossible, so recovery might focus on making the community more resistant to future disasters and positioning it for economic revitalization. The latter approach and the tax base that it brings is government's ultimate objective in recovery. A major disaster is a once-in-a-career blank slate for urban planners.

Total recovery or improvement are rarely achieved ideals. Politics is a process for apportioning limited government resources, so communities with little political power receive little outside assistance after the news crews pack up. Displaced populations often lack the will or means to return home. The World of Darkness is even worse and is strewn with wounded communities unable to bootstrap themselves back to prosperity after corrupt "leaders" have enriched themselves with relief funds and donations that arrived without the usual fiscal accountability.

For a wraith who wants to shape the world of the living and can pull strings across the Shroud, recovery brings a wealth of opportunities. Guiding a memorial design committee bolsters Memoriam. Influencing damage assessments tilts the balance between a rebuilt Fetter and debris to be mined for Stygian construction projects. Tugging government purse-strings cultivates the abandonment of



Haunt-ready ruins or directs a lucrative reconstruction contract to mortal descendants.

## The Only Way Out Is Through

Disaster survivors cleave together. In an incident's initial phase, the only help they have is each other. Afterward, the shared experience creates a particular sort of camaraderie and a self-initiated support network. These groups are the driving forces behind successful personal and community recovery as they push to rebuild better and smarter and organize memorial ceremonies and monuments. Sometimes, survivors of rare and unusual incident types seek out those who've endured similar catastrophes to offer their help. American school shooting survivors refer to this as "the most exclusive club that no one wants to join."

So too do the deceased victims form their own associations. Although the Legions argue over the proper disposition of souls (Does the Grim Legion or the Penitent Legion claim the casualties of a psychotic trucker's sidewalk rampage? Are deaths in Hurricane Katrina's nursing home evacuations a matter for the Emerald Legion or the Iron Legion?), the Restless in question know who died alongside them. These common deaths give them common cause in the literal sense, and they provide one another the same mutual support that survivors do. Beyond this, many share Fetters or Passions related to their deaths or the mortal communities they left behind.

Not all disaster victims form regular Circles. Even in the greatest catastrophes, the number of fallen who become wraiths is a scant fraction of the full death toll: perhaps 1 in 10 or 20 for common incident types, ranging as high as 1 in 3 for deliberate catastrophes that elicit global horror. Many disasters yield only a handful of Restless who drift apart once they get their ephemeral feet under them. Those who do stay in contact rarely seek to formalize their common identity with names or symbols. For recognition (whether desired or not), their shared Deathmarks suffice.

Some Circles actively engage with their former communities' recoveries. Memorial services, annual commemorations, monuments, and reconstruction efforts all encourage this behavior and reliable (if infrequent) Pathos infusions. Wraiths drawn to these practices feel compelled to reach out to the responsible mortals to provide comfort, assist reconstruction, or ensure that their own Memoriam endures. These interventions are a source of endless *Dictum Mortuum* violations.

Many post-disaster hauntings result from wraiths displeased at the turns their mortal hometowns have taken. Not all reconstruction is to the dead folks' liking. Fetters might be created in a disaster only to be threatened as mortal authorities pursue cleanup and revitalization. Recovery projects that seem cursed often are, and it's a rare historical preservation society that lacks an incorporeal and unselected board member.

Victims of incidents caused by human action or inaction might band together for postmortem justice or vengeance. Usually, such Circles operate independently, such as the ghosts of Bhopal who haunted several responsible industrialists to madness or suicide. A few wraiths reach across the Shroud to aid mortal authorities;

## On the Fringes

Real-world disaster practitioners talk about *vulnerable populations*: demographic groups with characteristics that make them more susceptible to disasters. People who live paycheck-to-paycheck can't abandon jobs to evacuate (they might not even have a car in which to leave town) or stockpile supplies. Immigrants lack language skills or cultural frameworks to understand or trust official messages. Children, the elderly, and adults with chronic medical conditions become separated from their caregivers on whom they rely for daily comfort, and are unlikely to survive in austere conditions on their own. The list goes on.

In the real world, politics often marginalizes vulnerable populations before the disaster, and then it neglects or blames them for their own misfortune afterward. In the World of Darkness, factions among wraiths and other supernatural beings take up for "their people." These groups do some good; inexorable majority tribalism resists but doesn't always negate their efforts.

before their collective descent into Spectrehood, the French paratroopers and American Marines killed in Beirut covertly provided intelligence support to the agencies hunting the bombings' backers.

## Those Who Light Torches

Because of the Hierarchy's bureaucratic ossification, disaster policy in the Dark Kingdom of Iron lags behind that of Skinlands governments. Very few Restless are experts in the concepts in the *Apocalypse Lexicon* (p. 53) and none of them are positioned to influence the Deathlords. Imperial thinking resembles that of the Skinlands a century ago with a hodgepodge of uncoordinated organizations flinging themselves at pieces of problems.

Here are some notable Stygian institutions involved with disasters on either side of the Shroud.

## The Maelstrom Bureau

*Storm Warning*

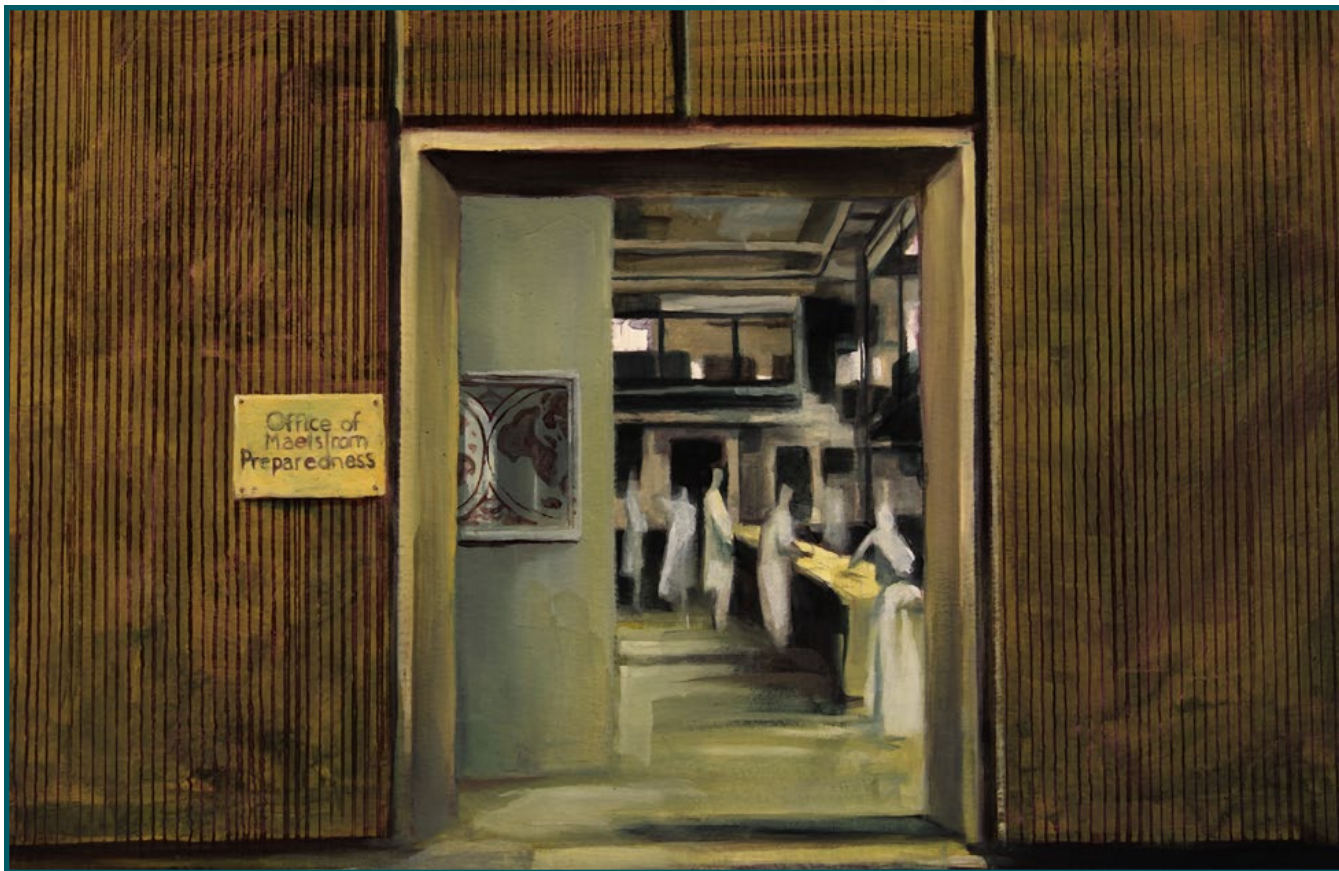
16 May 1980 – For Immediate Release

The Iron Legion Maelstrom Prediction and Preparation Unit's Vancouver office has issued a storm warning for the Pacific Northwest, including the Necropoli of Astoria... Olympia... Portland... Salem... Seattle... and Tacoma. On or about 19 May, a Skinlands volcanic event at Mount St. Helens will generate a local Force Two Maelstrom.

*Forecast Confidence: High.*

*Hazards: Skinlands effects will include minimal loss of life but significant physical destruction and widespread panic. This will result in*





*Nihil eruptions... Tempestquakes... plasmic ashfall... barrow-lava hail and rain... localized disruption of Fetter connections... and strong damaging winds in excess of 75 knots. Byways may be impassable due to debris accumulation. Moderate Spectre activity is likely. This Maelstrom will last approximately 36 hours.*

*Protection: All Citadels are urged to issue local storm warnings and ensure storm bell towers are manned and ready. Citizens should minimize travel and remain near shelter. Pass this warning to neighbors and travelers. Bring loose objects indoors or otherwise secure them to prevent them from becoming windborne projectiles. Upon hearing storm bells, seek shelter immediately and remain there until the storm has passed. Do not attempt to intervene in Skinlands events. This is a non-preventable occurrence.*

*Indicators: Living volcanologists have issued warnings for a possible eruption. Spectral activity and Skinlands geologic perturbations in the vicinity of Mount St. Helens have increased steadily over the last two observation periods. Weather observers report a mirage cloud aloft, moving toward actualization at three percent per hour. Precursor plasmic ashfall has occurred in the vicinity of the Yakima Citadel and the Packwood and Cowlitz Bywaystations.*

On the top floor of a Brutalist office block down the street from the Seat of Shadows, the one Hierarchy agency with an official disaster mission struggles to coordinate its far-flung network of observers and researchers. Founded as the Office of Maelstrom Preparedness in the 19th century's twilight years, the Maelstrom Bureau has endured every bureaucratic indignity known to wraith-kind over its decades of existence, including numerous changes of

name and structure. Despite it all, it is one of the Underworld's foremost clearinghouses of Maelstrom knowledge, although it must be convinced to share.

The Bureau's self-assigned charge is the prediction, mitigation, and study of Maelstroms. Its Stygian headquarters staff numbers just over 100 wraiths, half of whom come from its sponsoring body, the Iron Legion. The rest hail from other Legions by being seconded through a complex arrangement of reimbursement agreements. Most headquarters wraiths are clerks and academics who spend their shifts poring over reports and research proposals. Far larger are the ranks of the Bureau's field staff, who range from lone weather-obsessed volunteers to the anemologists and pluviometrists (scholars of the Underworld's "natural" forces and the substances they carry or reveal) who operate the field offices in the largest and most Maelstrom-prone Necropoli.

Each aspect of the Bureau's mission falls to a different branch. Maelstrom prediction is the duty of the Forecasting Service, which monitors both Skinlands events and the Tempest's protean weather for signs of impending Maelstroms. The Forecasting Service uses science alongside Argos, Fatalism, and other divinatory methods to separate "ordinary" Tempest patterns from those heralding a more destructive event. As with Skinlands meteorology, Underworld forecasting is neither exact nor consistently accurate, and citizens remember the failures more than the successes.

The Fortification Center creates defensive architecture. This office turns its eye toward reinforcing structures, which



includes anything from the tiny storm shelters scattered along major Byways to the greatest Citadels, against Maelstrom effects. It also grudgingly handles the Bureau's public education work by disseminating Maelstrom preparedness pamphlets to all Hierarchy citizens through its Citizen Outreach Office. Finally, its Storm Systems Laboratory is an engineering think-tank focused on personal protective equipment for Maelstroms. This group supplies much of the Bureau's supplemental funding through the sale of its creations. Storm Systems chain-coats, fog masks, wind-staves, and storm gauges command a premium among wraiths who must brave the Underworld's elements.

The Bureau's research arm is the Beaufort-Granogrec Anemological Institute. Prone to academic infighting and knowledge hoarding, the Institute generates great success despite itself. Its library and laboratory staff might be perusing damage reports from a storm-struck Citadel, analyzing the composition of a plasmic eyeball hail sample, or statistically surveying a century of Forecasting Service predictions against seismic records from the Cascadia Subduction Zone. Of course, someone must gather this data, and the Institute's more adventurous (or foolhardy) members lead research expeditions across the Shadowlands and Tempest. The Institute has several research campuses in Maelstrom-prone areas, with the most prominent in London, San Francisco, and Istanbul. In rare cooperation with other Empires' authorities, its No.3 Storm Penetration Squadron ("3SPS," which is officially an Iron Legion military unit) flies and sails from Hong Kong to make observations from within Maelstroms throughout the Western Pacific Shadowlands and coterminous Tempest regions.

Only the largest Necropoli field offices host all three branches. More commonly, a single Bureau representative struggles to discharge the full spectrum of their assignment. Such field reps recruit volunteers for daily weather observations, post-Maelstrom damage assessments, and cryptocartographic Tempest surveys.

Even as the Bureau's scientific and operational capabilities have waxed with the deaths and recruitments of experts in a wide range of disciplines, its leadership and influence have waned. Its founder and first superintendent, Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort, was lost in 1969 when Hurricane Camille's echo claimed the research ghost ship *Muskeget*. Co-founder and successor Jean Granogrec was an able meteorologist but a ham-fisted administrator, and they drove away many long-serving veterans. Granogrec's mismanagement came to a head in 2010, when the agency (then titled the Maelstrom Prediction and Preparation Unit) failed to predict or prepare for the Haitian earthquake and subsequent Pan-Caribbean Maelstrom. In response, the Ashen Lady reassigned Granogrec and renamed the MPPU. The office of superintendent gave way to a committee of bureau chiefs drawn from the Iron Legion's most influential Necropoli. Sadly, although some of these chiefs are able politicians, few are scientists or leaders, which result in a lack of direction and coordination. Even the *Journal of Applied Anemology*, once a cutting-edge monthly publication that was laden with advice accessible to the average wraith on the street, has been reduced to an unreliable quarterly reprinting of monographs that were dredged from the archives. Increasingly, local field offices

reach out to other sources of support in the absence of timely guidance from headquarters.

## The Harbingers' Guild

The masters of Argos have long been the Underworld's lifesavers (so to speak). The guild ascribes to a maritime code of ethics that requires any Harbinger to come to the aid of a traveler in distress. A Harbinger who ignores such a call is swiftly cast out unless he has a damned good reason for neglecting his duty. Although the Harbingers are a Working Guild and not a High Guild, their dedication earns significant prestige with the general population and leeway with imperial authorities. Even the strictest Anacreons recognize that safe travel to their Necropoli relies on the Harbingers and look the other way in the absence of political activism.

Collectively, most Harbingers are opportunistic saviors and have agendas other than looking for ghosts who took a wrong turn in the Tempest. Some inscrutable quality of Argos leads them to be in the right place at the right time at a statistically-improbable frequency. Privately, Harbingers grumble about journeys interrupted by the need to save ghosts who don't have the sense to come in out of the blood rain, but they still do it.

One Harbinger faction devotes itself full-time to search and rescue work: the centuries-old Cormorant Order, which reputedly began as a pre-guild institution that patrolled and maintained Scandinavian Byways. The original Cormorants also established the first Bywaystations, which are emergency shelters for travelers who found themselves away from Citadels during Maelstroms. Although the Legions co-opted the Bywaystation concept and every other Dark Kingdom has its own equivalent, the most ancient and reliable ones are marked with the Cormorants' symbol.

Modern Cormorants still embark on Byway navigation patrols and maintain their Bywaystations, particularly in areas bereft of Legion attention. They also maintain rescue stations near areas particularly hazardous for travelers and outside the most Maelstrom-prone Necropoli. A typical station is haunted by 3-6 well-equipped Cormorants with some form of Tempest-capable and Maelstrom-resistant transportation. This transport is usually a seagoing vessel that is either a relic or an Underworld-built one. The largest stations are the home ports for patrol ships with crews of 10 or more wraiths. Operational tempos are grueling; crews launch on at least one mission a week. Through a combination of Arcanoi and over-engineered construction, stations almost always survive major Shadowlands disasters, which makes them one of the first places wraiths seek assistance afterward. As a result, the Order became adept at organizing crowds of shocked bystanders for basic disaster tasks.

Beyond the obligatory Argos, Cormorants place a premium on Fatalism and Usury, which are valuable in their duty's "search" and "rescue" (SAR) components. They train incessantly in seamanship (or airmanship for the elite who crew the Order's few relic helicopters), technical rescue, and self-defense. The ideal Cormorant can plot and lead a wide-area Tempest search for an overdue ghost ship, rappel into a Nihil to pluck a wraith from



the edge of a Harrowing, or cut through Spectres and structural components alike to locate and extricate entrapped victims within a collapsed Citadel.

Although the Order takes its SAR work very seriously, it remains a guild organ and less regimented than mortal emergency services, which drives modern professional rescuers insane when they try to resume their work postmortem. Above individual stations, it relies on its parent guild to coordinate major efforts, though recently-reaped members are driving for greater standardization in command and control. Cormorants organize their kit and appearance as best they see fit, though almost all display their affiliation with a black-on-teal badge of a cormorant in its wing-drying pose. When on missions, many affix a Redeye (see **Wraith: The Oblivion** p. 425-6) to the back of their headgear to mark their position for their cohorts.

### Anemological Forecasting

Professional Maelstrom forecasting requires the character to observe, record, and analyze Tempest phenomena for two hours a day. Once per week, the player rolls Intelligence + Science (difficulty 8, and they lose 1 die for each day of observations they missed within the past month). With success, they determine if a Maelstrom will occur within the next week.

Once the forecaster predicts a Maelstrom, they refine their forecast with a daily extended Intelligence + Science roll (difficulty 7). Every 3 accumulated successes provide one piece of information about the Maelstrom in the following order:

- Date of onset
- Force
- Duration in days
- General path and size
- Specific hazard manifestations

Anemological forecasting *may* predict Underworld disasters other than Maelstroms if the weekly forecasting roll yields 5 successes. Subsequent refinement occurs at difficulty 8.

Predicting Skinlands disasters remains more art than science and relies on factors elusive to the scientific method. For each of the following factors, the Storyteller may allow one roll a week in advance so that the character knows that *something* bad is coming:

- If the character died in a similar disaster, roll Stamina + Eidolon (difficulty 7). A success manifests as phantom pain in the wraith's fatal wounds.
- If the character survived a similar disaster in life, roll Wits + Occult (difficulty 8). Success yields a queasy sensation of *deja vu*.
- If the character studied similar disasters in life, roll Perception + Enigmas (difficulty 9). Success provides a handful of familiar pre-incident indicators.

Three days in advance, the Shroud becomes volatile. Any Arcanos art whose difficulty depends on the Shroud manifests oddly. Recognizing the synesthetic ripples or faint burning sensation as more than imperfections of control requires a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 8, or 6 if using Fatalism or Lifeweb).

Refining a premonition of doom requires the wraith to scrutinize the Skinlands for clues of what's to come. The player makes a daily extended roll of Intelligence + Investigation (difficulty 8). Every 3 accumulated successes provide one piece of information about the disaster in the following order:

- Type of disaster
- Starting date
- Starting location
- Starting time within a four-hour window
- General duration (hours, days, weeks, months, years, or even longer)
- Size and impact

As with all divinatory methods, these systems are inexact and story should always take precedence over mechanics.

## The Emerald Legion

The Emerald Legion collects disaster victims. To be sure, this isn't universal (pandemic patients go to the Skeletal Legion, and the Smiling Lord takes those who fall to terrorism), but imperial standards classify most disasters as happenstance. Therefore, the Legion's ranks fill with wraiths who share personal experience with mass fatality incidents and the destruction that often accompanies them. Consequently, it's the Legion most involved with the Stygian side of disaster relief.

The Legion's most visible efforts are its Green Teams: units formed for large-scale Reaping when enphants cross over en masse. Although they fit the colloquial definition of wakes, Green Team policy dictates a kinder and gentler approach to handling the newly-dead. To manage their charges, team members train in crisis counseling, Castigate, and Lifeweb.

The Emerald Legion is also the Legion most likely to turn a blind eye to cross-Shroud excursions in the name of aiding disaster victims or fellow wraiths. Overt aid to such endeavors is rare, but sympathetic Legionnaires are past masters of covert assistance and sometimes collude with the Legion of Fate to provide support so subtle that its recipient thinks that it is a mere coincidence.

The Emerald Legion's most significant contribution is also its least recognized one. Thanks to Sandra Quattlebaum's pioneering work with the Iron Delivery Express System and the Harbingers' Guild, the Legion enjoys Stygia's foremost logistics system. With this system, the Legion can deliver wraithpower and supplies to Maelstrom-struck Citadels before other Hierarchy arms can even mobilize. Given the Emerald Legion's subsequent dominance in the Necropoli that it's aided, politics outweighs altruism in determining when and where to send IDES shipments. Regardless, the wraiths on the ground still benefit.

## Necropolitan Offices of Emergency Management

Mortal agencies' doctrine holds that all disasters are local. Everything happens somewhere; the people who live there are the first ones to respond and will be the ones still there when all the outside help goes home. To manage limited resources with some degree of efficiency, that outside help comes only after local



## Backchannels

Some missions are more important than politics. The Harbingers have strong ties to the Maelstrom Bureau through their Anemographer faction. The guild is careful to not claim Sir Francis as one of its own, but the Institute's name openly acknowledges the long-standing relationship between the Bureau and the Harbingers' own Tempest explorers. Almost every Institute expedition includes a Harbinger, and guildwraiths compose many of 3SPS' pilots. More broadly, Harbormasters underpin the Bureau's observer network, and every field rep can tell of a jet-eyed wraith bringing a timely warning of an impending Maelstrom.

On a lesser note, the IDES' founder has strong if unadvertised Harbinger ties. The IDES' reliance on Argos gives the guild a fair amount of soft power within the Emerald Legion's civilian bureaucracy. Harbingers are careful not to abuse this leverage, but guildwraiths can draw on some Legion resources for work that complements the organizations' respective missions.

resources are exhausted, first in the form of aid from neighboring locales, then state or provincial assets, and finally federal or international assistance.

In Stygia, this doctrine is truer. Travel's hazards and sheer difficulty isolate Necropoli in the best of times. Until the IDES proved otherwise, the Hierarchy assumed large-scale movements of wraiths and supplies to be impossible outside of military operations. This isolation created a self-reliant Underworld disaster culture: *No one is coming, so it's up to us.* Anacreons do request aid from neighboring Citadels but never assume it'll actually arrive. Only recently have some cities, after experiencing multiple Maelstroms or other calamities, begun to organize permanent agencies to plan for local disasters. A few of these NOEMs have forged mutual aid compacts in which they pledge to support one another's disaster responses.

## Reaping (After) the Whirlwind

The fear, grief, and other emotions that stem from disasters are concentrated and shared, so it's no surprise that disaster fatalities create more wraiths than do the same number of individual deaths across the mortal population. Any disaster is a fertile ground for Reapers. Reaping in a catastrophe's aftermath (and doing so amidst the storm) can be perilous. Competitors, Spectres, and the odd plasmic or Ferryman all contest hunting privileges, and the freshest wraiths can erupt from their Cauls with surprising vigor and still fighting against whatever killed them. Casualties who escape their own Cauls are another sort of danger because

they know exactly what's happened to them and take a dim view of other ghosts profiting on their deaths. Lastly, the most fertile Skinlands disasters are the most likely to spawn Maelstroms.

Wraiths who specialize in swiftly negotiating mass fatality incidents to harvest newly made Restless are known as *vultures* in Stygian parlance. Like their namesakes, Circles of vultures are called *wakes*. Any successful wake has a member who can predict a disaster before it occurs (usually by reading pre-Maelstrom portents or by analyzing political, meteorological, or geographic indicators) so that the group can stage itself nearby. Their willingness to go where the bodies will fall requires wakes to be more mobile than typical Circles, so each wake has multiple means of facilitating transportation. Wakes must manage workplace hazards ranging from soulforged blades to supernatural weather, so self-protection skills are a job requirement.

Less prestigious but sharing many of the same traits are *tidings* of *magpies*, who are Circles who salvage disaster-created Relics rather than Enfants. Profitable magpies are well-attuned to current market forces and are adept at promoting their gleanings for auction or barter. Tidings tend to be busier than wakes and face slightly less peril in their trade because many events of massive destruction (and thus large-scale relic creation) occur without significant casualties. Some Circles bridge both trades, but the different logistical needs and marketplaces lead most to specialize.

Some vultures are more altruistic than others. The best style themselves as SAR teams and often adopt the Cormorant Order's heraldic creature in place of their usual appellation. The worst are simply slavers with an unusually strong work ethic and tolerance for (or addiction to) risk. Magpies, operating in a less morally perilous marketplace, tend to be more businesslike, although it's not unknown for predatory tidings (or ordinary bandits) to lurk outside disaster areas and rob fellow magpies at the end of a night's labor.

## Ghosts in Disasters and Disasters in Ghosts

Maelstroms are the most common Underworld manifestation of Skinlands disasters but they're not the only way the Shadowlands can react to destruction in the material world. Also, not all disasters begin on the breathing side of the Shroud. The Underworld's oft-bizarre nature, random acts of Oblivion, and wraithly malice or incompetence can spawn occurrences that rival any Skinlands event's destructiveness. Some such incidents are broadly similar to their counterparts in the mortal realm, and others are unique to the metaphysics that reign in the lands of the dead.

## Echoes

Sometimes, Oblivion's answer to a Skinlands cataclysm is a dark mirror rather than a Maelstrom. This typically occurs in natural disasters that Underworld meteorological or geological analogs can mimic. Stygian disaster scholars call such phenomena *echoes*, even if they manifest before their Skinlands generating events.

Underworld weather can blow out of the Tempest or drop from the leaden sky without warning. A ghost tornado's winds are



stronger than the material world's atmosphere can support, and they suck unprotected wraiths into the storm's maw with malicious precision. Wraiths ensnared endure a nauseating carousel ride as windblown debris slowly flays their Corpus. Tempest hailstones come in strange materials and change direction in flight, even flying against the wind to bludgeon victims and batter Citadel walls. Windstorms can sweep up wraiths and debris and hurl them into the Tempest or even other Dark Kingdoms. Chilly and dark floodwaters drain Pathos from those caught in them and sap their strength and will until the victims are easy prey for the half-glimpsed shapes swimming beneath the surface. In Swar, monsoon season is the feeding time.

Drought brings the rare sensations of heat and thirst to the Shadowlands. With it comes a strange apathetic lassitude: wraiths caught within this slow-motion disaster rarely notice it until an outside visitor remarks on it. In the Bush of Ghosts' interior Shadowlands, animal *abombo* flee a drought-stricken region before the ground itself cracks and ignites with a phenomenon that mimics barrow-flame but burns searingly hot.

When Skinlands earth moves, Shadowlands terrain yields to the Labyrinth. Sinkholes spawn Nihilis that open silently and grow whenever no eye is upon them; left unchecked, they can swallow whole Citadels. Earthquakes bring down vast swaths of Necropolitan architecture. Quake fissures contain Nihilis in their depths, and many snap shut like vast mouths and mangle entrapped wraiths. Landslides can bury entire Necropoli beneath boulders of Stygian ore or thick and tarry plasmic mud. What these landslides reveal is sometimes worse than what they enshroud, though: long-buried cities of the dead predating any known Dark Kingdom or mortal civilization, or the vast non-Euclidean forms of slumbering nameless monstrosities.

Volcanic eruptions equal Maelstroms as the Shadowlands' most destructive events. The primary vent's Underworld reflection spews forth caustic plasmic ash, acidic vapors, and semi-solid barrow-flame lava. Larger projectiles can burn through the world's skin to bore lesser Nihilis where they fall. Metaphysical atmospheric effects manifest with the ashfall, which creates a supernatural miasma that impairs wraiths' connections to their Fetters and use of some Arcanoi. With a catastrophic volcanic explosion, the pyroclastic flow scorches everything in its path save for the Spectres who ride within it. In the Hawaiian Underworld and other regions whose native cultures venerate volcanoes, massive barrow-flame-limned figures of unknown origin can be glimpsed reveling in or orchestrating eruptions.

Not all echoes are of natural disasters. In 1917, a Skeletal Legion ghost train in Romania derailed simultaneously with the Ciurea rail disaster. Nearly 200 wraiths plunged into a mass Harrowing. Later that year, a titanic explosion devastated the Halifax Necropolis seconds before its Skinlands precursor detonated in the harbor. The resulting Spectre-laden pyrocumululus cloud raked Nova Scotia's Shadowlands with barrow-flame lightning for hours. Around modern mass shootings, bullet rains have fallen.

## A Memory of Broken Iron

The Dark Kingdoms' dominant technologies don't accommodate many direct analogues to the technological and man-made hazards that plague the Quick in the modern era. Stygian infrastructure functions at a pre-industrial level: no electricity generation and distribution, water treatment, fossil fuel refining, data storage and transmission, mass transportation, or industrial chemicals exist to cause disasters by failing. What examples of modern technology do exist in the Shadowlands are unique and precious, and are not products of a global trade, production, and standardization system. This makes wraiths relatively immune to many such failures, but not all of them.

Underworld architecture is a touchy thing. Construction material is either the ghost of a dead structure or made from someone's soul, neither of which makes a reliable foundation. Few Dark Kingdoms have adopted modern building codes, and some buildings seemingly want to implode. Frequent structural collapses bury wraiths under tons of rubble until their pressed Corpus dribbles out and their consciousness spirals down into a Harrowing.

The Underworld industry doesn't use much hazardous material. Soulfire crystals and rarer forms of stored Pathos would dominate the Stygian hazmat response guidebook if a firefighter's ghost ever wrote one. When a Pathos vessel loses containment suddenly, it explodes on more than the physical level. Nearby wraiths who survive the blast suffer incapacitating surges of whatever emotion was dominant in the contained Pathos. This spiritual explosion has secondary effects that can be more destructive than the initial detonation.

Some crafts, particularly soulforging and the outlawed Alchemists' arts, use barrow-flame to shape, refine, and temper raw materials. Despite being unspeakably cold to the touch, barrow-flame softens and consumes substances as though it were true fire. However, there is no known reliable method for extinguishing it. Uncontrolled barrow-flame can spread swiftly through a Necropolis as it seeks out paths where it can quickly spread. The 2014 barrow-conflagration that gutted the Athens Citadel is Stygia's most recent major industrial disaster.

With relatively little infrastructure or industry, the Underworld also sees few wraith-made disasters. Industrial sabotage is the most common as Renegades, rival Legions, or guilds strike at soulforging or Labyrinth mining operations. Arson is a rare but feared threat when the Spooks Guild mobilizes for war. Transportation and architectural sabotage also occur as extremist groups attempt to continue their causes in the Underworld or adapt to new offenses. Of greater concern to authorities in every Dark Kingdom is the recent proliferation of improvised explosive devices fueled by soulfire, or worse, bloodfire.

## Perpetual Screams

The Underworld is a place of memory, and the world remembers its wounds. Some wounds leave scars that never heal in





the Shadowlands and are exacerbated by historical remembrance. Parts of Chicago, Dresden, and the British Columbian forests flicker with barrow-flame that eternally consume the ghosts of buildings and trees. On the Honshu coast, the Tempest rears back to reveal the bones of the Yellow Springs as its returning wave builds offshore. Constant rain drowns the ghosts of Mozambique's villages. The howl of turbofans and the stench of jet fuel fill Tenerife's air.

Worse, some of these events periodically recur in the Shadowlands. The Mississippi River perpetually flows backward into Reelfoot Lake, but every eight years Necropoli around the New Madrid Seismic Zone shake to an encore of the 1811 earthquake. The Indonesian Underworld now knows Krakatoa's reflection re-erupts on a 44-year cycle, which disrupts the Tempest throughout the region. These aren't ghostly reruns: Each new instance brings fresh devastation to the Restless who experience it.

Even worse, a handful of sustained disaster effects correspond to no known historical occurrence. The best-known qualify as landmarks and have names despite scholars' concern that giving them an identity might feed or awaken them. The Ten Thousand Crying Needles of Taipei's littoral Tempest, Savannah's Tree of Flame and Glass, and Swar's Storm That Dreams all manifest in specific locales although not always on predictable schedules. Official explanations pass them off as random Underworld weirdness. Less-accepted theories hold that they're echoes of events so powerful that they reverberate back in time.

## Storytelling Disasters

Disasters can serve several roles in your chronicle depending on the type of story that you and your players want to tell. Much of this advice applies not just to **Wraith** but to any World of Darkness game.

A disaster is backdrop and catalyst for all manner of conflict. Many regime changes in twilight courts have transpired under cover of hurricanes or riots. Emergency services and other agencies are overwhelmed, giving mortal and supernatural factions the opportunity to resolve grudges with less fear of discovery or interference. Mortals seeking to reclaim the night also hide their hunts amid greater devastation.

The same disruption places characters' mortal connections and material assets at risk from both the incident itself and those who would strike at the characters indirectly. Wraiths in particular must concern themselves with the people and things represented as Backgrounds on their character sheets and with the Fetters that support their continued existence.

The disaster itself can serve as antagonist. An actively hostile environment engages characters with physical threats beyond combat. Personal survival, saving lives or precious objects, or just trying to navigate a devastated area all can provide fresh challenges. If characters have acquired an overpowered or implausible resource, a disaster is an excellent means of reducing or eliminating it



(although the Storyteller should handle this carefully to avoid appearing capricious).

Timing matters. Beginning a chronicle in or immediately after a disaster unveils a setting in disarray. Casualties have created power vacuums into which characters can step. Recovery involves intensive planning and immense budgets, and both are exploitable. Conflict is ongoing as existing or emerging authorities struggle to re-establish order. The characters might already have been in the area (in which case the group should establish what each one did during the crisis); they might have come voluntarily to seek opportunities, or someone else might have exiled or assigned them to the stricken region.

A mid-chronicle disaster can refresh a stale setting, simplify issues that players had given up on solving, or complicate a too-easy problem set. In short, it's a course correction opportunity. Because a disaster isn't supposed to be the chronicle's end, careful planning is necessary to ensure that the crisis doesn't overpower everything that happens after it (or wipe out the characters).

Of course, a disaster can be the scene or focus of the chronicle's climax. This conclusion gives the Storyteller an unlimited special effects budget and license to threaten everything that matters to the characters. The catastrophe shouldn't reduce the players' characters to popcorn-munching bystanders in what's supposed to be their own story, but it should make them work for every success. Every scene should retain an opportunity for meaningful action.

It's possible to design an entire chronicle around the disaster. Begin with the mitigation and preparedness phase, such as when scientific predictions or occult prophecies point to impending doom. Players should be clear that their characters won't be able to forestall it entirely, although they might reduce its impact if they're smart and lucky. Play through the response phase as the disaster unfolds and then move into the opportunity-laden recovery phase.



## WHEN THE STORM COMES LOOKING FOR YOU

A CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO MAELSTROM PREPAREDNESS

### WHAT IS A MAELSTROM?

A Maelstrom is the Underworld's most destructive weather-like phenomenon. It superficially resembles a hurricane but with various unnatural manifestations, most of which are tied to Oblivion. Spectre attacks are likely during Maelstroms. Your Shadow might become more active in response to these stimuli, and exposure to Maelstrom effects can injure or harrow you.

### WHAT CAUSES MAELSTROMS, AND WHEN DO THEY HAPPEN?

There is no "Maelstrom season." Maelstroms occur at any time of year in response to events among the living. Some Maelstroms might precede their triggering events by up to several days.

The Iron Legion  Maelstrom Bureau



## **HOW CAN I KNOW WHEN A MAELSTROM IS COMING?**

The Maelstrom Bureau's Forecasting Service predicts maelstroms with a wide array of techniques. If conditions are right for a Maelstrom to form, imperial officials in your Necropolis will issue a Maelstrom bulletin. When you receive a bulletin, make preparations and remain near shelter.

When a Maelstrom is imminent, officials will issue a Maelstrom warning and ring the local Citadel's storm bells. When you hear the bells, spread the word and seek shelter immediately.

Officials test their bells at noon on the first Wednesday of each month except when a Maelstrom bulletin is in effect.

## **HOW CAN I PREPARE?**

Know how officials in your necropolis will warn you of a Maelstrom.

Visit your local Maelstrom Bureau office to learn more about the signs of a Maelstrom or to volunteer for storm spotter training.

Be aware of storm shelters in the areas you frequent. A swiftly developing Maelstrom might find you away from your local Citadel.

Develop the habit of maintaining a reserve of Pathos in case of corporeal injury. Remember that mortal medical techniques no longer benefit you.

## **WHAT DO I DO WHEN A MAELSTROM ARRIVES?**

Warn others and seek shelter immediately.

Remain in the shelter until the storm passes.

Do not place yourself in danger to rescue others if you are not trained and equipped to do so. Unprepared rescuers become additional victims. Notify i

imperial officials of any emergency

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*\* If you serve the empire in a military role, your Legion's general orders for Maelstrom duty supersede this guidance. Ensure that your issued kit is in good order. Report to your designated muster point. Be prepared to perform refortification, search and rescue, Oblivion defense, or other missions as conditions dictate.*

## **WHAT IS A GOOD SHELTER?**

Your local Citadel offers the best storm protection. Professional engineers from the Maelstrom Bureau's Fortification Center have reinforced it against the maximum credible Maelstrom manifestations.

On some routes through the Tempest, Imperial forces maintain Bywaystations. These are small purpose-built storm shelters stocked with repair supplies and defensive arms. Bywaystations are marked with the symbol of a diving bird with its wings outstretched. Before traveling, consult local officials to learn the locations of Bywaystations on your planned route.

If a Citadel or Bywaystation is inaccessible, the best shelter is a single-story structure with strong walls, a sturdy roof, and windows and entrances that you can barricade easily.

As a last resort, a structure with a weakened Shroud may offer some protection from manifestations of Oblivion. Avoid inadvertent contact with the living while using such improvised shelter.

## **WHAT IF I CAN'T REACH SHELTER?**

Find a hiding place that offers protection from wind and precipitation. Get as low to the ground as possible to avoid windblown debris.

Remain inconspicuous. Cover any brightly colored or luminescent corpus. Do not make noise even if you become injured. Do not call for help.

Do not make eye contact with anything that you see in the storm. If you hear something speaking in the storm, do not believe or obey it.









# The Labyrinth



*Look. Better yet, listen. You need to know what you're getting into. You've picked up a ticket to Hell and if you've gotten this far you at least get to know all about what that gets you.*

*You've heard stories, you've seen the Shadow-eaten, and you think after the recruitment speech that you know what's going on around here. You're sitting there believing you're 10-foot tall and covered with hair and ready to take on every Spectre in the Labyrinth. Maybe you've stomped a few Spectres or you want revenge, but it doesn't matter.*

*You don't know squat, rook. You ain't seen a drop of the Hell around here, not a touch of strange. You think you've got any idea at all what it's like here? You don't. That's why I'm here to give you the grand tour of the crap you're in. If you're smart, you'll turn right around and leave. If you're crazy, you'll stick around. If you're smart, you'll pay attention.*

*We've got a motto here on the edge, so learn it if you think you're a Doomslayer. "If you come back from the Labyrinth with something useful, it's a miracle. If you come back at all, it's a success. If the Spectres and freaks miss you, it's luck. As for anything else, that's fate."*

*The next two things to remember are this:*

*You're screwed. Damned. Spectre bait. We all are. We accept that, we throw ourselves at it like a line of enemies not because we're charged with some holy task by Charon his own damn self. We do it because the alternative is worse. Inevitably, some of us don't come back.*

*The war never ends. Not if Oblivion's there, and it's not going anywhere. You join up, you don't get to walk away. Here, everyone fights*

*and nobody quits. You like that? I heard it in a movie once. Everybody fights, nobody quits, and if you don't do your part, I'll feed you into the breach of a Slag Cannon myself.*

*It's a man's life...afterlife...whatever...in the Doomslayers. You up for it, rook? Good. I hate wasting my time. Grab your ruck and come on. I'm going to tell you about the Labyrinth.*

## What is it Anyway?

Ask a dozen Restless what the Labyrinth is and you'll get two dozen answers. It's a shell around the Mouth of the Void. It's an endless maze full of monsters. It's always been here. There are so many other answers. The guilds think they've got the answers. Heretical cults lie about it to lure souls into their cult. The independent scholars among the dead, who are inheritors of the collegia, catch glimpses of the truth before the Legions shut them down for good. Nobody has all the answers, so it's all best guesses made by looking at something through a shattered lens. After all, how can you understand something that's fundamentally not there?

If you want to understand the Labyrinth, you must understand Oblivion. Forget the history you've heard and the party line. The basics are true: Oblivion is the emptiness, horror, and outright evil eating away at the foundations of every soul in the Shadowlands. Characterizing Oblivion as a mindless nothingness doesn't prepare you for what it is: a force without thought, will, and intent. It warps and twists everything it touches to the breaking point and beyond until that thing dissolves into the Void.



If that were Oblivion's sole function, matters would be much simpler. You could build a wall around it, keep it contained, and rest easier in the afterlife. Oblivion has plans and it hungers. It's a predator with a million eyes, always hunting for its next meal. Every wraith carries its touch inside as their Shadow, which is the key to understanding the Labyrinth.

The Labyrinth did not appear without precedent. Its seeds lay in the thwarted ambitions, petty cruelties, lost nightmares, and ill-defined fears that rain down on the Shadowlands from the living world every day. Not all those bleak fragments issue from human minds or even minds that were once human. Venture deep enough into the endless passages and you'll find fragments of worlds that existed long before the Earth or mortal man, or that came into being long after they perished.

Like Spectres and Restless, it is a dark reflection of the Shadowlands and a warped mirror pieced together by the vast and unknowable force of Oblivion. However, reflection is not all that the Labyrinth is. It is a temple for Specters and the Neverborn. It is a fortress, and within its center Oblivion watches through the eyes of its spawn and listens to the whispers of the Hive-Mind while slowly and surely drawing its plans against all that is not itself.

Beyond this, the Labyrinth is an engine. Powered by the endless nightmare of the Void, it draws in hope and spoils it to bitterness. It grinds the structure of the Shadowlands like grist in a mill and returns it as a furtherance of its own ever-expanding structure. It smothers reason in its sleep to produce monsters. Its corrosive and corrupting effluvium chokes the Shadowlands and the souls that exist within it, and it leaves nothing and no one untouched.

It is also vital to the existence of the Shadowlands. Although it is a potent source of Oblivion and a magnet for Specters, the Neverborn, and horrors spontaneously created from nightmare, the Labyrinth is also where wraiths go to negotiate with their Shadows, a repository of forgotten or destroyed resources, such as pure veins of Corpus, Angst, soulfire, and the rare hidden pockets of Pathos.

## The Theory of the Labyrinth

The true nature of the Labyrinth is as mazy and confused as the passages that permeate it. There are two points of *general* agreement:

- The Neverborn created the Labyrinth by tearing its substance from the raw essence of Creation at the beginning of time.
- Oblivion was not always as powerful and malevolent as it is today.

Despite overwhelming proof to the contrary, some wraiths refuse to believe in the Labyrinth's existence. Deniers hold to the psychological interpretation of the Shadowlands and believe that the Labyrinth has no objective existence at all. At best, these Restless are deluded fools on the order of Flat Earthers and at worst are little better than the Shadow-eaten because such denial feeds Oblivion (deniers are the first ones tossed over the walls when a Maelstrom hits). Wraiths who accept the Labyrinth's existence (also known as "sane") have a limited consensus about the origins of the Labyrinth. Most Restless accept the thought that the Neverborn created the Labyrinth; it's the specifics of the matter about which people argue.

Other hypotheses, mainly bandied about by Heretics, range from a change in the personality of God to the disruption of the original planetary order in the fashion suggested by Immanuel Velikovsky's heirs to the suggestion that the original Malfeans are nightmares in the dreams of Creation.

There seems to be prevailing wisdom about Oblivion's eventual triumph. Some observers who are unable or unwilling to think about it promulgate theories even less realistic than the ones discussed here. Like the origins of the Labyrinth, the details are open to dispute. There is something like agreement that the Sixth Great Maelstrom will someday overwhelm the Shadowlands in the absence of something sufficiently dramatic, such as the return of Charon in his full strength and glory. A minority claims the danger is a tool of the Hierarchy's control, with the triumph of Oblivion not due for long eons. Optimists who think that Oblivion is just going to go away or reach stasis are subjected to ruthless mockery.

Philosophically minded wraiths believe many underestimate the place of Oblivion and feel that it underlies not just the Shadowlands but the whole of the universe if you probe deeply enough. Doomslayer experience has yet to find boundaries on the Labyrinth, so these scholars take this fact as confirmation.

## The Structure of the Labyrinth

The Labyrinth runs wider and deeper than the human mind can readily comprehend, and within infinite space there is infinite diversity. There are also a few norms that those who spend time in the Labyrinth can come to rely upon in terms of what the place is like and how the Restless function within it.

Structurally, the parts of the Labyrinth furthest from the Void lose their chaotic fluidity over time and hardened into a blackened and stone-like resin shot through with marble-like veins of white material. Barring outside influences, this substance, *pétra*, remains stable. But as any experienced dweller near or explorer of the Labyrinth can tell you that "stable" is at best an untrustworthy term.

When trod upon, the veins in *pétra* emit short moans and sometimes discharge flashes of memory from those who have already passed on down. Their intensity varies from featherweight touches up to the hammer-blow of Mnemotechnics. Most are the memories of the very recently departed, no more than months old, but snippets of lives lost longer ago sometimes linger.

The memory veins serve as a last test of the supplicant's readiness: those who flinch or are startled still cling to their existence enough to be useful as tools. Oblivion leads them away from the brink to discharge some task. Only when the intrusion fails to disrupt the supplicant's march into the Void is it truly time. Those who remain unshaken are ready to contribute their fragments to the Void to hasten the end of all things.

The best-known entrance and exit to the Labyrinth is the Veinous Stair (see p. 70). It is comprised almost entirely of *pétra*. Its name comes from the threads and ribbons of frozen memory that constantly shift within what otherwise appears as black stone.

Once the Restless descend the Stair to the very upper and outmost edges of the Labyrinth, the surety of *pétra* slowly gives



way to cancerous chaos. You cannot expect any but the very oldest points within the Labyrinth to have any consistency to their structure. Whim, fantasy, and nightmare all collide within to create claustrophobically tight or mind-bending and immense corridors, lacunae, Necropoli, and stranger landscapes. Such fixed points, even those within sight of an entrance, become viciously fought for and held dearly because they provide islands and markers by which to navigate. Some scholars think there is a pattern to these areas, but to date none have discovered if such a pattern truly exists.

The Labyrinth, despite the proximity of the Void, is rarely entirely dark. Rather, it is dark *enough* with its substance glowing with muted colors that tug at the corners of the eye and cast the simplest shadow into monstrosity. Generally, the more active and fluid any given area of the Labyrinth is, the more half-light it creates to better reveal shapes and shadows to lure the credulous or unwary deeper into the eventual embrace of the Void.

Spectral squads range across the exterior and outermost regions of the Labyrinth. They use hoarded relic strobe lights to blind or at least disorient Restless moving on the Stair. Since there are never enough of these lights, less fortunate Spectres assigned to the effort use spotlights, movie studio klieg lights, signal flares, lighthouse lamps, and whatever else comes to hand. Kindled Spectral torches inflict some emotional damage on wraiths and are replenished from below if any of the torches manages to escape.

Deeper within the Labyrinth, reason and even causality surrender to the ever-changing flux of the Void. What was stone becomes warm and nearly biological. The air either becomes fetid and humid like a swamp or cold due to frozen wastelands of black ice. Accepted principles of physics (such as they are in the Shadowlands) distort and become Corpus-annihilating menaces to travel. By the time you reach the Well of the Void, sanity has fled entirely to phenomena such as proto-Maelstroms in the form of Oblivion-tainted blizzards, Corpus-flaying sandstorms, or pockets of vacuum.

Those who follow the supposed footsteps of Charon to the center of the Labyrinth claim to see visions of long-dead tomb worlds spinning in nothingness. These worlds have been stripped of everything, including name and meaning. There, the armies of Oblivion gather their strength, and from within the tomb-worlds' blasted shells Malfeans howl into the Void and call their children home.

## Abscesses

Abscesses are limited spaces within the infinite passages of the Labyrinth created by powerful Spectres who retain their sense of identity despite their link to the Hive-Mind. These malevolent souls use the Dark Arcanoi of Shroud Rending and Tempest Weaving to carve out places of their own within the Labyrinth, and establish limited domains where the understood laws of the Shadowlands become mutable. Abscesses broadly resemble Zones of Alienation (see p. 68), and are utterly dominated by the Spectre or Hive that created them. Within the Abscess, the Shadow-eaten wield enormous power; in a twisted way, they *are* the Abscess.

They are spaces filled with the madness and rage of their creators. When the domain takes shape, the material within becomes

Odium, which is anti-Corpus; the stuff of the Void accreted and made solid. Its form springs from the rage and madness of the Spectre or Hive shaping it, and reflects an existing location in the Skinlands. Connecting the two is a passage, which is a permanent scar in the Shroud called a fistula.

Fistulas serve as the only means of mobility that the creators of the Abscess have beyond its defined borders. The fistula connects the pocket realm to a powerful Nihil. By using them, Spectres move freely between the Labyrinth and the Skinlands free of the usual restrictions, which enables them to spread Oblivion to the world of the living.

Few Spectres can accomplish the creation of an Abscess alone, and the Hive-Mind resists every effort at it. But should the Shadow-eaten succeed in their task, they possess a personal Hell that operates at their whim. Abscesses go beyond even the stages and sets used in Harrowings and are inevitably filled with Moliated souls twisted to suit the Spectres' desires. To stabilize these pockets, at least one Moliated Spectre must serve as a "skeleton," providing the nightmare logic and general structure of the Abscess.

Once carved from the plasm of the Tempest and Labyrinth, Oublette (•••••), Harrow the Mortal Flesh (•••••), and Anger Enough for Two Worlds (•••••) refine the Abscess further.

As expected, the cost for enacting these Arcanoi together is staggering, and the result is monstrous: Linking a Nihil in the Skinlands to the Abscess permanently lowers the Shroud there by 4. The Abscess is a gross violation of even the loose order of the Labyrinth, and it is a place of horror and torment that even other Spectres fear. As such, the minimum Shroud rating for the linked Nihil is 3 instead of the usual 4. Travel between the Abscess and Nihil through its fistula has its difficulty lowered by 2.

The sole grace of an Abscess is that the Spectres are bound to its borders even in the Skinlands. As such, the Abscess must consume enormous amounts of Pathos and generates Angst in measures that can permanently contaminate the Skinlands. In these cases, the Fog burns away and those among the Quick that would become Spectres after death find themselves attracted to the purulent atmosphere of the contaminated area. This situation plays well into the plans of the Spectres by providing the sole means of leaving the Odium-tainted locale. A living person chosen as the vehicle for the Abscess' mobility has Odium forced into their body, and their living mind is corrupted by using Contamination to become something beyond a Consort: an Odium-tainted horror called a Nomad. Such freakish abominations exist solely to torment the Quick by dragging their victims back to the Nihil at the center of an Abscess, where they endure torments that shatter their sanity and produce the Angst for which the Spectres hunger.

For the purposes of a chronicle, Nomads function like the Risen (see **Wraith: The Oblivion**, p. 385).

## A Maze of Flesh: Body Horror and the Labyrinth

Critic Ronald Allan Lopez Cruz describes *body horror* or *biological horror* as "a subgenre of horror which intentionally showcases graphic or psychologically disturbing violations of the human body. These





violations may manifest through aberrant sex, mutations, mutilation, zombification, gratuitous violence, disease, or unnatural movements of the body. Body horror was a description originally applied to an emerging subgenre of American horror films but has roots in early Gothic literature and has expanded to include other media.”

There are practical alternatives to using body horror in **Wraith: The Oblivion**. Enumerating them all would require a book in of itself. Here is some practical (though limited) advice on approaching the horror without directly utilizing body horror.

The first tool is *implication*. Never directly show what you hint. Ghost stories, even ones where the characters *are* the dead, rely heavily on misdirection and implication to achieve the necessary atmosphere. Strange, luminous mists and fogs; far-off voices; and shadows only briefly glimpsed set up scenes of horror and exploit the human tendency to fill in the blanks. Although implication is true for almost all genres of horror, it’s particularly suited to **Wraith** chronicles.

The second tool is *abjection*, which is when someone experiences or confronts (both mentally and as a body) a breakdown in the distinction between what is self and what is Other. Abjection prevents the absolute realization of existence and completes the course of biological, social, physical, and spiritual cycles. **Wraith** uses many different systems and themes to approach abjection, with Spectres and Oblivion as the strongest representation, but Storytellers can take it further by extending the concept to the wraith’s Corpus

or their surroundings. The Labyrinth is where wraiths go to deal with Spectres in a literal and figurative sense, and it provides fertile ground for roleplaying in the Underworld.

Although these themes fit and help define the aesthetic of **Wraith: The Oblivion** generally and the Labyrinth specifically, they can be problematic for some Storytellers and their players. **Wraith** is a high-trust game that deals with disturbing themes, and the players and Storyteller involved must keep that aspect in mind. Approach exploring the limits of your fellow players and stretching the boundaries of roleplaying with care and consideration. Creating a memorable and fun experience is a good thing; locking a claustrophobe in a closet is inexcusable.

### Zones of Alienation

In the chaotic and ever-shifting environs of the Labyrinth, there are many mysteries. Among these mysteries, the Zones of Alienation (or just Zones) stand out for their strangeness. Even the oldest scholars of the obscure and bizarre aspects of the Underworld admit their bafflement at the existence of these places and hesitate to even theorize on their origin. The Zones, they say, *are*. What hand or mind, if any, wrought them, who can say?

There are few certainties in the Underworld, and the Zones are the least certain areas of knowledge, although certain phenomena remain more or less consistent. Wraiths and Spectres define or create some consistencies with their combined presence or absence, and many others exist entirely without explanation. Historically,



Doomsayer interrogation of prisoners of war has revealed little to nothing about the Zones, except that even the Hive-Mind fears them.

As a result, the Zones are some of the few places where an uneasy détente exists between wraiths and Spectres, although both covertly violate that peace. So long as some form of deniability holds fast, it's acceptable, if not palatable, to adopt an attitude of containment akin to that of Cold War-era Berlin in the Skinlands. The Zones are fixed points within the Labyrinth immune to the tides of time and Oblivion. This frozen state makes them invaluable for navigational purposes.

Within the Zones, the malleable physics of the Underworld go haywire and defy "known" laws and causality, mocking all given axioms of the dead and making them hazardous at best to all but the foolhardy. This danger does not discourage Renegades, thieves, and other outlaws within wraith society from daring to breach the blockades that surround the Zones. Older wraiths call these thieves *jackals*, but the term has fallen by the wayside in favor of a new name: *stalkers*.

Stalkers defy the cordons established around the Zones, which consist of vast barriers and warnings regularly patrolled by wraiths and Spectres to seek the bizarre Artifacts and powerful Relics that appear there. Given that careful planning and cautious exploration, evasion, and escape are the hallmarks of successful stalkers' existences, entire chronicles can spin around these activities. Likewise, the items stalkers bring back exist nowhere else *but* the Zones, so they command a high price on the black markets on the edges of the Labyrinth.

Slipping past the heavily-guarded cordons around the Zones is the first step in a successful stalk. Beyond the animated barriers of Corpusslicing wire, balefire mines, heavily armed patrols, and shrieking alarms forged from souls is the Zone itself. Although its barriers are well-defined, the interior of a Zone is rarely so. The interior is comprised of a patchwork architecture that is long-lost, abandoned, and forgotten, and is filled with anomalies that threaten the Corpus and mind alike. Some of it even originates from *human* history.

Plasms are the most common Zone denizens. Their malleable forms are warped and twisted by exposure to the Zone itself, and they often mimic the original inhabitants of the tangle of structures. Stalkers and other Doomslayers that have returned successfully can likewise have their Corpus temporarily or permanently altered beyond even the most powerful Arcanoi's capability to repair.

Those entities who are fortunate and skilled enough to make the return journey intact claim that there is *something* in the Zones, which they claim is a vast and utterly alien consciousness that is directing events for its own inscrutable ends. Whatever it might be, the *Mezhdū* ("the Between") is both rarely sensed and inimical to those tainted by Oblivion. Stalkers caution that the Between is no ally to the dead and that even a faint contamination or obstreperous Shadow can provoke violent eruptions in the anomalies that rival the worst Tempests; unlike those storms, the anomalies act with *volition*. Few who catch the attention of the Between return, and their tales are known only to those who remain unseen.

One thing is certain: The Between, anomalies, and the strange relics found within a Zone are all part of the same phenomenon. The precise nature of their relationship remains a mystery.

## Entrances and Exits

The outside of the Labyrinth warps and cracks from both internal and external stresses. The tides of stasis and change force everything into new configurations and cast up mountainous ridges or collapse them into valleys choked with debris. Ruined sections of the Shadowlands sometimes plummet through the Tempest to crash onto the Labyrinth, which set off Labyrinth-quakes that make existing passages collapse and break open new ones around their impact craters. Tempest storms and Maelstroms on their way up out of the Labyrinth erode, rot, and destroy protruding features. Slower currents push or pull sections of the Labyrinth miles from the baseline elevation.

Within the chaos there are countless openings that range from pinhole cracks through which plasm oozes to pits and canyons so wide that their outer borders vanish in Tempest mist and fog. Most of the smaller openings are 1-15 feet across. Any opening smaller than that range closes immediately because of the natural resistance of the Labyrinth. Larger openings require tremendous force along enough distance to connect deep-lying weaknesses within the Labyrinth. Other openings linger for years, decades, or even centuries, but in time they close as unpredictably as they opened. Once the process begins, most openings shut in the space of days or weeks.

There are also the holes that were blown open by Spectres for use in Harrowings, and the channels at the bottom ends of Nihilis. Only the most profoundly and foolhardy Doomslayers use these holes without extensive preparation and most of those who try meet ghastly ends. These are the routes of desperate flight for when all other alternatives fail. Such passages tend to be smooth, straight, and quick, but they also tend to be full of Spectres in the full flush of activity.

Doomsayer expeditions usually leave by an opening other than the one through which they entered. One of the basic principles of survival in the Labyrinth is constant movement. Retracing one's steps almost guarantees an encounter with Spectres who have detected one's presence and are gathering for attack. Spectral patrols rise from the depths after major bouts of Labyrinthotectonic activity to keep a watch out for intruders (and refugees seeking to escape Spectral authority). Doomslayers with the resources to do so contract with friendly Harbingers to fly over a chosen section of Labyrinth to scout the current topology. Veteran Doomslayers can estimate the probable patterns of passages beneath various surface formations and work out contingency plans. Less lucky groups trust to the observations they can make themselves while descending through the Tempest.

Leaving the Labyrinth is not strictly a matter of geography. There is an element of will or some other spiritual factor as well. If a Doomslayer enters with the overriding determination to accomplish a goal, the Labyrinth might not release them until it is satisfied. All routes to the outside curve back, all level paths lead down, and



all straight lines curve. If the goal is unreachable, the wraith is in for an extended stay.

There are Doomslayers who have been there for centuries. Periodically, younger wraiths encounter these wanderers, who reject all offers of aid. The ancient Doomslayers trudge on in pursuit of their lost goals. Some of them somehow avoid succumbing to their Shadows and Spectral assaults, and linger on, and on; a minor school of Stygian philosophy says that they will survive even after Stygia is smoking ruins.

Sometimes exits close for other reasons. Tempest-Weaving Spectres can draw the Labyrinth in upon itself (and often seize the opportunity to follow Fetter links back to their owners). The normal processes of Labyrinth realignment create risks of closure that grow greater the longer intruders spend below: avalanches cover valley chambers, tremors slam together the opposing sides of a rift, and storms fill open passages with caustic plasm. Sometimes, changes happen quickly as whole landscapes transform themselves in response to the dreams of the Labyrinth's masters or perhaps their own impulses.

### The Veinous Stair

The Veinous Stair is the spine of the Labyrinth and the Axis Mundi of the world under Oblivion's sway. It is the counterpart of the River of Death in the Shadowlands, the place to which traffic naturally flows, and the fixed point in the eons-long circulation of the Labyrinth. It runs from a fixed point in Stygia to a fixed point in the surface of the Labyrinth and then on down. It is the only feature of the Labyrinth that remains stationary relative to the universe above. Even the exterior mouth of the Well of the Void drifts along with its surrounding, but no changes of Labyrinthine terrain dislodge the Veinous Stair.

Its single almost-consistent feature is its steps: 18 inches wide and 12 inches deep with enough minor variations to cause the unwary problems. Waves of distortion sometimes ripple upward from the Well when the flow of souls is particularly heavy. Entire sections are altered by pulses that travel up faster than the fastest Harbinger can bring warning.

On the Stair, the main mode of commerce is mining and recovering the materials and relics that have fallen from the Skinlands. These items embed themselves in the pétra and await discovery. The upper reaches of the Stair are long-depleted, and those seeking the wealth hidden within its substance risk much by descending ever-closer to the Labyrinth by inches because raids by Spectres are common enough to be a serious threat.

The side shafts sunk into rich veins of Angst, soulfire, and other valuable raw materials help give definition and stability to the Stair. Reinforcing rings of Stygian steel make it much harder for passages to shift shape or position. This corporeal effort gains support from the sustained willpower of those who toil within the Labyrinth for Stygian ends. Their beliefs unconsciously drive back the worst of the Labyrinth's inconstancy. In compensation, the unmined passages just beyond the limits of regular Stygian passages are more variable than usual, and some shift more rapidly than the eye can follow. Nightmares of chaos sweep around the miners in

search of opportunities to feed and destroy. Any effort to extend a mine shaft or open a new one requires the support of the Legions. Little is impossible in the Labyrinth, and there are tales of epic mining disasters in which entire crews are crushed or lost, and their fates are painstakingly etched into the walls of the Stair.

Unreinforced passages open and close as frequently along the Stair as anywhere else in the Labyrinth. The most stable ones are subject to exploratory mining, and those passages that show instabilities are shunned by the ranks of regular wraiths. For Doomslayers, the instability is a promising sign because it offers hopes of access to new stretches of the Labyrinth. Those who are in the Labyrinth because it's their duty rather than their choice try to take no more chances than are necessary, and the vistas of passage, chamber, and plasm offer little temptation to them. The occasional raids by foraging Shadowed plasmics do nothing to make exploring any more attractive.

To Spectres, the Stair is both a wonderful opportunity and a galling and gaping wound. There are always plenty of desirable targets creeping along it: miners, soldiers, and explorers, and they all are far more appetizing than fellow Spectres as sources of nourishment. Conversely, the Stair and its occupants are a reminder of how much of the universe has not succumbed to Oblivion. There are infinite depths within the Labyrinth, but there's an extensive, diverse, and vital span of existence above.

Spectres with arts of concealment sneak on to the Stair to write slogans, paint diagrams, and carve frescoes that have propagandistic intent. These etchings mock Stygian history and accomplishments, cast aspersions at the motives of those commanding the miners and soldiers assigned to the Labyrinth, and proclaim the inevitable triumph of Oblivion. The Spectres lay out little tableaus that show the extent of Oblivion's influence in the Shadowlands, and often gather details for these tableaus from available Shadows. They provide testimonials about the pleasures of the Shadow-eaten's existence, and often emphasize the new opportunities to fulfill Passions and goals that Stygia denies. When all else fails, they settle for straightforwardly shocking and disturbing images calculated to exploit the fears of viewers.

Some Doppelgangers have given up on the prospect of joint action and prefer to operate solo. A lone Doppelganger stakes out a vantage point and nabs the last straggling member of a group of wraiths. He quickly adopts the victim's appearance and returns to Stygia with the others. Over time, a large contingent of Doppelgangers develops in miners' and soldiers' communities poised to disperse for action elsewhere in the Shadowlands.

### The Well of the Void

The Void is the center and the bottom of the Labyrinth. In a sense, it's the Labyrinth's core. Those who are sufficiently tired of existence find it not far away, either around the next corner, down a flight of steps, behind the last doorway, or at the foot of the bed. When it serves the purposes of the Neverborn to intervene, they can lead those seeking the Void along a lengthier route to a place where the doomed soul can perform one final service. Otherwise, the Void unfolds its final threshold for the convenience of the ready.



The Void can appear anywhere in the Labyrinth, in the parts ruled by other kingdoms, and in the wastes where no great powers prevail.

In addition to the Void's ubiquitous manifestations, there is a fixed entrance at the bottom of the Veinous Stair. Here, a well miles across descends indefinitely down into darkness. Above the mouth of the Stair it narrows, and its size can vary from half a mile to a few yards as it passes through layers of Labyrinthine matter. Below the Stair, its shaft is pockmarked with sanctuaries that have been carved out of it by Oblivion-worshipping Spectres at this final place within existence.

There is no fixed point beyond which return is impossible down in the depths of the Well. Sometimes, those who try climbing or flying down vanish forever just a few seconds after leaving the lowest ledges. Other seekers of obliteration remain visible for hours or even days. Oblivion has its own rhythms that remain obscure even to those who have been observing it for decades or centuries.

### Babylon Favela

Communities of those souls not quite ready to meet Oblivion eke out pathetic existences in chambers opening on to the Well. Babylon Favela is named after the tiered Hanging Gardens, and it is a typical example of many such settlements.

The settlers include a range of types, such as the deluded who hope to summon the next Great Maelstrom by force of will, the confused who seek a sign about how to proceed, and the despairing who still retain some tie to the rest of the universe. All of them scavenge what nourishment they can from those about to plunge into the Well. While waiting for fresh supplicants, they turn to carving their stories, hopes, and fears into the walls around them. In some places, particularly along the two great stairways that spiral down into the depths of the Well, the carvings reach back dozens of feet from the original surface and reflect untold generations of sculptors trying to efface or transform their predecessors' work. These lost souls shape their caves into echoes or parodies of their Skinlands homes, places in the Shadowlands that they conquered or destroyed, and other dwellings that made an impression in the days before their drive to seek Oblivion became dominant.

Death emphatically does *not* make all people equal.

### Business and Mercantilism

Ask anyone in Stygia and they'll tell you that nobody has any dealings with the Spectres under any circumstances except to grant them Nhudri's Embrace and then the mercy of the forges. Lies come as easily to the dead as to the living.

There is a great deal more commerce between Stygia and the Labyrinth than anyone admits. Everyone does it and assumes they're alone in their sins. Spectres provide some of the most prized goods in the Underworld like soulfire crystals at far better prices than the Hierarchy offers with its monopoly on legitimate sales. Although items manufactured under contract from the Hierarchy must use (or at least seem to use) legitimate suppliers, Renegades and Heretics are likely to go for the best price when fueling souled firearms, which is an example of what drives the strange commerce with the denizens of the Labyrinth.





Spectres travel widely in the Underworld, and goods from other Dark Kingdoms wash up naturally in the Labyrinth as the detritus of Helldiving expeditions and Harrowings. Anyone with Spectral connections can get even the most exotic goods at “affordable prices.” The Tempest gives up its gifts to the Shadow-eaten more easily than to the Restless. Things that were thought lost forever in the Tempest are retrievable if the wraith is willing to pay the price. Especially unusual items and plasmics dredged from the Tempest have a market value to a Spectre who is seeking Shadowlands lucre for their inscrutable reasons.

Spectres sell themselves as well. There isn’t a huge market in the Shadowlands for practitioners of Hive-Mind, but even the fates meted out by the Arrangers of the Masquers Guild aren’t as painful as Shades dragging a wraith down into a Nihil. Only the mad strike such a deal with the Shadow-eaten, but the mad are never in short supply.

Spectres have their reasons to indulge in this odd capitalism. Some still go numbly through the empty motions of buying, selling, and amassing wealth. Others do it to sow discord in the Shadowlands or to build up funds to support networks of Doppelganger agents operating in the Hierarchy. Some seek an edge in the Oblivion War by selling intelligence about their rivals to Helldivers and Doomslayers.

Philosophical Spectres (who are rare because Oblivion does not encourage forward thinking) see the establishment of commerce between the Labyrinth and the Underworld to be essential in the erosion of the differences between wraith and Spectre, and Shadow and Psyche.

## War Without End

For wraiths, particularly Doomslayers, the reality of the Labyrinth is eternal battle. All things bend toward this end. The Doomslayers live between states of conflict from without and within (as they wrestle with their Shadows’ empowerment from the Void) or prepare for the next mission. The heroes, fools, and mad that battle against Oblivion are the most restless of the Restless.

## The Doomslayer Orders of Battle

The **Order of the Thorn** takes the fight to the enemy in an organized and military fashion. Its members take a fair number of prisoners, although no one outside the Order knows why. The Thorns dedicate themselves to fighting Oblivion on a tactical and strategic level, and they provide the most open applications of force among the Doomslayer Orders. These brave wraiths carry on their organization’s crusade against the Shadow-eaten for the usual reasons that an individual dedicates their life to a cause: trauma, vision, or duty. Whatever motivates them individually, the Thorns are united in their hatred of Spectres.

What makes the Thorns exceptional is their reluctance to kill. Some are former Shadow-eaten (see p. 31 for the process of Redemption), have lost loved ones to Oblivion, or follow the dictates of their faith. Whatever the case, when a Thorn destroys a Spectre they have lost the fight by their own moral standards. Whenever it is possible, Thorns capture the Shadow-eaten. Their prisoners are

either handed over to the Darksidiers for Redemption, the Office of the Primary Secretary for interrogation, or sent to the Order’s soulforges and reshaped into weapons in the war against Oblivion. Many wraiths maintain the latter option is hardly a superior fate to destruction.

The **Office of the Primary Secretary, A. K. A. “The Division”** observes important Stygian political figures for signs of replacement by Doppelgangers and rout the impostors that they discover. This group is the “secret service” of the Doomslaying Orders and is much smaller than the Thorns (only about a thousand Restless are members). The Division’s members are some of the most gifted practitioners of the Arcanoi and ministers to the Shadow of the Underworld. They combine the skills they learned while alive with the powers of the Restless. Unlike the Helldivers, who deal with Spectres who have become too dangerous for covert direct action before they act outside the Labyrinth, the Division engages in counter-espionage against the Shadow-eaten.

A Division operation against the Shadow-eaten takes the long-term view of matters. Their agents hail from the ranks of thieves, confidence artists, and spies among the Quick. They claim that such varied professions are merely aspects of the whole of the Office of the Primary Secretary. Many develop elaborate “legends” and false identities over time that allow them to carry out vital work against Doppelgangers and other infiltrators without interference from the fraught politics of the Legions.

**Helldivers** are Masquers who perform special missions inside the Labyrinth. They work alone or in team of 2-5 members. These missions can be assassinations, extractions, covert operations, or even scientific field observation. They go under deep cover for their assignments. Their mandate is deceptively simple: When there’s a problem that the other Doomslayer Orders cannot address, they ask for a Helldiver team. The Helldivers are masters of Moliate who enter the Labyrinth disguised as Spectres. Clothed in the semblance of the enemy, they descend into the Labyrinth to infiltrate the ranks of the Shadow-eaten.

Some Helldivers are anthropologists or trained agents of espionage. These Helldivers, the *Agents of Insight*, strive to learn the nuances of Spectral society and culture and map the complex flows of power and influence that form the political topology of the Labyrinth. They are the eyes and ears of Stygia in the Labyrinth. The Agents of Insight scientifically investigate Spectres and their bizarre cultures, and map the Labyrinth. Any sort of device, instrument, sample, or specimen must leave or enter the Labyrinth somehow, and the Agents of Insight are uniquely suited to accomplish this task as field agents and couriers.

Other Helldivers are the *Kindly Ones*, who are assassins without parallel who stalk the Shadow-eaten deemed to be most dangerous. Unseen and unsuspected, they work their way close to important Spectres and arrange for them to leave the scene quietly. The Kindly Ones are the commandoes of the Helldivers and silent warriors among the Doomslayers who carry out the most dangerous of missions while surrounded by their enemies. As such, they have the highest casualty counts of any of the Orders.



**Darksiders** are Pardoners who cater to the needs of other Doomslayers. Some serve as combat medics for the soul by keeping Doomslayers' Shadows in line even in the heart of the Labyrinth. They are rumored to also work on rehabilitating the Shadow-eaten. The Thorns risk much to capture Spectres intact to subject them to the ministrations of the Darksiders. Their mission is to find a cure for the Shadow-eaten disease and find a method to Redeem all Spectres.

The Pardoners are the primary contributors to the Darksiders, and part of the Order's membership comes directly from that guild. These Darksiders are Master-class Pardoners who believe (as do the other members of the Order) in the eventual Redemption of the Shadow-eaten. The rest of the membership is of mixed but impressive pedigree: Pardoners with methods too progressive for the guild to accept, Obliviographers, cosmetic Masquers, and Monitors concerned with the repair of Fetters.

Darksiders are students of the Shadow and Oblivion. They labor for years to find ways to Redeem the Shadow-eaten, repair Oblivion-damaged Corpus and Fetters, and reverse the growth of the Shadow. This Order keeps in contact with Darksiders who pursue independent or unrelated research, and speak with the various Dybbuk Circles researching Redemption.

The commerce between the Darksiders and some of the Dybbuk groups extends to joint research and personnel exchange. These Doomslayers also help fund the Institute of Obliviographic Studies and contribute a great deal of material to the library, which puts them in close contact with any number of groups studying Oblivion and the Labyrinth and making their theories very influential.

**Solos** is a catch-all term for any wraith who Doomslays without belonging to an official organization. Some go through training and some don't. Some do it for the money and others for personal reasons. Within the wide range of wraiths that choose to Doomslay without official sanction, two broad groups emerge. This isn't to say that other types don't exist, but successful Solos still find safety in numbers and common cause within a shared culture.

**Skellhunters** undertake hunting Spectres on an individual level. They are broadly hunters who stalk the Shadow-eaten for the bounty placed on their heads issued by the Office of the Primary Secretary. Some of them are simply fools, and others are slavers who use this profession to make their efforts seem legitimate. A tiny fraction are true professionals. These last few tend to be ideologically motivated, and often are either retirees from the Doomslayer Orders or running lucrative for-profit operations.

The second group of Solos is widely despised and more controversial. **Stalkers** are Doomslayers who independently scout new locations within the Labyrinth, retrieve unusual relics, and most often deal directly with Spectres as a commercial venture. They are the only group that dares to penetrate the Zones of Alienation (see p. 68) with any regularity. They risk their existence to snatch exquisitely rare and powerful Artifacts from the baleful chaos. Although the Orders denounce and punish such actions and the Hierarchy declares them illegal (and send recidivists to the soulforges), stalkers provide valuable services in exchange for favors and Oboli alike.

## Osseum

Osseum is an Arcanos rarely seen outside of the Labyrinth and its borders. It is concerned with creating things out of the dust of ages (Common) and becoming the dust of ages (Initiate). Nothing created with Osseum lasts, but the ability to summon forth tools and material is invaluable in a place where nothing else is certain.

### Osseum System

Access to the freely available detritus of the Tempest greatly aids users of Osseum. The difficulty of all Osseum rolls is reduced by 1 while in the Tempest. Furthermore, the difficulty of all Osseum rolls is reduced by 2 while in the Labyrinth or during a Maelstrom.

#### • Bloodhound (Common)

At this level, the wraith senses the ebb and flow of the particles of Corpus and tomb dust around them to identify barely seen tracks in the earth and disturbances in the air.

**System:** The player spends 1 point of Pathos and rolls Perception + Osseum (difficulty 8). The difficulty of all Perception-based and tracking related rolls is reduced by 1 for each success for the next scene.

#### • Blind (Initiate)

The wraith gathers a small cloud of dust and Corpus into their hand that they hurl at a foe to distract them. This can be as simple as gathering dust into the wraith's off hand during combat or as unusual as vomiting a sticky spray of dust into their face.

**System:** The player spends 1 point of Pathos and rolls Stamina + Osseum (difficulty 8). On the character's action, they can hurl or spray a hail of dust into the eyes of their opponent and blind their foe. Goggles, masks, and other facial protection do not help until the target removes the dust. The difficulties of all attacks by the foe against the character are increased by +1 for each success the character obtains (maximum 9) for a number of turns equal to the number of successes obtained on the activation roll.

#### • • Coriolis Shadow (Common)

The wraith summons a cloud of dark particles around them to conceal their presence or blind their foes.

**System:** The player spends a Corpus and rolls Wits + Osseum (difficulty 7). Successes work in one of two ways:

- **Conceal:** The wraith pulls a cloud of non-reflecting particles around them to conceal themselves from view. Each success grants the wraith one additional die to their stealth pool for the rest of the scene.
- **Blur:** Success on the roll means that the wraith creates a storm of opaque particles. The storm has a diameter around them is equal to the wraith's Willpower score in yards. The wraith is unaffected by this cloud, and the miniature dust storm increases the difficulty of any hand-to-hand or firearm attack that targets the character by +1. All thrown or archaic missile weapon attacks suffer a +2 difficulty. The storm lasts one turn per success.

#### • • Bone Shroud (Initiate)

The wraith wraps themselves in a powdery white shroud of bone-like particles that form a thick, hooded cassock around them.



This shroud is strong enough to protect them from the ravages of Maelstrom winds.

**System:** The player spends 2 points of Pathos and rolls Stamina + Osseum (difficulty 8). Each success reduces the per-scene damage of a Maelstrom by one die. The Bone Shroud normally lasts one scene, but the player may spend an additional two Pathos to extend its duration for an additional scene.

#### ••• Osseous Arsenal (Common)

Ossean Doomslayers transform their Corpus into weapons and armor of bone to prosecute their unending war against Oblivion. Like its counterpart in Moliata, weapons and armor forged through Osseous Arsenal is customizable by the user to resemble everything from elaborately scrimshawed armor of polished bone to primitive clubs and shivs. Unlike their Moliated counterparts, items created through Osseous Arsenal are temporary at best.

**System:** Osseous Arsenal can create one weapon or type of armor. Each weapon or armor requires a separate roll. The player spends 2 points of Pathos and 1 point of Corpus and rolls Stamina + Osseum (difficulty 6) to create each item. Tomb dust summoned from the air mixes with the Ossean's Corpus to create the items of the Osseous Arsenal. They last one full scene and can be fortified to last an additional scene by the expenditure of an additional point of Pathos to maintain their frail vitality.

**Weapons:** Osseous Arsenal only creates melee and thrown weapons. Each weapon created requires successes equal to the damage the weapon causes (a spear or polearm requires three successes, a sabre requires two successes, brass knuckles require one success, and so on).

**Armor:** Osseous Arsenal only creates normal armor (no Stygian Steel, True Jade, and so on). Each suit or type of armor requires successes equal to its level of protection to create it (Class 1 requires 1 success and Class 5 requires 5 successes). The armor functions as detailed in the armor section of **Wraith: The Oblivion** on p. 328.

#### ••• Sinkhole (Initiate)

The wraith vanishes into the earth of the Underworld as a cloud of ashen soot. This power can work on any earthen surface from the Shadowlands, such as the banks of the River of Death or the corridors of the Labyrinth. It is also the chief means Osseans use to hide from Spectres and sudden Maelstroms.

**System:** The player spends 1 point of Pathos and the character vanishes into the earth. The transformation requires a turn to complete, during which the wraith is vulnerable. Once transformed, the wraith is in a slumber-like state until they make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to awaken and return to the world above. All attempts to locate the Wraith by any means increase by +2 difficulty. Should someone locate the submerged Ossean, they find a mass of dust packed as densely as concrete. Attempts to harm the wraith immediately expel them from the earth in a cloud of blinding dust (+2 difficulty to all Perception-based rolls made by the attacker for one turn). The Ossean subtracts 2 from their initiative the first turn after their exhumation due to disorientation but acts normally from their second turn onward.

#### •••• Ossean Citadel (Common)

The wraith summons the particles of Corpus in from the air and earth around them to build a redoubt of interlaced bony spines. The structure can range in size from a small tent to a small house, but the interlaced web of bones serves to provide temporary protection from the ravages of Maelstroms. The storm winds that whistle through gaps in the citadel may still harm Restless within, but at a decreased level.

**System:** The player spends 4 points of Pathos and 2 points of Corpus and rolls Stamina + Osseum (difficulty 8). Each success decreases the strength of a Maelstrom within the confines of the structure by one for a number of scenes equal to the number of successes acquired. The size of the structure ranges from a small tent (1 success) to a house (5 successes) or even larger depending on the roll. Powerful Osseans create stockades formidable enough to surround a small Necropolis.

#### •••• Ashes to Ashes (Initiate)

The wraith summons a storm of sandy particles from the air around them to abrade their foe. Concentrated blasts include tiny particles of Stygian Steel, True Jade, or similar material sufficient to render even the most potent foe unto dust.

**System:** The player targets a single foe within Willpower x 10 yards and unleashes a furious storm of abrasive particles that engulf the target. The player spends 2 points of Pathos and 1 point of Corpus. The wraith's Shadow gains 1 point of Angst. The player rolls Stamina + Osseum (difficulty 6) to unleash the storm. The player may choose to inflict lethal or aggravated damage. If lethal, each success inflicts a single point of lethal damage. If aggravated, every 2 successes (rounded down) convert into a single point of aggravated damage. Both forms of damage ignore armor.

#### ••••• Pauper King (Common)

Users of this art summon the dust of ages and broken things of the Tempest to form a battered yet formidable panoply. The user shrouds themselves in a suit of armor composed of rusted mail, a dented breastplate, moldering robes, sculpted plates of bone, and a crown of jagged bone. The armor can look like almost anything the wraith desires, but it is weary, dented, and withered with the weight of ages.

**System:** Pauper King costs 3 points of Pathos, 2 points of Corpus, and 1 point of Willpower to create. The player rolls Stamina + Osseum (difficulty 8). Upon success, the armor allows the user to soak aggravated damage as though it were lethal damage until it dissipates. In addition, the user's cloak billows in the un-winds of the Underworld as they shroud themselves in a blinding storm of fine dust. The number of successes used to create the cloak adds to the difficulty of all attacks against the user (difficulty 9 maximum). The dust is so pervasive that only creatures that function without sight are unaffected. Pauper King lasts for a number of scenes equal to the number of successes rolled.

#### ••••• Dust to Dust (Initiate)

The wraith has forged such an intimate bond with the dust of ages that they transform into dust itself. In moments, the Ossean



and their belongings transform and take flight as a cloud of dust. In dust form, the character can fly at a jog and penetrate almost any space not air tight by pouring themselves through keyholes, slipping under doors, or travelling down narrow pipes.

**System:** The player spends 2 points of Pathos and rolls Wits + Osseum (difficulty 6). Success instantly transforms the character into a mobile cloud of dust that can travel at a jog for a number of turns equal to the number of successes that they scored on their roll. The duration of this art can be extended to a number of scenes equal to the player's number of successes with the expenditure of 3 points of Corpus and 1 point of Willpower.

The dust cloud is not dispersible by even the strongest winds, but it can move about or blown off course (at the Storyteller's discretion). Wraiths in dust form perceive the world normally but cannot use Arcanoi requiring eye contact. The wraith is immune to mundane physical attacks, but still takes full damage from barrowfire and supernatural attacks. The supernatural nature of Maelstroms means they do damage to wraiths in dust form, but only at half damage (rounded down). The wraith may not attack others physically while in dust form but may use Arcanoi that do not require a physical body.

## Peril, Incorporated!

Doomslayers are an odd bunch at the best of times. They are wraiths who are charged with prosecuting an endless war and espionage against an enemy deemed unstoppable. Such tasks attract the strangest among the dead, such as wraiths that don't fit within the rigid structures imposed by the Hierarchy. Fringe philosophers, thrillseekers, lone wolves, special operatives from all eras, and other strange wraiths fill the ranks of the Doomslayers with each one applying their unique capabilities to the eternal struggle against Oblivion. Even among the bizarre brigades that comprise the Doomslayers, the group calling itself *Peril, Incorporated!* stands out.

On record as an attachment to Pursuit Squadron 15 of the Legion of Fate, the operatives of Peril, Incorporated! act independently of the Legions and answer only to the commanding officer of the Helldivers and the spymaster of the Division. They carry out missions against Spectres and other threats deemed too dangerous or bizarre to entrust to more conventional forces. They are an eclectic mix of spies, Artificers, soldiers, scientists, philosophers, and specialists who under other circumstances would be security risks according to the Hierarchy and the Doomslayers. Their success record in operations against the Shadow-eaten is a bulwark against such accusations, which gives them the latitude to operate as they see fit. One does not argue with results.

Among the more famous (or notorious) members of Peril, Incorporated! are the following Restless:

- **Dr. Alexander Corbin:** Pilot of the *Eagle Two*, which is the team's primary means of transport. Dr. Corbin presents himself as a bona-fide, larger-than-life character straight from the hero pulps of the 1920s and 1930s who claims to have visited impossible locales in life and battled against bizarre foes. It's a matter of debate whether his claims are true because they

### Really?

Yes, really. Survival in the Labyrinth and fighting Spectres depends on a willingness to go all in on risks that would normally not make any sense. The sensible and prudently cautious get destroyed just like everyone else. Smart and lucky risk-takers are as likely to survive as anyone else too.

Storytellers and players can draw on Peril, Incorporated! as is. You can also use it as both inspiration and justification to throw together influences you like and put them to work in your own chronicle. The point is to let yourself get bold and extreme because that's what this sort of Underworld work needs.

do not match the accepted history of the Quick as it's known. What is inarguable is Dr. Corbin's mastery of the Arcanoi of Argos, Flux, and Inhabit, which make him indispensable to his team and the squadron.

- **Violet Szabo:** A French/British Special Operations Executive agent during the Second World War and a posthumous recipient of the George Cross. Szabo found herself captured on her second mission into occupied France. She was interrogated and tortured. Eventually, she was deported to Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany and executed. Death has done little to repress the Cockney spy. Since joining Peril, Incorporated!, she is feared among Spectres due to her mastery of Moliate, utter fearlessness, and seeming lack of influence from her Shadow.
- **Bran Mac Conn of the Hundred Battles, Late of the XIth Legion, Licensed Private Investigator by His Own Hand:** A man of many titles, the improbably time-tossed Bran Mac Conn is Peril, Incorporated!'s most fearsome hand to hand combatant. A veteran of Claudius' 11th Legion, Mac Conn is easily the eldest of the wraiths serving in the Squadron and one of their most-trusted advisors. He commands the forces of Outrage in battle for the team, and it is rumored that it was he who discovered the Arcanos of Osseum. His taste in post-mortem clothing is atrocious by the reckoning of his comrades.
- **Art Kane:** A more recent recruit in to the Peril, Incorporated! ranks, Kane served in the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops (dubbed the Ghost Army) during the Second World War. Kane works with the rest of his new unit as a master of illusion and deception, and his skills as a provocative photographer in life feed his Mnemosynis and Puppetry Arcanoi. He has yet to integrate fully into the ranks of the boisterous and bizarre afterlife army in which he's found himself, and he is often a source of friction among the Doomslayers.
- **Lorraine Copeland:** Another SOE recruit, Copeland serves as the Peril, Incorporated! archaeologist and expert on the





Labyrinth. She assists the team and the Squadron in planning daring drops into Shadow-eaten strongholds. Although the records remain sealed by order of the Division, she led a daring raid into the heart of a massive Tempest. Whatever they discovered there, it whispers Oblivion's song to Copeland every waking moment.

- **"Haze":** A well-known musician in life, Haze refuses to go by his Skinlands name. A rough fit for Peril at the time of his recruitment, he is nonetheless a skilled paratrooper, and his unparalleled command of the Keening and Castigate Arcanoi have saved the team's souls on multiple occasions. Shortly after his death, Haze arranged for a Masquer to conceal his features so that his face is perpetually cast in psychedelic shadows. His Relic Fender Stratocaster is one of the most powerful Chanteur instruments in the Shadowlands.

They almost always work with others for specific missions. As part of their general ethos of heroic adventure in the gravest extreme, they welcome allies of good will and wiliness to cooperate in the work of constant innovation. They can serve in a chronicle as good guides to places, people, and phenomena that characters might not survive by discovering on their own.

### Rainbow 03: the *Eagle Two*

Military history bulges with projects that might have changed the course of history if not for poor scheduling. Rainbow Zero Three (from its US Army Air Corps serial number, 44-91003) was

one such project. The XF-12 Rainbow was Republic Aviation's high-performance reconnaissance aircraft that could overfly Japan from American Pacific island bases. Its onboard technology, which was revolutionary for the 1940s, enabled the crew to develop and analyze reconnaissance photos in flight and analyze them for intelligence, which vastly hastened the intelligence cycle for United States Army Air Corp commanders. Unfortunately for Republic Aviation, the war's end yielded a surplus of other airframes that could be adapted for the same mission. The newly independent United States Air Force canceled the program in 1948 only a few weeks before 44-91003 crashed off Florida in Choctawhatchee Bay. At least, that's what the history books of the time claim.

The truth of the *Eagle Two* is more colorful and bizarre than few wraiths dare suspect: It did not originate from the Skinlands they know but from another continuum entirely. Unknown to Skinlands historians, the XF-12's design originated decades earlier with the work of aviation engineer and designer Dr. Alexander Corbin. As part of a group sponsored by Howard Hughes, Dr. Corbin's experimental aircraft had a long and strange history before the Second World War as it crisscrossed the globe to carry out covert missions. It served as the primary transport for the International Security team dubbed Peril, Incorporated! by the press of the time due to their colorful personalities and exploits.

Its final mission ended in destruction. The aircraft was pushed out of its version of the Skinlands and into a shared Shroud and came out in to the Shadowlands that the characters know. Pursuit



Squadron 15, a Legion of Fate unit composed of former test pilots from Eglin Air Force Base and Naval Air Station Pensacola, salvaged 44-91003 from the Tempest within weeks of its destruction. With its photoreconnaissance equipment restored, it served the Necropolis Miami garrison for several decades by keeping an unblinking eye on events until relic jets became common enough to replace it.

Obsolete and difficult to maintain, it went to a Hierarchy military surplus auction where its designer, the newly deceased Alexander Corbin, acquired it for a handful of oboli. Refitting the venerable aircraft required the work of decades by Corbin, but once it was completed the *Eagle Two* became the crown jewel in the Doomslayers' air forces.

Today, late Cold War cameras and other electronic sensors replace the *Eagle Two's* 1940s-vintage gear. The smaller equipment opens mass and volume so that it can serve as an airborne command post and special operations aircraft in addition to its original reconnaissance role. Its flight crew remains at four (pilot, copilot, navigator, and flight engineer), but Corbin has added three gunner positions: dorsal and ventral turrets and a tail barbette, each with dual relic .50 caliber machine guns. Its fuselage seats up to nine mission crew, whether they are sensor operators and intelligence analysts for reconnaissance, senior Helldivers and their radio techs for airborne command and control, or commandos for low-level parachute insertions. Continuous tinkering by Dr. Corbin and an unlikely alliance of Artificer and Alchemist aviation enthusiasts whose passion transcends guild rivalries has kept it airworthy and improved its already record-setting performance.

**System:** The *Eagle Two* is a unique Relic. It has a safe speed of 400 mph (644 km/h), a maximum speed of 500 mph (800 kph), Maneuver 6, and 40 points of Corpus. Fueling its quartet of Pratt & Whitney Wasp radial piston engines requires 80 points Pathos, but that gives it better than 4,000 miles of range. Its payload's capabilities are malleable depending on the mission; its usual ground crew can reconfigure its gear in two hours.

Designed for reconnaissance, the *Eagle Two* is happiest when it's looking for something, which resonates with its crews. All Perception-based rolls receive a -1 difficulty aboard it, as do all Fatalism and Lifeweb arts. It also rewards a capable aviator: If a pilot uses *Maitre après Dieu* (Argos •••••), then its Maneuver limit increases to 8. Finally, at a cost of 8 points of Pathos for the scene (paid by any combination of the flight crew), its engines become completely silent and its skin changes color to match the local Tempest's sky, which adds +2 difficulty to any attempts to detect or attack it at range.

## The HellBeetle

The early Atomic Age was a time of engineering writ large. The atom promised limitless power if only humanity could build the tools to command it. Among various proposals to revolutionize transportation were nuclear-powered aircraft. One of the problems that ultimately grounded these schemes was the complexity of safely servicing these reactors, but in trying to solve this problem, General Electric's Nuclear Materials and Propulsion Division created what remains the world's largest self-propelled robot.

The Beetle, which was produced for the US Air Force's Special Weapons Center, was 85 tons of hydraulics, servomotors, and radiation shielding. On the rare days when all systems worked as designed, its tracked chassis (built from an M42 anti-aircraft gun carrier) crawled into action at a blistering 13 miles per hour. Its cab, which was equipped with two massive arms capable of powdering reinforced concrete or picking up an egg without cracking it, rested on four hydraulic rams capable of lifting it to a height of 26 feet. The single operator worked from behind 2-foot-thick leaded glass inside an air-conditioned cockpit with an 8-hour air supply.

The Air Force has never admitted what it did with the one Beetle that GE constructed in 1961, and Peril, Incorporated! is equally cagey about how they obtained it sometime after 1991. Observers hoping to see the Underworld's premiere giant fighting robot are disappointed, though. The Helldivers have recognized the rechristened HellBeetle's limitations as a combatant; that is, its large silhouette and lack of tactical maneuverability, so they have avoided deploying it in such a role. Instead, the HellBeetle fulfills its designers' original vision of operating in the most hostile environments possible. It's the Underworld's premiere giant salvage, recovery, and search and rescue robot.

**System:** The HellBeetle is a unique Relic vehicle with a safe speed of 8 mph, a maximum speed of 15 mph, Maneuver 3, and 100 points of Corpus. A full fuel tank of 16 Pathos keeps it going for eight hours. While powered, the HellBeetle is completely immune to all Maelstrom effects, soulfire, barrow-flame, and all non-supernatural environmental hazards (including radiation). It also ignores all damage from such petty sources as fists, swords, and firearms. Only anti-tank warheads or the equivalent unnatural weapons of the most powerful Spectres can damage it.

Peril, Incorporated!'s technical staff is continually finding places to attach more equipment to the HellBeetle. Its usual tool complement includes a cutting torch, a rotary saw, a chainsaw, winches, hydraulic spreaders, a plow blade, an earthmoving bucket, and just about any other large tool that a giant robot might need to extricate a wraith, resource, or relic from the Tempest or Labyrinth. Each of these tools is mounted on its own articulated arm or is adapted for the pincers on the two main arms. When the operator uses the HellBeetle's arms, they replace their own Strength and Dexterity with the robot's Strength •••••••••••••••• (yes, 15 dots) and Dexterity •• by using Technology in place of whichever Ability would normally apply. The arms are too slow to make effective attacks against anything smaller or faster than Gorool or the Kraken.

In truly extreme circumstances, Peril, Incorporated! may equip the HellBeetle with an M10-8 flamethrower or an M261 19-tube rocket launcher, both of which were obtained from Vietnam War-era US equipment. The flamethrower carries enough alchemical fuel for 10 shots, each of which ignites a 5-yard radius balefire inferno (soak difficulty 9 and 3 levels of aggravated damage/turn) at a medium range of 100 yards. Each Hydra-70 rocket detonates for 9 dice of damage in a 10-yard radius (increased by 1 yard per extra success from the attack) with a medium range of 5,000 yards, and the pilot can salvo the rockets in three-round bursts.







# The Dark Kingdom of Ivory



The people of the African continent have always had a unique relationship with the spirit world. Despite cultural differences, customs, and stories chronicling their various mythologies, Africans believed the physical world and the spirit world were two sides of the same coin, with each world influencing the other. They would honor those who passed on and ask for their guidance in times of joy and sorrow, and war and peace. They would speak to departed family members as though they were still present through ritual, dance, and song. The spirits, in turn, would respond in kind through memory and metaphor. Sometimes, they would return to the physical plane through the bodies of their descendants to right wrongs or remind a people of lessons long thought forgotten.

## Origins, both Humble and Grand



This is truth. In the beginning, there was only the Ocean, which is the sum of all creation and the wellspring of the soul. It has been said the Ancestors, also known as the Ijele, emerged from the Ocean and created the Shore, and upon the Shore, the Dark Kingdom of Ivory was built.

This is also truth.

Her name was Ala. She was the first. Rising from the collective memory of the Ocean, She created the Shore from the Egg of the

World and named the Shore Ife. In turn, She communed with the Maji, spirits of the animal kingdom, who gifted the bones of their discarded carcasses, and created the Dark Kingdom of Ivory.

The Dark Kingdom of Ivory was the sum of ancestral memory, reflecting the diverse cultures of the continent. Ala took the wild energy of imagination and shaped it into a realm of vast kingdoms of gold and iron, which stood in harmony with the expanse of the veldt. Eventually, Ala would come to divide the Dark Kingdom of Ivory into four realms that were connected and separated by 256 paths. Each realm was vital to the Dark Kingdom's existence. If one should fall, chaos would reign.

Ala called upon four of the Ijele to aid Her in governing this vast new land. These four, Ellegua the Traveler, Kokou the Drum, Abuk the Garden, and Ghede the Crass, represented the primal forces of creation. Their respective domains reflected the conflicting psychic energies that brought the Dark Kingdom into existence.

## The Bridge

Shanga, the Bridge Between Worlds, was the largest city in the Dark Kingdom of Ivory. Home to the most revered of souls, Shanga was the cultural and political center of the Dark Kingdom. With pomegranate skies and opulent spires of jewels, mud, and bone, supposedly molded and shaped from souls willing to stand as permanent edifices to the Dark Kingdom's glory, the Dark Kingdom of Ivory was the shining light of the Underworld. Its temple was called Beit al-Ajaib, the House of Wonders, and it was the tallest spire in the center of the Shanga. Beit al-Ajaib housed



the Library of Oral Tradition, which held wisdom from which the Griots would craft their tales for mankind. It was home to the Elders of Zanzibar, Ancestors who moved on from the physical world after a life of great service and extreme sacrifice. The Elders guarded the Library and its secrets from those who would use the knowledge for nefarious means, which would disrupt the balance between the spiritual and physical and rob the Dark Kingdom of Ivory of its power.

Now, the Bridge crumbles. Spanning the void of Oblivion, great tears and holes between buildings and once-safe cobblestone tracks make Shanga an inhospitable Necropolis of transition, an island in the Tempest. Few remain here for long out of fear of being dragged below. Steadily, the Bridge becomes a series of floating islands linked only by tenuous strands.

## The Marketplace

The Atunwa, also known as the Marketplace, connected the Dark Kingdom of Ivory to the realm of man. Situated at the center of the Crossroads, the Atunwa was the bazaar of memory and the first place that Restless and sleeping mortals would encounter in the Dark Kingdom.

The Marketplace was a bustling and joyful land. It smelled of the most fragrant incense and was filled with the sounds of music and commerce. The colors and patterns of fabrics that were made by looms of fate were the most intricate and vibrant in all of the Dark Kingdom, and perhaps the entire Underworld. Some believe they were

made from thinly sliced souls, while others believe each fabric was a Relic from the Skinlands. Mortal necromancers and beings known as the Mla Watu would come to the Marketplace by way of the River of Dreams. They came to commune with the Ancestors, hold children who died in childbirth, and find names for future generations. The Merchants of Atunwa, which were the ruling body of the Marketplace, were shrewd hagglers, but they were always fair in business.

The busiest section of the Marketplace was the center square where Ellegua the Judge of the Marketplace would hold court. Driving a nail into a large effigy that stood at the Gates of Shanga signified disputes that had been settled. The effigy was called the Nkisi, also known as the Good Man. Each nail contained a portion of the Dark Kingdom's wisdom. Nails also functioned as keys. One could be a key that would allow its wielder to open the Gates of Shanga. Another would allow access to Beit al-Ajaib and the Library of Oral Tradition. The Nkisi itself was a symbol signifying the strength of unity in the Dark Kingdom.

New arrivals would stand before the Traveler and the Merchants of Atunwa to learn their fate. How one lived their life would determine which region of the Dark Kingdom they would make their home. If one were honored for their guidance and wisdom in life, they would become a scholar in Shanga. If one were wicked and selfish as a mortal, they would toil in the Forge of the Shade. If they worked the soil or were great hunters, they would find comfort in the Bush. The wraiths who still wanted a taste of mortal pleasures became the ambassadors of the Mirrorlands.





Knowledge was shared freely among the dead and the living, and all became stronger for it, the wraiths' festering Shadows too growing in strength due to their enlightenment. Its borders were protected by the Soga, which was a militia comprised of the bravest fallen warriors, who made Shanga the jewel of the Dark Kingdom. Because of this prestige, the souls of the Dark Kingdom called Ala Queen of the Dead and deferred to her wisdom.

The Marketplace is in disrepair these days. Although it still bustles with activity and anything can be purchased or sold, the fates foretold by the Traveler are often grim, the wares on show are more likely morbid than grandiose, and quiet threats take the place of happy barter.

## The Crossroads

Ellegua the Traveler governance extended to the 256 Paths of the Crossroads, which is the nexus that connected the regions of the Dark Kingdom. The Crossroads was a labyrinth of danger and delight; that is, a realm where the path one takes determines their destiny. There is no map that could effectively help one navigate this chaotic land. The 256 Paths were fickle. Destinations were unsure and ever changing. A path that once led to fortune could lead to destruction in one step. Only Ellegua knew where all of the Paths led. If one did not seek Ellegua's direction, one could become lost forever in the labyrinth.

The 256 Paths were also protection. Not every road led to the regions of the Dark Kingdom. Some paths were false roads leading to the parts of the Kingdom dominated by dark and untamable beasts. Some false roads were dead ends in the truest sense of the term because they led to Oblivion.

Ellegua was crafty, and although none could question their knowledge, few knew how to appease the Traveler.

The Crossroads of tonight is little-changed, although the guides are fewer and possessed of an affection for trickery. No wraiths can exit or enter the Dark Kingdom of Ivory without using the Crossroads, which places a premium price on knowledge about its safe routes. Some claim it exists as an extension of the dreaded Labyrinth, or perhaps something deeper, such as a Malfean. Certainly, taking one wrong turn on the Crossroads can lead to what appears to be a great and impossibly sized prison of raging and screaming creatures, and another turn might lead one into the maw of a maddened spectral dragon.

## The Shade

Kokou the Drum was the Lord of the Shade, which was the land of the wicked dead whose punishment was to work the forges as penance for their misdeeds in the physical world. Factories in the Shade built the machines and weapons for the Kingdom's defenses. Kokou was a relentless taskmaster because protecting the Kingdom was all that mattered. The forges constantly burned and filled the skies with plumes of smoke, which gave the Shade of Africa its name. A powerful and ruthless warrior, Kokou would protect the Kingdom at all costs, even if it meant taking the throne should Ala ever faced Oblivion itself. His devotion and fanaticism would often give the Ijele pause.

The Shade was the Crucible that would test men who entered the Underworld in search of adventure or to honor a debt that was owed to otherworldly forces. Those who passed the trials of the Shade came to be known as the Orishas, heroes and heroines of two worlds.

These trials persist even now. Champions occasionally emerge to take the fight to Oblivion and its servants, although the Shade has grown darker in tone as human atrocities grow more systemic and callous. No longer do heroes and heroines appear with sword in hand to take on a tangible foe. It is more likely for the Shade's champions to appear with strategies for eliminating poverty, mortal starvation, or genocidal regimes, or for those champions to be so numbed to suffering that they immediately become Spectres.

## The Bush

Abuk the Garden became Mistress of the Bush, which was the natural land with its weird creatures like spiders who wove stories in their webs, scorpions who would sting frogs they traveled upon, and hyenas that walked upright like men. The Bush was lush and green. It was bursting with delicious fruit, and its skies burned in perpetual sunset. It was home to the fables of man and the birthplace of myth. The Bush was also home to the Aziza, who were benevolent spirits who gave the gift of fire to humanity. It has been said that without the gifts that Abuk gave to the mortals that humankind itself would have perished. Its borders were defended by the Sotunde, who were warrior souls fortified by their connection to their descendants through the Atunwa.

Following the trend of corruption and degradation, even the Bush suffers in these days. Less vibrant and nourishing, wraiths treat the Bush more as a place of retreat and contemplation than relaxation and indulgence. Some are exiled to the Bush and forced to wander in search of meaning in existence or atonement for crimes. This scorched Underworld possesses a motley of scholars and criminals, with each one trying to carve purpose from a ruined paradise.

## The Mirrorlands

Ghede the Crass ruled the Mirrorlands, whose borders were closest to the Marketplace. The Shroud is weakest in this region of the Dark Kingdom because death and fertility move in step to the rhythm of a yankadi. The Mirrorlands had soft soil with thick trees with winding branches canopying the realm. The denizens of the Mirrorlands were called the Loa. The Loa were the spirits that interacted most with mortals, and they often spoke directly to the living through the chevats, who were humans possessed by the Loa and ridden as though they were horses for the Loa to jockey. The Mirrorlands were a place of constant celebration. Music filled the air as the Loa danced freely with the living. The Mirrorlands smelled of the finest rum, the most pungent sweetness of fine cigars, and the afterglow of wild passion. Ghede was always ready for a party and the Mirrorlands were home to the greatest parties of all.

More than any part of the Dark Kingdom of Ivory, the ancient Mirrorlands is a twisted and hollowed version of what it was. Some parts are still vibrant, and other parts are scoured down. The Marketplace stands as a Necropolis attempting to look bold while it suffers severe



## Two Mirrorlands?

All mirrors cast a reflection. Sometimes, a shard breaks off and slips free to become its own perfect mirror. The Mirrorlands of the Dark Kingdom of Ivory and the Mirrorlands that persist beneath Haiti are two pieces of the same broken surface. Many of the wraiths who established the present day Mirrorlands were former inhabitants of that section of the Dark Kingdom of Ivory's tapestry, but they and their mortal descendants were forcibly migrated across the Tempest to new lands.

The modern Mirrorlands still practice many of the ancient traditions, but as time marches on and the loom of fate twists its threads into knots, few remember its origins.

attempts at undermining. A rarity for its possession of spiritual plants and animals, the Mirrorlands now stand as a ravaged memorial where the Restless come to occasionally loot for relics and search for ancient Restless that possess great knowledge. Sometimes, a crusading wraith comes here looking to rebuild the Dark Kingdom of Ivory.

The number of Spectres here is immense and are led by one named Iku the Plague. Few who claim the Mirrorlands as their Necropolis keep it for long. They often find their Corpus wracked with a plasm-eating contagion.

The practice of Atunwa by the African people once made the Kingdom of Ivory strong and perhaps the mightiest land in the entire Underworld. These days are past.

## The Power of Myth: The Era of Heroes



Stories are powerful things.

In the physical world, the people of Africa spread across the continent and created great and powerful kingdoms. This expansion brought them in contact with other cultures. They would incorporate these cultures into their spirituality, which changed the topography of the Dark Kingdom. These changes were most evident in Shanga as new esoteric denizens made their home in the Marketplace, such as the formless Djinn and Fravashi, who are guardian spirits known as the "midwives of Good Creation." Spires made from the bones of the Maji would transmogrify and become bulbous domes of gold with minarets touching the violet sky.

These changes occurred partly due to the power of stories. The Griots, fortified with knowledge from the Library of Oral Tradition, traveled among the people and wove tales of the Dark Kingdom. Inspired, many sought out the Crossroads and followed the labyrinth of the 256 paths hoping to reach the Marketplace to learn the secrets of Shanga. Some wanted to use the knowledge of the Dark Kingdom

for the betterment of man. However, some wanted to gain power from the Dark Kingdom to influence the physical world with impunity.

Ala the Queen of the Dead would not let this knowledge be abused because it would break the unspoken treaty between the physical and spiritual worlds. Other mortals were called upon to protect the physical world from the corrupted power of the Dark Kingdom. The Crucible that was the Shade would test these mortals. Those who survived Kokou's gauntlet would become the Orishas, heroes touched by the Ijele and in service to the kingdoms of humankind. The stories of these beings spread throughout the physical world and became the stuff of legend.

One such legend was the Spirit of the Vai.

*The Loma were a vigorous and warlike people who came from the northeast. They engaged in feuds with their neighbors, barely gaining any ground until a Mandingo raiding party came down from the north that was led by the Warlord Luogon. The Loma and the Mandingo formed an alliance, created a mighty army, and wreaked havoc against the other tribes of the Five Rivers.*

*Luogon was a wicked man. Ruthless and arrogant, he possessed powerful magic. Luogon wore a Nail that he stole from the Bridge of Shanga, which gave him the strength to force his will upon others. It could open doors to the land of the dead where he would find endless bodies for his campaign. He would use this power to take control of the Five Rivers region and make it his own.*

*Individually, the tribes of the Five Rivers were no match for the forces of the united armies. They were quickly overrun by the hordes of outlaws and Renegades. These hordes are now called the Gizima Nation. Many brave warriors rose and attempted to drive the Gizima Nation out of the region, but the Gizima were too powerful. Soon, the entire region was crushed under the weight of the Gizima Nation. The remaining tribes were used as labor or sold as slaves to other kingdoms as prisoners of war. The Five Rivers began to dry up and famine took hold of the land. But, none of these things mattered to Luogon. His appetite for power was insatiable.*

*Teta was the daughter of Dwe Chikede, who was chieftain of the Vai people. Chikede was a good chief: strong, kind, and fair to his people. He bravely defied the Kpelle Nation and called upon the remaining tribes of the Five Rivers to unite against their common foe. Teta watched in horror as her father was slaughtered by the Gizima horde. His sword was shattered, and the Vai people were led into bondage. She fled to the Forest of Bassa with the pieces of her father's sword. She hid in the great forest and prayed to the gods for the Five Rivers' deliverance from the plague brought upon them.*

*It was the rainy season and this rain was particularly powerful. Teta was hungry and desperately searched to find shelter from the storm. She stumbled upon a cave and found a pot of stew still cooking on the fire. Instinct told her to run. She could not trust anyone. Everyone she met could be an enemy. But, Teta was wet, hungry, and tired, and the stew smelled so good. Teta ate her fill and soon fell into a deep slumber.*

*Teta woke to an old woman glaring at her.*

*"You ate my stew!" the old woman shrieked. "Thief! You will pay, oh! I'm coming to find the Kpelle jus' now! They will give me good money for the daughter of Chikede!"*

*Teta begged the old woman to spare her life. "Please, auntie! Do not send for the Kpelle! They killed my father! They destroy all of the Five Rivers! Luogon is a monster, auntie! Hide me and I will do whatever you ask! I will be your humble servant for life!"*



The old woman grabbed Teta by the face and looked directly into her eyes. "You speak true. You will be my servant for all time," the old woman said. Then, the wrinkles on the old woman's face melted away revealing an almost otherworldly beautiful woman. As she stood upright, no longer crouching due to the ravages of age, her tattered rags were replaced with the robes of knowledge. She held in her hands the sword of Dwe Chikede, re-forged and made whole.

"My name is Sia. I am a Griot," the woman said. "Luogon stole from us. We would like our property returned. Only a weapon touched by the spirit world can overcome his magic. Use your father's sword and reclaim what was taken from you."

Teta Dwe Chikede emerged from the Bassa forest changed and made different. She was touched by the spirit world. She was no longer living, but she could no longer die either. With her father's sword, she brought justice to the Five Rivers and became the symbol of liberation that her people so desperately needed. She defeated Luogon by running him through with the Sword of Chikede. Its magic destroyed Luogon's dominion over his armies of the living and dead. It is said that she never her took her father's throne, but returned to the Bassa forest to honor the agreement that she had made with the Griot. It is said that Teta Chikede still watches over the Bassa forest as the Spirit of the Vai, the Warden who stands on the Bridge and the first of the Latigi.

These stories would inspire other mortals to pierce the veil between the living and the dead in the pursuit of meaning and glory. Most in the Dark Kingdom embraced mortals and vampires seeking the Marketplace to learn the wonders of the worlds beyond. However, some looked upon these visitors with disdain and believed their presence sullied the Dark Kingdom of Ivory. They felt the Dark Kingdom needed to be purged of the interloper taint. They would see the Bridge Between Worlds burned and Beit al-Ajaib razed, separate the mortals from the Ancestors, and make the mysteries of the realm beyond unknowable.

They would bring darkness to the Dark Kingdom. Perhaps the one Dark Kingdom clinging most closely to the concept of an idealized afterlife.

## The Order of Ya'Qub

At the edge of the Bush sits the dark plains of Khoisan. Khoisan is a barren expanse of dust and a tenement of shantytowns in a desert of anguish and despair. In times past, it routinely devastated the Bush. It is a wilderness where tenebrous souls plot and scheme and use avatars to control the nightmare beast. These souls tempt the weak with promises of power, but make them pawns to carry out the whims of the nefarious.

Luogon, laid low by the Spirit of the Vai, found himself a wraith in this unforgiving land. It was in Khoisan where he seethed for an eternity. A true pariah of two worlds, Luogon was utterly powerless and this truth did not sit well with the Serpent. He decided if he could not rule the physical world, he would overthrow the Dark Kingdom of Ivory, hoard its secrets, and remake the Underworld in his image. However, the Dark Kingdom was too vast and powerful for one wraith to overthrow and rule. In addition, the name of Luogon was mocked and ridiculed in the Dark Kingdom and not respected

or worshipped. In order for his plan to succeed, The Warlord would need to raise an army. The Dark Kingdom would need to be corrupted so much that the link to the physical plane would be severed to save the Dark Kingdom from destruction.

This was no small feat. The Warlord would have to shed his skin like a serpent and reveal a new identity for his armies to deify. He would find his followers in the Shade among wraiths who worked the forges of Kokou. In this fresh skin, the Warlord would come to the wicked and downtrodden as a revolutionary and savior. He would call himself Ijele and fan the smoldering flames of discord that his followers carried in their hearts with promises of a new kingdom where they too would be worshipped for their great deeds. They would be powerful enough to break the shackles of Kokou that they had worn for too long. Their rebellion would be the root of a new story and a new model for the physical world to follow.

With that, the Warlord was no more, and became a mere wisp of smoke that faded into the abyss of forgotten memory. Emerging from the caves of Khoisan stood Ya'Qub the Rebel, who would raise the Veil and deny the physical world access to protect the Dark Kingdom of Ivory.

Ya'Qub found many followers in the Shade. Inspired by their false lord, they called themselves the Order of Ya'Qub. They performed acts of terror to destabilize the natural order of the Dark Kingdom. They infiltrated the various regions of the Dark Kingdom to spread the myth of Ya'Qub. Ya'Qub used what little power he had to pierce the Veil, and he planted seeds of misremembered tales and outright fallacies in the minds of the petty and weak in the physical world. These mortal glory seekers grew troublesome for the defenders of the Dark Kingdom. These would-be conquerors disrespected the unspoken treaty and sullied the Marketplace. The Dark Kingdom had become weary of these interlopers and began to restrict access to Shanga. Ya'Qub brought disorder to harmony and fanned the flames of growing animosity toward the mortals in the Dark Kingdom.

Still, during this time, Ya'Qub and his cult were no match for the Orishas. What the Order of Ya'Qub had in numbers the Orishas more than compensated with the strength derived from faith. Despite the Rebel's machinations, most of the mortals on the continent still believed in their heroes. They still honored the Ancestors. They still practiced the ancient rituals of dance, song, and masquerade. The belief from the physical world made the Orishas nearly invincible. For a time, the Order of Ya'Qub was considered more of a nuisance than a threat to the Dark Kingdom.

However, all of that changed once Europeans stepped foot on the African continent.

## The Dark Kingdom Falls

The mortal year was 1441 CE when they Europeans first arrived in great number.

The Ocean, once the wellspring that nourished the Dark Kingdom, flooded onto the Shore. It was poisoned by the suffering of those who did not survive the journey to the New World. The metaphysical blood they spilled into the Ocean became the ichor attracting the carnivorous Selachii who came in search of hapless wraiths to devour.



These new wraiths arrived on the Shore of the Dark Kingdom frightened, angry, and bitter. They were torn from the lives they knew, packed onto ships like cheap and disposable cargo, and sent to foreign lands to work the fields by harvesting sugar, coffee, and cotton for their captors until death. Separated from their people and their culture, they had no strength to draw upon and no knowledge to share. They wanted nothing to do with the physical world. If they could, they would return to the physical world and take revenge upon their captors and the people who abandoned them.

Their rage would be the fuel for the Order of Ya'Qub's ascension.

The Dark Kingdom became a home to a people who had forgotten who they were. They entered an afterlife that was nothing like the tales they had been told. They were stolen from their homeland, separated from their countrymen, and forbidden to practice their native languages and cultures. With their faith and ceremonies of worship replaced with a perverted version of the lessons brought forth by a carpenter turned prophet, these new wraiths entered a reality that they did not understand and were sorely unprepared to face.

With their knowledge stunted, these wraiths would not find a home in Shanga. Their connection to the Motherland was severed, and they could not find solace in the Bush. They refused to dance in the Mirrorlands because they had no reason to celebrate. The Restless of the enslaved were spiritual refugees in what seemed to be a foreign land. They wore the psychic trauma of the slave trade like a shroud heavier than any chains they wore when alive. These Lost Wraiths found a home in the Shade by working the Forge as though they were as low as the prisoners paying their eternal penance.

The Lost Wraiths resented their perceived place in the Dark Kingdom because they felt they were no better off than when they wore flesh. They thought of the Dark Kingdom as a purgatory rather than the paradise they were promised by their oppressors' book of faith. They demanded a heaven as reward for their life in hell on Earth. They looked for a savior to release them from their imagined bondage.

The Rebel would be their liberator. Ya'Qub found his army.

The Lost Wraiths stormed the Citadel of the Drum where Kokou sat upon his throne. The Orishas were weakened. Stories of their exploits were systematically destroyed by the displacement, subjugation, and attempted erasure of the African people. They were no match for the Order of Ya'Qub. The mighty Kokou fought bravely, but the forces of Ya'Qub soon overwhelmed him. With the destruction of Kokou, the Order of Ya'Qub claimed victory, and the Rebel ascended to the throne of the Drum.

Ya'Qub looked upon his new kingdom and smiled. The Shade was now his. The Forge was under his control and his followers were legion.

The Atunwa was next.

Ya'Qub's army descended upon the Marketplace like a swarm of locusts consuming everything beyond their fill. In an act of desperation, Ellegua fractured into 256 aspects. The paths of the Crossroads leading to Shanga were lost. Ellegua burned the Marketplace in an attempt to protect the remaining lands of the Dark Kingdom from the Order of Ya'Qub.

With the Atunwa's fall, the Dark Kingdom was almost separated from the physical world. The Soga were crushed and Shanga became utterly defenseless. If the Bridge was crossed and Ya'Qub entered the halls of Beit al-Ajail, the entire Dark Kingdom would be lost.

The Queen of the Dead would not allow that possibility to become a reality. She cast out the Elders of Zanzibar and force them to return to the physical world as Risen. Her hope was that they would pass the knowledge held within the Library of Oral Tradition on to future Griots to keep the memory of the Dark Kingdom alive. After all, stories are powerful things. She knew that Ya'Qub would find a way to hunt the Griots, so her last act as Queen of the Dead was to gather the Orishas who survived the raid in the Shade. These survivors were given a new charge and a new title. The Orishas were now the Latigi, Defenders of the Voice. The Latigi, also called the Fists of Truth or Judges, protected the Griots against those who would prefer the truth to be silenced.

The Queen of the Dead now sits on her throne in Shanga in absolute seclusion. No one has seen her in over a century.

## The Shade Becomes "Komboni"

They thought the rebellion would turn the "hell" of the Shade into the "heaven" they were denied while they were alive.

They were wrong. It took them 500 years of civil conflict and feeding the stuff of Restless into the machinery of war to secure and lose territories time and again to realize their constant churn of land and souls was destroying the past.

Ya'Qub was the greatest of false prophets. Feeding off the misery of the Lost Wraiths, Ya'Qub became Master of the Shade. The Order of Ya'Qub became the Rebel's personal guard, his spy network, and overseers of his new kingdom. Wearing black shrouds with pale masks, the Order of Ya'Qub resembled the people who enslaved the Lost Wraiths in life. The Order enforced the rule of the Rebel's law with savage fervor and cruel glee. They looked upon the Lost Wraiths with disdain and used their ignorance of their history to keep them subservient. The inmates ran the asylum, and the Lost Wraiths truly suffered a fate worse than death. They were a people in eternal servitude and beholden to the one that betrayed their trust.

However, the Rebel was not satisfied with ruling only the Shade. Its borders were too small for his ambition. He wanted to open the roads to the other regions that were closed due to Ala's mandate and Ellegua's actions. Though Abuk languished in the Crucible, which was now the prison of the Forge, and there was a tenuous treaty of non-aggression existed between Ya'Qub's realm and Iku's in the Mirrorlands, the Rebel was still denied access to Shanga. Although it was empty, the Library of Oral Tradition still stood. The Crossroads were much more perilous to traverse but still linked the physical world to the Dark Kingdom. And the Nails; among those cursed Nails was one that would give Ya'Qub safe passage through the Crossroads and open the Gates of Shanga.

The Lost Wraiths who worked the Forge find Ya'Qub an even harder taskmaster than Kokou. The Rebel created an armory and stockpiled ammunition for use against the remaining regions of the Dark Kingdom. The Lost Wraiths were tasked to create weapons and tear down the walls separating the regions





and bring the entire Dark Kingdom under Ya'Qub's control. An industrialized armament process that started in the 16th century has never concluded. Although the Dark Kingdom of Ivory attempted a bold stand against the rebellion, the weapons continue to be produced. This great Underworld held fast to heritage and former glories but eventually it fell to Ya'Qub's rebels, with massive losses on both sides.

Those same rebels no longer believed in Ya'Qub as savior, but the war had raged for so long they could find no alternative.

The Shade changed to reflect the world that the Lost Wraiths left behind in their transition to the Underworld. What was once known as the Shade is now called "Komboni" by its residents, who feel deep shame for fighting against their heritage, and name their realm after the slums of Zambia. Out of a mix of respect and fear, they will not call the Shade by its old name, though some of the newest wraiths in the Dark Kingdom call it "the Hood."

At first, Komboni looked like thousands of small war camps and forts scattered around the Dark Kingdom. Slowly, as the Shade weakened and crumbled, those small outposts linked up and built on top of the Shade's rubble. What was once a reflection of the African aesthetic became a nightmare of subsidized public design. In the 1970s, Komboni became a psychic ghetto of broken dreams and little hope. It evolved into back-to-back cities of towering and dilapidated housing projects that blotted out the remaining light of the Dark Kingdom's violaceous skies.

At the center of Komboni stands the Forge, which vomits the clouds of war into the atmosphere. Only the Forge, which still churns out weapons of war, acts as a memorial to the Shade as it was. Burned-out and abandoned homes dot the spaces between the Forge's towers. Komboni smells of piss, shit, and tears; and disillusionment, disgust, and despair. Its wraiths feel the urge to fight for more territory because they believe that just over the horizon is hope, but wherever they go they spread Ya'Qub's endless violence and misery.

Some of the Lost Wraiths embrace the chaos. The wraiths of tyrants, gangsters, dealers, and thieves prey upon their own hoping to gain the Rebel's favor and join the Order of Ya'Qub. Others become so-called leaders impotently screaming for a revolution that would make the oppressed the slave master instead of bringing true change to the system. Then, there are the street corner "prophets" telling half-remembered tales of the One Who Sleeps, a hero from the old days that still gives Ya'Qub pause. Some of the older wraiths speak of the Railroad, which delivers the Lost Wraiths out of the Shade into the fabled city of Shanga. Most of the Lost Wraiths shuffle the streets, work the Forge, and keep their heads down to avoid the Order's wrath. Their efforts are futile because their safety depends on the whims of a system that keeps them crushed under its boot.

But, some of those stories are true, and if one pays attention, they might find that the key to liberation rests in these supposed fictions.



## The Plantation of the Mirrorlands

Ghede saw the writing on the wall. The party was over.

The Crass saw the change in new arrivals coming to the Mirrorlands. They were wraiths of the people who in life were affected by the Great Abduction into slavery. They too were angry. But, they were not as directionless as the Lost Wraiths of Komboni. These wraiths still held onto the old ways. The Loa still spoke to these members of the tribe and granted them comfort and strength in their struggle against tyranny. This connection gave those people the strength to rebel against their enslavers. The flames of revolution in the physical world also fortified the borders of the Mirrorlands. The Mirrorlands took on attributes from other cultures that fell during the European expansion into the New World and the culture of the new wraiths' oppressors.

It was this "gumbo" of differing cultures that gave Ghede an idea. Although the Mirrorlands were better protected from Ya'Qub than Shanga, they would still fall under the Rebel's rule unless certain measures were taken.

As the Army of Ya'Qub turned their attention to the Mirrorlands, Papa Legba, the Council of Ellegua's Mirrorlands aspect, journeyed to the Dark Kingdom of Obsidian. There, he met with Atabey the Fresh Water, Pariacaca the Falcon, and Olemec the Jaguar. He established an alliance with these gods and hid three Nails: one in the Flayed Lands, one on the Islands of Flint, and one in the Lands of Gold. The symbols of Obsidian were etched onto these Nails for protection against Ya'Qub. Only a wraith from the Mirrorlands could hold such a Nail or use it to traverse the Crossroads. These Restless are called Zemi, or the Medicine. No one knows who has the Medicine. Only Papa Legba knows who protects these Nails. Their identities are hidden from everyone, including the other Zemi. Also, finding the Medicine is only part of the puzzle because only Yaperikuli, another member of the Council of Ellegua, knows where the Nails are hidden.

While Legba was absent, parts of the African Mirrorlands fell to a Spectral incursion. Iku ravaged the land with a plague and ended the long party for the laissez-faire wraiths that existed in this Underworld utopia. Despite all he has done, Ya'Qub isn't a servant of Oblivion. Therefore, Ghede struck a bargain with the Army of Ya'Qub. He agreed that the Mirrorlands would acknowledge Ya'Qub as their supreme ruler. As a show of good faith, the wraiths of the Mirrorlands cleared the winding forests and swamps of the Mirrorlands. They took the names of gods that were not theirs and made them their own. The wraiths worked the fields in supposed supplication for Ghede who would rule over them from vast mansions that sat on the hills of the cleared fields, somehow able to move between each without difficulty. The Mirrorlands had become the Plantation, and the Loa became known as the Saints dedicated to spreading the word of Ya'Qub. The Mirrorlands were spared the Rebel's wrath.

The fiction worked.

Ghede learned from his people. He saw the wraiths of the Mirrorlands learned to hide their traditions from their slave masters who wanted supplant their faith. Instead, they took the religion that was forced upon them and merged it with their own. Ghede would

follow that same tactic and hide in plain sight. This bought time to plan, time to gain strength, and time to find the Spirit of the Vai.

Trust is now the most valued commodity in the Mirrorlands, and it is expensive to earn. Everyone has at least two names and four eyes to see from all corners. The spies of Ya'Qub are everywhere. Communication with the physical world happens in secret through the chevats, Houngans, Mambos, Santeras, and Santeros. One careless word could expose the Saints for who they are or pierce the veil of the Plantation. Then, everything would be for naught. It would take a sacrificed chicken, copious amounts of rum, and a fine cigar to loosen the lips of a wraith on the Plantation. Even if one could get a member of Les Invisibles to talk, the information that one receives might not reveal what has been hidden.

This elaborate illusion has spared the Mirrorlands so far, but the embers of revolution still smolder. The young Restless are growing temperamental. They see their brothers and sisters toil in Komboni and wonder why the Mirrorlands stay their hand while others suffer. They think their leaders, the Rada, are too soft.

There is one among them who they have rallied around whose voice is louder than most. Some say that she is the daughter of Kokou, who means to retrieve her father's drum. Some say she knows where the One Who Sleeps is buried and has the means to awaken him and free the Dark Kingdom of Ivory. Other legends say it is this daughter and her quest that will achieve this freedom without the need for any apocryphal wraith to be summoned from Oblivion.

## The Desert

Abuk the Garden is in chains. She is imprisoned in the bowels of the Forge at the center of the Crucible. The Sotunde had been exterminated; the animals that speak to men are all but gone. The Bush has been exploited and strip-mined of its spiritual resources. It has been left barren and consumed by the chaos of Khoisan. The wraiths of child soldiers run rampant across the desolated landscape like packs of wild dogs. Called the Boultingin, these poor and directionless souls are the shock troops of would-be Djinn warlords vying for control of this apocalypse. The Bush has become the Desert, a land of sorrow and regret.

The Desert is also where the Old Ways still endure.

The people of the African Diaspora are resilient, and the wraiths of the Motherland are no different. The Elders of Zanzibar fled to the Bush when Ya'Qub came to Shanga. They claimed the parts of the Bush not consumed by the Desert. They found a people weary but unbroken by hardship. These Restless fought off the Boultingin hordes and made a land of their own. They used the knowledge of Beit al-Ajaib to create a land where trees still grew and rivers still flowed. It is here where the wraiths of the Motherland and the honored dead make their home. This area is called The Oasis of Bantu, which is a series of villages protected by the warrior angels known as Malakia, also called the Sunbirds. The environment around Bantu also protects the Oasis. Surrounded by the harsh environment of high mountains, withering sandstorms and rude beasts, the Desert makes it too dangerous for even the Army of Ya'Qub to cross.



The citizens of Bantu are called to service. There is no rest as they begin a sacred duty to offer up their deeds as inspiration to the living and the dead. All who find themselves in Bantu are drafted into this militia. The drum, the mask, and the dance are their tools of communication. The Nails of the Nkisi are their weapons of choice.

Bantu is the land where seeds of hope have been planted.

They make plans at the Oasis. The scholars have become generals for the liberation of the Dark Kingdom. They have knowledge, and knowledge is power. They have established a network among the other regions of the Dark Kingdom. This network spreads the history of the Dark Kingdom and dispels the lies of the Rebel who sits on a stolen throne. It helps Lost Wraiths that have been awakened by the truth escape from the hell of the Shade. They support the Restless trying to lift the veil of complacency in the Mirrorlands. They call this network the Railroad.

Abuk will be freed and the Bush will flourish once more. The Gates of Shanga will open and the Queen of the Dead will be reunited with her people. The Library will be rebuilt and Ya'Qub will fall. They are confident that they will succeed because one among them knows where the Nail holding the key to the Dark Kingdom of Ivory's freedom exists.

It is in the caves of the Bassa forest, where the Spirit of the Vai sleeps.

## Sankofa: Return of the Ijele



The Dark Kingdom of Ivory is a fallen empire. The Army of Ya'Qub is a virus that has grown into an epidemic and threatens to plunge the Dark Kingdom into the Abyss. Ellegua and Ala had no choice. The body had to die in the hope of preserving the soul.

The citizens of the Dark Kingdom are now a divided people with a common history. Each region is under siege but too weak to combat Ya'Qub's regime alone. They must combine their efforts. The Dark Kingdom of Ivory must not be forgotten.

### The Railroad

All is not good in the Hood.

They've been spotted next to the false prophets shouting distorted scripture on the street corners. They're not like the others, though. There's something different about these wraiths; they have a confidence and pride that has not been seen for a long time in Komboni. These wraiths insist on naming their realm "the Hood." These performers use music as the message. They tell stories about the Dark Kingdom of Ivory, the City of Shanga, and the Marketplace, and how glorious they were. They weave tales of unity among the regions and spread the legend of the One Who Sleeps. They speak with rhyming couplets in time with makeshift drums of tables, steam pipes in the Forge, or tenement walls. The Lost Wraiths call these performers the Books. The Order of Ya'Qub's attempts to discredit and denigrate the Books have yielded little success. The Books are

telling the truth in a language that Komboni understands, and the Hood is listening.

Some of the Lost Wraiths are now starting to question their fate. The younger ones are getting bolder in their critique of the Ya'Qub regime. They fear the Order of Ya'Qub less with each passing day. The Forge now represents a corrupt system rather than a beacon of salvation. Protests are now a common occurrence and the march to war slows to a crawl.

These Lost Wraiths are tired of being slaves. Abuk the Garden has become a symbol of their freedom while she languishes in the Crucible. These restless souls have joined a network representing the remaining regions of the Dark Kingdom. They are ideological kin to the Followers of Petro and long to walk in the Oasis of Bantu. They are the resistance that means to cause great mischief. These dissidents challenge the rule of Ya'Qub. They fight for the day that the Gates of Shanga open again so that they can walk its streets, and look upon the Queen of the Dead and bask at her majesty.

Now, it is the Rebel who feels the sickness of dissent as it grows in his kingdom's belly.

This illness calls itself the Railroad.

### Can it be Saved?

There are times when chaos brings clarity.

Ellegua learned this truth after fracturing his essence. 256 different voices with 256 points of view brought the plight of the Dark Kingdom into sharp focus. The Dark Kingdom of Ivory needed to fall. It had grown soft and weighed down by its own majesty. In order for the Dark Kingdom of Ivory to stay relevant, it needed to become the stuff of legend. The truth was painful to admit, but the honesty of this truth revealed what must be done.

When Ellegua destroyed the Nkisi, he destroyed the thing that united the lands of the Dark Kingdom. From the Railroad to the Followers of Petro to the Oasis of Bantu, there are now too many factors at play. Although they share the same root goal, their methods are disjointed and often come into conflict with each other. Their growing petty squabbles distract them from the true enemy. The Order of Ya'Qub is infiltrating the differing factions and causing further distrust and confusion. The liberation of Abuk will not solve this problem. The Dark Kingdom of Ivory has been forever changed and old solutions have become obsolete.

The Council of Ellegua agree. The Dark Kingdom of Ivory needs a new story. It needs an ancient symbol wearing new robes for the factions of the Dark Kingdom to respect. It needs a new legend with a familiar tune to shake the resolve of the Rebel and his forces.

When the Nkisi was destroyed and the Nails were scattered across the Dark Kingdom, Ellegua the First Aspect kept one Nail for himself. This was the first Nail thrust into the Nkisi; the first settled dispute that unified the people of the Dark Kingdom. This will be the Nail given to one who has been touched by the Dark Kingdom. They will enter the Crossroads and survive the Crucible. They will pierce the veil of the Plantation and travel the Desert to drink at the Oasis. They will die and rise wielding the Sword of Chikede as their sign of office. They will bring order to the Dark Kingdom and open the Gates of Shanga.









# The Dark Kingdoms of the Americas

**T**he Americas. The Flayed Lands. Mighty lands of Obsidian, Flint, and Gold. All of them were reduced to ash in an orgy of avarice. Deathlords whisper cautionary tales to their Legions, Heretics weep under the weight of their sins, and renegades mutter accusations and denials in the same breath. The story of Oblivion is the story of the Flayed Lands because few Restless have felt its fury with greater intimacy.

## Smoking Mirror — The Dark Kingdom of Obsidian

*“Broken spears lie in the roads;  
We have torn our hair in grief.  
The houses are roofless now, and their walls  
are red with blood.”*

— Elegy for Tenochtitlan

### History

**T**he civilizations of Mesoamerica rise and fall in an endless cycle of birth and destruction. In the beginning, there were the Olmecah. They fanned the embers of civilization and gave writing, artistry, and faith to those that followed them. Then came the wrath

known as Mixcoatl, who was the first of the Mesoamerican dead. He was a king in life who became a king in death by founding the House of the Werejaguar to care for the Olmecah. Mixcoatl and his house protected the living from the vagaries of weather, war, and the early manifestations of Oblivion. His reign was long and his word unquestioned, but Oblivion would have its due. The Olmecah fell, and Mixcoatl retreated to the darkness from whence he came.

Without their master, the House of the Werejaguar fell into disarray. The Maya, Teotihuacan, Toltecan, and others came and went, but not without depositing their culture and their dead in to the Underworld. The newly dead would not bow to the Werejaguar’s authority, and the Underworld knew war. Ancient as they were, not even the Werejaguar could defeat all of the newcomers, so they forged an uneasy truce and created the Obsidian Council. Together, they carved new realms out of the Tempest, the greatest of which was Nahui-Ollin (“Earthquake Sun”), which was named after the fifth and final age of the Mexihcah cosmic cycle.

Unknown to the Obsidian Council, covetous eyes watched them from across the Tempest. Exiled from Stygia, the Fishers fled to the Far Shore realm of Paradise. Paradise’s golden streets and alabaster towers were thronged with refugees and drowning under the endless deluge of souls. Seeking a solution, the Fishers’ Archbishop turned his attention to rumors of a distant land that was untouched by Stygia. He was inspired by these rumors, and decided that the Fishers



would forge a new land known as Nova Paradisum that would surpass Stygia.

The Obsidian Council received word from the coast. A handful of wooden ships thronged with strange wraiths and skin-ridden mortals were approaching by sea, and they were followed by many more in the Shadowlands. A thousand golden ships disgorged an endless horde of Fisher soldiers and crusader-knights and their Renegade allies.

The war raged for almost a century with no quarter. The invaders' early advances were stalled when Ix Chel organized a massive counterattack with fresh armies that were culled from the endless tide of native plague victims pouring across the Shroud. Relentless ferocity and seemingly limitless reinforcements heartened the Obsidian forces as they pushed the invaders back to their fortified capital at Vera Cruz. Heretic and Renegade alike were stretched to the breaking point before their unique advantages began to turn the tide in their favor: Crusader-knights armed with Stygian steel, barghests, night-black warhorses, Artifact blades wreathed in golden flame, and the odd relic firearm or cannon blunted Ix Chel's assault. The death of their mortal priests and followers denied valuable Pathos to the Obsidian wraiths, and the flow of reinforcements from the living world slowed to a trickle as the great plagues ran their course. The Heretics and their allies conquered the Necropoli of Mesoamerica one by one and forced the Obsidian Restless back to Nahui-Ollin. The Fishers' golden-hulled treasure galleons carried mountains of captured souls and plunder back to Paradise.

The siege of Nahui-Ollin dragged on for ages. Its shores were bombarded by golden men-of-war while its skies filled with angelics of fearsome power. The last remnants of resistance were about to collapse when Ix Chel's death triggered the Third Great Maelstrom. Nahui-Ollin shook with incredible violence, and its streets shattered and its great temples crumbled to the ground. Great waves swallowed the Heretic fleet as the stars themselves seemed to fall from the sky in the form of the tzitzimemeh, which are horrifying skull-faced Doomshades with iron claws and insatiable hunger. The tzitzimemeh tore through invader and native alike. They fanned out on pyroclastic winds that choked the Lands of Obsidian and consumed all before them. In that moment, the Flayed Lands were born.

The Maelstrom scoured the invaders from the face of the Flayed Lands, which broke the power of Paradise for centuries and left only desperate survivors that were protected by the mightiest Artifacts in places like Veracruz, Tlaxcala, and St. Augustine. The Obsidian dead retreated to the darkness of Mictlan and wept as their former kingdoms burned. Centuries passed, and Mictlan slowly became a dark reflection of Nahui-Ollin's former glory. In time, a new set of invaders came to the Flayed Lands and found a shattered land that was tainted by Oblivion and filled with horrors. Inch by painful inch, the invaders claimed the land for their own, taking every Byway and Necropolis while the four houses watched from the darkness. Today, the land above is a chaotic realm where Renegades and

Heretics vie for power with the Hierarchy and its agents, while deep beneath them the Fifth Sun rises anew.

## Mictlan

Mictlan is the last refuge of the Dark Kingdom of Obsidian. Located deep beneath the remains of Nahui-Ollin, Mictlan was carved out of the bedrock of the Tempest by the mighty Restless Mictlantecuhtli and Mictlancihuatl. Both wraiths are extremely proficient in the arts of Argos and managed to cloak all of Mictlan with a potent variant of Enshroud. Mictlan consists of a vast central cavern housing the Obsidian Palace of Mictlantecuhtli and Mictlancihuatl and the chambers of the Obsidian Council. Four caverns branch from the central chamber in alignment with the cardinal directions of the Mexihcah universe, each of them glittering darkly in the light of flickering soulfire crystals.

Mictlantecuhtli and Mictlancihuatl rule the central cavern of Mictlan from their ebon palace, and their fearsome skeletal forms invite no defiance. They monitor the comings and goings of new wraiths, provide asylum to those fleeing the other houses, supervise Mictlan's defense, and mediate disputes between the houses. Mictlancihuatl spent centuries perpetuating reverence to the dead of Mexico through her subtle manipulation of mortals by allowing her agents to scour the Shadowlands during the Day of the Dead to harvest its bounty. Her palace overflows with fragrant marigolds, sugar skulls, and offerendas of all shapes and sizes. This bounty is the showcase of the royal couple's frequent galas. The central cavern is home to a vast ballcourt of polished obsidian where great wagers are placed on the outcome of the games. Few know of the ball courts lesser-known ability to provide the royal couple's servants safe passage between Mictlan, the Skinlands, and the Tempest. Mictlantecuhtli spends his days maintaining the defense of the city and regulates access to it through the only passage (beyond the ball court) that leads to the Tempest above. Travel to Mictlan involves a fearsome journey through nine levels of deadly traps modeled after the Mexihcah Underworld for those who do not have Mictlantecuhtli's permission to enter the city. Mictlan's royal couple seem content to rule from their palace and are disinterested in the politics of the four houses, but there is gossip that they have a more sinister nature or are one individual whose Shadow and Psyche have split in to two separate beings. Whatever the answer, everyone in Mictlan requires their services at some point and actively court their favor.

## Fifth Sun Rising — The Four Houses Today

The four houses have not been idle since the Flaying. The vast web of interconnected Necropoli and Tempest-cities they once ruled have been reduced to Spectre-haunted ruins whose temples are wreathed in barrow-flame. So, they have spent the past five centuries expanding the caverns and darkened vaults of Mictlan to accommodate new temples, palaces, ball courts, and storehouses. Their members have learned new Arcanoi and mastered techniques of harvesting Pathos from the living



in addition to establishing outposts throughout Mesoamerica. Though they seldom agree on much, the houses are unanimous in their desire to recapture their former glory.

The houses' greatest challenge is recruitment. Most mortals have long forgotten the faith of their ancestors, but the cultural influence of the Flayed Lands is remembered fondly throughout Mesoamerica. The Hierarchy, Renegades, and Heretics absorb the lion's share of *Enfant* wraiths, but the wraiths of the Flayed Lands are extremely patient and more than capable of finding those rare few who are susceptible to their call.

### The House of the Werejaguar

Ancient and powerful, the House of the Werejaguar was always the voice of unity on the Obsidian Council until *Mixcoatl's* loss reduced them to listless Shadows of their former grandeur. The Werejaguar seat on the Council remained vacant for centuries until *Eight Deer* claimed leadership. His impassioned speeches breathed new life into the Werejaguar as he set his plan into motion. His first act was to proclaim himself the voice of *Mixcoatl*, who is the patron god of the Otomi and Chichimecah. Meeting representatives of both peoples in secret, his arguments proved convincing. In an unprecedented step, the Otomi and Chichimecah abandoned their former allegiance to *Itzamna* for formal induction into the House of the Werejaguar. Many thought of reprisal, but *Eight Deer* is well over two millennia old, accompanied by an entourage of Otomi and Chichimecah guards Moliated into the form of werejaguars, and armed with an ax of True Jade.

*Eight Deer's* second act was to lead scouting parties to recover the ancient heritage of the Werejaguar. A master of Argos, he helped the Chichimecah recover death steeds that were abandoned by the Heretics so that the Werejaguar could range far into the Tempest and recover potent Olmecah Artifacts, such as True Jade soulfire masks or enigmatic jade cylinders etched with the secrets of lost Arcanoi. One such cylinder granted *Eight Deer* the ability to summon forth the ancient Werejaguar gaunts who chose to slumber in the colossal basalt heads that were seeded throughout Olmecah territory after the fall of their people. Three were called forth from *Tres Zapotes* and *La Cobata*, and they dramatically strengthened the house.

*Eight Deer* then took his boldest action to date: the reclamation of the ancient Olmecah capital of *La Venta*. Long designated by the Hierarchy as too costly to claim, *La Venta* Necropolis was a Spectre-overrun nightmare. *Eight Deer* led a force composed almost entirely of Werejaguar gaunts into the city. They annihilated its Spectral population, reclaimed its Artifacts, and woke 10 additional Werejaguar gaunts from the colossal heads located there.

Emboldened by his success, *Eight Deer* has extended offers of friendship and unity to the other houses, but they remain skeptical. *Xipi Totec* and *Ix Chel* suspect that *Eight Deer* seeks to claim the throne of a reborn *Nahui-Ollin*, and *Itzamna* remains resentful over the loss of the Otomi and Chichimecah. Regardless, *Eight Deer* seeks to reclaim the

House of the Werejaguar's position as the first house among the Obsidian dead.

### The House of Ix Chel

Similar to the House of the Werejaguar, the House of *Ix Chel* is an ancient and storied house predominantly composed of gaunts drawn from the sweep of Mayan history. Unfortunately, the comparison to the Werejaguar ends there. Although there are enough ancient Mayans to check the power of the Werejaguar, they are disorganized at the best of times. Something of a rogues gallery, the *Ix Chel* is a magnificent collection of lords and paupers who compete for the scraps of their once great people.

Heirs to some of the greatest accomplishments in the Mayan Underworld, House *Ix Chel* has a history stretching back for millennia. It carved a network of roads and Byways through the Tempest that connected innumerable city-states, which provided safe travel throughout the Flayed Lands and beyond. The city-states of the *Ix Chel* stood proudly in the darkness of the Tempest, with each one constructed around an onyx pyramid with nine levels that represented the layers of the Mayan Underworld. Each pyramid was surmounted by a temple and surrounded by lavishly painted palaces, sub-temples, marketplaces, a ball court, and thoroughfares of polished obsidian. Masters of Argos, *Ix Chel* pushed deep into the Tempest, where it mapped the caves and cenotes they found along the rivers of death and used them to explore the upper levels of the Labyrinth. They also wove powerful Arcanoi into their ball courts as symbolic gateways between worlds, which allowed them to travel between the Shadowlands, Tempest, and Skinlands with ease. Endless trains of porters traversed the Tempest, and the marketplaces of *Ix Chel* overflowed with relics and Artifacts from the other houses and lands to the south.

*Ix Chel's* success was marred by the petty wars, intrigues, and squabbles of the great kings and councils that ruled each state. *Ix Chel* politics became an almost incomprehensible web of intrigue and ever-shifting alliances as their kings' loyalties changed with the wind. This chaos ended when the gaunt known as *Ix Chel* took her seat on the Obsidian Council. Through sheer force of will, she managed to weld her people into a unified force and cast aside all opposition. It was this same determination that led her to defend the Flayed Lands with unmitigated fury until she perished in the Lands of Gold.

The House of *Ix Chel* led the defense of the Flayed Lands and took astonishing casualties as a result. The survivors largely consisted of the broken or those lords who abandoned *Ix Chel* upon her departure for the Lands of Gold. It has taken centuries to replenish their ranks by drawing recruits mostly from Maya who died after the Maelstrom or the indigenous Maya communities that survived the conquest. The *Ix Chel* have coalesced around 12 lords and their courts. Each court is ruled by a mighty gaunt, who is attended by a host of courtiers, warriors, priests, and merchants. Relations between the 12 are unstable at best, and no single lord has managed to



permanently assume the title of Ix Chel; instead, the holder of the Ix Chel seat on the Obsidian Council changes yearly. Most of the 12 lords spend their time intriguing, beautifying their corner of Mictlan, or wagering on ball games. Others have taken a more active interest in external affairs, and the foremost among them is the wraith Ek Chuah (“black scorpion”), who is named after the Maya god of merchants and travelers. Ek Chuah has an uncanny ability to navigate the Tempest (and possibly the Labyrinth) and is seldom seen without a spear of True Obsidian and a pack filled with lost relics. Ek Chuah’s entire body is black from his use of Argos, and his followers assume the same unique tint. Ek Chuah and his followers use their unique talents to map the shattered roads, Byways, and city-states of the Flayed Lands in hope of restoring their former dominance. These efforts recently bore fruit with the revelation that Xibalba, a massive Mayan city in the Tempest, still exists and is ruled by the Spectre of Itzamna.

### The House of Xipi Totec

The House of Xipi Totec consists of the Mexihcah and those subject peoples who have not joined the Itzamna. The Xipi Totec was among the foremost defenders of the Dark Kingdom of Obsidian and inflicted dizzying casualties on the invaders before it fell. Unified in purpose but not in leadership, it will either rise to take its place as leader of the Obsidian Council or destroy itself in the process.

Xipi Totec is a populous house with numerous advantages. Many of their original members were held in reserve for Ix Chel’s planned counterattack and managed to retreat to Mictlan before the Maelstrom destroyed them. It has also been highly successful in recruiting new Restless by taking advantage of the large amount of its cultural heritage that still exists in Mexico.

The house has been very industrious in adapting to the new metaphysical landscape by learning to harvest Pathos from the living and using Usury to capture Pathos from sacrificed drones and Spectres in objects of quartz, jade, and stone. Its artisans are some of the foremost creators of Pathos jewelry behind the Itzamna, which allows the house to reap great profits from the Pathos trade.

The house is organized along the lines of the Mexihcah Triple Alliance, with Xipi Totec himself assuming the title of Huey Tlatoani (“Great Speaker”). He is the emperor of the Mexihcah dead. A trio of powerful gaunts who form Xipi Totec’s cabinet assume the guise of “the four Tezcatlipocas” or creators of the universe, which are Xipi Totec, Huitzilopochtli, Quetzalcoatl, and Tezcatlipoca.

Xipi Totec has the honor of being the only member of the original Obsidian Council to survive the Flaying. Representing the god of rebirth, Xipi Totec survived his destruction Harrowing and discarded his normal attire of rotting Spectre Corpora for the appearance of a golden-skinned youth. Xipi Totec commands the loyalty of most of his house, including most of the commoners, through a combination of shrewd politics, carefully allotted rewards, and naked force. In his aspect as a deity of war, Xipi

Totec re-dons the rotting Corpora and inflicts horrifying plagues on those who defy him. He also stages gladiatorial sacrifices that pit outsiders and traitors against the finest warriors of his house in return for their freedom. Balancing the interests of his fragmented house against the weight of his failure during the Flaying has forced Xipi Totec into a daily battle against his Shadow, which makes it hard to maintain his position without making a mistake that will cost him his turquoise crown.

Huitzilopochtli assumes the aspect of the Mexihcah god of war and claims dominion over professional warriors and women who die in childbirth. His faction is small but diverse, and it includes Mexihcah knights, cartel enforcers, and Mexican Federal Police. Huitzilopochtli aggressively advocates the ouster of the Hierarchy from the Flayed Lands and the House of Xipi Totec’s right to rule the Obsidian dead. While Xipi Totec controls the greater mass of warriors available to the house, Huitzilopochtli retains control over the cuauhtli (“Eagle Warriors”). Equipped with weapons of True Obsidian and a panoply of relic eagle feathers and helmets, the cuauhtli strike out into the Tempest, guard important members of the house, destroy those who tarry too close to Mictlan, and capture Spectres for sacrifice. The last of those duties has made the cuauhtli some of the foremost Doomslayers in Mictlan.

Huitzilopochtli’s ventures outside Mictlan put him into contact with Tlaloc, who is an ancient and powerful gaunt who created a paradisiacal Far Shore realm of lush vegetation and eternal spring called Tlalocan. Claiming dominion over those who die of lightning strikes, drowning, and waterborne afflictions, Tlaloc’s mastery over storms and formidable army protected Tlalocan from the Flaying. Huitzilopochtli intends to conclude a treaty with Tlaloc so that they can claim leadership over his house, an offer Tlaloc is contemplating very seriously.

Quetzalcoatl represents wind, light, education, justice, and the priesthood. He is the high priest and archivist of the House of Xipi Totec and seeks to maintain civilization and knowledge in the face of Oblivion. He is the patron of the great calmecac (“religious school”) in Mictlan, where he trains new generations of priests for his house and captures the knowledge of his people in painted codices. Quetzalcoatl is very active in the living world and sends dreams to the Quick to inspire them to embrace their Mexihcah heritage. He is also the wraith who is least offended by the idea of forging an alliance with the Hierarchy against the Renegades and Heretics in an effort to return the House of Xipi Totec to its rightful place of honor. Quetzalcoatl has taken the controversial step of slowly reaching out to low-ranking members of the Hierarchy and free wraiths to prosecute tasks beyond his purview, such as salvaging Fisher galleons filled with Mexihcah Relics and Artifacts that sank during the Maelstrom or were captured by Renegade pirate. He also wants to reclaim relic codices that were burned by the Spaniards. He keeps a close eye on Xipi Totec out of fear that he might soon reach the point of Catharsis. To this end, he seeks to gain Xipi Totec’s trust so that Xipi Totec will submit to proper Castigation.



Tezcatlipoca (“Smoking Mirror”) represents the god of night, sorcery, and warfare. He is a master of Fatalism and little is hidden from his Artifact obsidian mirror. He is the patron of the Telpochcalli (“school for commoners”) and is a firm believer in advancement through conflict. Tezcatlipoca has little interest in ruling his house but seeks to guarantee that the holder of the seat is worthy of the position. He observes Xipi Totec with great interest and will enthusiastically support him if he can master his Shadow without assistance. To that end, Tezcatlipoca intends to reveal to Xipi Totec that Quetzalcoatl has contact with outsiders if Quetzalcoatl gets close to Castigating him. He is greatly interested in Huitzilopochtli’s dealings with Tloloc, but is content to observe from afar for now.

Tezcatlipoca’s mastery over Arcanoi extends to a number of the Dark Arcanoi used by Spectres. He employs them to train his elite ocelotl (“Jaguar Warriors”) in the arts of helldiving. He tasks them with eliminating high-profile Spectres, wringing the Labyrinth of its secrets, and clandestinely observing members of the other houses.

### The House of Itzamna

Founded by a Mayan gaunt of the same name, House Itzamna serves to balance the power of Xipi Totec and is home to wraiths who do not easily fit into the ranks of the other houses.

Itzamnan membership includes a multitude of Mesoamerican cultures, such as Maya, Mixtec, and Tepanec Restless who are not affiliated with Ix Chel or Xipi Totec; Tarascans; Zapotecs; Toltecs; wraiths from Teotihuacan; and a host of smaller factions old and new. Like their fellow houses, the leaders of the Itzamna had a difficult time coming to any sort of consensus after the loss of their founder, so they formed a governing council composed of a single representative from each faction. Disorder reigned until the recent election of Siyaj K’ak’ of Teotihuacan.

Siyaj K’ak’ is a powerfully built gaunt that affects a pure obsidian mask that crackles with barely contained power. Siyaj K’ak’ saw the rise of Eight Deer and the ease with which he stole away the Otomi and Chichimecah as a wakeup call for his house. To that end, Siyaj K’ak’ assumed the reins of power and set himself to the formidable task of organizing the diverse and disorganized wraiths that make up his people.

As the largest house with the most diverse membership, the Itzamna embraces new people and ideas with greater ease than their fellows. Siyaj K’ak’ established outposts throughout the Shadowlands to locate new wraiths and personally introduces newly Reaped Enfants to the brilliant burgundy temples and other wonders of the Itzamna-ruled caverns in Mictlan. Most Enfants are carefully selected prior to extending them an offer of membership, so they often accept with enthusiasm. Those that do not accept the offer are introduced to the darker side of the Itzamna: They become fodder for its forges.

The Itzamna hosts some of the finest metalworkers, lapidaries, and stonemasons. Itzamna forges produce items of exquisite quality and brilliance, such as masks of copper, gold, and jade;





feather cloaks; and a riotous panoply of decorative weapons, armor, and jewelry. These items include weapons and soulfire masks forged of True Obsidian, True Jade, and True Turquoise, although their manufacture is arduous and time-consuming. The Itzamna profits greatly from trade in these items.

Siyaj K'ak's immediate objective is to weld his people into a cohesive whole and recruit new members to compensate for the loss of the Otomi and Chichimecah. He guards against future loss of the house's membership by lavishly rewarding his loyal followers while slowly transforming the Itzamna caverns into a fantastical place of colorful temples, majestic palaces, and monuments to former and future glory. Like the Werejaguar, new life and purpose are seeping into the Itzamna, but only time will tell if Siyaj K'ak' can weld the vast constellation of Itzamna wraiths into a single rising star.

## Oblivion in the Flayed Lands

Oblivion holds great sway in the Flayed Lands. The Hierarchy patrols them in large numbers and seldom leaves its fortified Necropoli without good reason or significant force. The sky still crackles with the faded afterimage of the Third Great Maelstrom, and regional storms are frequent. The Tempest is jumbled mass of broken roads and Byways that lead to half-submerged Necropoli filled with burning temples. Deeper still is the Labyrinth, which has taken on the unhealthy cast of the four prior worlds of the Mexihcah dead. Doomshades in the form of obsidian jaguars, feral monkeys, and terrifying tzitzimemeh prowl the depths, and hurricane-force winds, fiery rain, great floods, and terrifying earthquakes occasionally bubble to the surface. Below are a handful of the largest locations lost to Oblivion in the Flayed Lands.

## Nahui-Ollin — "Earthquake Sun"

The former capital of the Obsidian Restless and seat of the Obsidian Council, Nahui-Ollin was once the greatest accomplishment of the Obsidian dead. Divided into four great quarters, Nahui-Ollin was a sprawling metropolis that was filled with soaring temples that were stuccoed white with the plasm of captive drones and painted a dozen vibrant hues. Its broad thoroughfares and canals offered access to a thousand diversions, and its marketplaces were thronged with trade from across the Americas. Temples filled with painted codices captured the wisdom of the Obsidian dead, and the city even boasted a vast zoo and botanical garden with strange specimens from across the Underworld. Surrounded by the Sunless Sea on all sides, Nahui-Ollin was accessible only by canoe or by the three great causeways carved out of the Tempest, which lead to Xibalba, the Lands of Flint, and the Lands of Gold.

The Heretic siege and the Great Maelstrom that followed reduced Nahui-Ollin to a nightmare realm of shattered temples and empty streets that echo with cries of the tzitzimemeh as they stalk their prey. Much of the city is flooded or covered with oily ash, and its streets and causeways are rent by Nihils that

glow and hiss with the light of Oblivion. The canals bubble with tar-like Angst that reflects the unholy light of the balefire that ravages the city's great temples. The Hierarchy declared Nahui-Ollin beyond salvation and placed it off limits as a sad reminder of a once great people. However, this restriction does not dissuade treasure hunters from entering the city, but few return with more than tales of horror.

## Xibalba — "Place of Fright"

Xibalba is the greatest Tempest realm that was created by the House of Ix Chel, and it was rivaled only by the likes of Nahui-Ollin and Hanan Pacha in the Lands of Gold. Xibalba endured a long siege by the Heretics but had not yet fallen when the Third Great Maelstrom struck due to the valiant efforts of Itzamna, who was left in charge by Ix Chel when she travelled south. The Maelstrom hit Xibalba with such intensity that it shattered the very physics of the Underworld there and drove Itzamna mad with grief; it destroyed his Psyche and transformed him into Hun-Came ("One Death"), Spectre Lord of Xibalba. Itzamna remade Xibalba in the image of Oblivion by transforming its former grandeur into a monument to darkness.

Itzamna quickly learned that Xibalba was trapped somewhere between the layers of the Tempest in a semi-permanent state of Harrowing. He could harm only those wraiths who directly attacked his person or the Spectres under his care, but he was not prevented from subjecting visitors to various deadly challenges. Itzamna surrounded his kingdom with numerous perils to dissuade casual intrusion and filled the city with various traps, including stone houses that instantly plunge all who enter into the deadliest of Harrowings. The truly bold can challenge Itzamna's court to a match in the great ball court of Xibalba, which is the greatest Artifact of the Mayan dead. It can transport the winning team deep into Mitnal (the Mayan Labyrinth), offer them unique protection against Mitnal's perils and its Spectres. Once they are transported, there is no guarantee of escape, but the rewards are easily as great as the risk.

## Mitnal

Ruled by a nameless Onceborn often referred to as Yum Cimil, Kisin, Ah-Puch, or a multitude of other names, Mitnal is the Labyrinth of the Mayan dead. Located deep beneath Xibalba, Mitnal is a place of pestilential fumes so potent that they can abrade a wraith's Corpus with the strength of a Maelstrom. Only those wraiths protected by powerful Artifacts, Arcanoi, or winning a victory in a ball game in Xibalba can enter Mitnal with even the remotest chance of survival. Yum Cimil or his ubiquitous owl-like Doomshades often confront the Restless as they wander Mitnal. His Doomshades prowl aimlessly through the darkness seeking wraiths to Moliate into new and horrifying shapes. Yum Cimil rages against the upper world and caused earthquakes so powerful that entire Mayan cities were dragged deep into Mitnal, and their treasures are there for intrepid wraiths to take. Many have tried to take this wealth, but the



last thing most intruders hear is the tinkling of the bells tied in Yum Cimil's hair and brief flash of his skeletal form.

## Balance

The events of the Third Great Maelstrom were terrifying to behold, especially to Mixcoatl. After his failure with the Olmecah, he shepherded his people for centuries so that they could grow, thrive, and meet their challenges on their own terms. This state existed for millennia until the arrival of the Third Great Maelstrom. Mixcoatl emerged from captivity and used all his accumulated might to calm the storm and tempered it enough to save a fraction of his people. Although he was successful, his Shadow was torn from his being and flung deep into the Labyrinth where it went mad.

Mixcoatl's Shadow dubbed itself "Tezcatlipoca," and assumed his position among the most powerful of the Shadow-eaten in the Flayed Lands. Tezcatlipoca quickly set himself to undoing the efforts of his Psyche because he believed Mixcoatl was the ancient Feathered Serpent of his people, who is often referred to as "Quetzalcoatl" by young wraiths. Tezcatlipoca became the destruction to Mixcoatl's creation and the chaos to Mixcoatl's order. He focused his efforts on places that were sacred to the Feathered Serpent by rendering Tula, San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan, and La Venta so fell that not even the Hierarchy would assail them. The recent awakening of Mixcoatl from his long slumber after the Flaying has initiated an elaborate game of chess between Mixcoatl and Tezcatlipoca with The Flayed Lands as their prize. Mixcoatl's first move was to give Eight Deer the jade cylinder that he used to liberate San Lorenzo. Mixcoatl awaits Tezcatlipoca's response.

## Eyes in the Forest — The Islands of Flint



Records of the so called "Dark Kingdom of Flint" are culled from the fragmentary reports of Renegades and Heretics that disagree on the fine details of almost any subject. What is known is that the native wraiths of North America are not or have ever been a monolithic force. Instead, they are a dizzying collection of bands, tribes, nations, kingdoms, and confederations, each with their own unique culture, government, and objectives.

## History

The Heretics and Renegades that first arrived in North America were much more diverse and disorganized than their Fisher cousins to the South. They expected to find an untamed land where they could carve out petty kingdoms of their own far from the Hierarchy's cloying grasp. What they found was a continent filled with unique peoples and their dead. The first wave of new arrivals made contact in a dozen different ways.

Some forged alliances, others traded, and others made war. New alliances were forged between the Islands of Flint in response to the interlopers, which were strained to the breaking when the Third Great Maelstrom struck.

Screaming up from the south, the Maelstrom scoured three-quarters of the Flint Restless from the face of North America during its initial eruption and many more afterward. The survivors resolved to protect themselves against similar storms and the European wraiths who would surely return. When the Maelstrom abated, the Lands of Flint rebuilt and fortified their islands in the Tempest against the day they would need them again. New waves of wraiths arrived from the east, inaugurating a dizzying series of alliances, trade compacts, and brushfire wars as both sides prosecuted their interests against each other and the Spectres that lingered in the Maelstrom's wake. A state of rough equilibrium lasted for over a century until the Hierarchy's legendary Fifth Legion landed in New Amsterdam.

The Fifth Legion and its auxiliaries conquered Necropolis after Necropolis and forced the surviving Renegades and Heretics west until they went to ground or were pushed into the sea. Many Flint wraiths fought and died valiantly with their Renegade and Heretic allies, but most sensed a change in the Tempest and retreated to the Islands of Flint. The Hierarchy has never been comfortable with their inability to account for the seeming lack of indigenous wraiths in North America, but the staggering cost of their conquest of the Americas has convinced them to table the question for now.

## The Five Nations

The predominant Islands of Flint are a loose confederation of five power blocs called the Five Nations that were forced to work together against the arriving European wraiths and the Maelstroms to follow. These blocs consist of the Haudenosaunee Nation, the Council of Tribes, the Cherokee Nation, the People of Peace, and the Inuktitut. These blocs bore the brunt of Stygian intrusion into North America.

### The Haudenosaunee Nation - The Iroquois

The Haudenosaunee ("people of the longhouse") are often referred to as the "Iroquois," and they consist of a league of five (and later six) powerful nations that haunted the New York and Pennsylvania area when the Heretics arrived. The Haudenosaunee forced the new arrivals to become allies or vanish into the night until they received astonishing casualties at the hand of the Third Great Maelstrom, which provided the European Restless an opportunity to claim substantial territory before the Haudenosaunee recovered.

The Haudenosaunee believe untended grief caused by the loss of a family member leads to madness and spiritual weakness. The Maelstrom deaths deeply grieved the Haudenosaunee, so they struck out in every direction and initiated "mourning wars" for over a century to replenish their ranks. These captives and a flood of dead whom died from smallpox balanced the scales



against the European wraiths. The Haudenosaunee became the northeastern gatekeepers of the Flint dead, and they forged alliances and made war as they pleased.

This situation lasted until their first battle with the Fifth Legion. The Haudenosaunee went to the aid of their beleaguered allies in New Amsterdam. Although they fought bravely, they sustained heavy losses. Horrified by an army whose sole purpose was utter destruction, the Haudenosaunee withdrew to the Tempest and joined the Five Nations.

The Haudenosaunee occupy a heavily forested region of the Tempest whose tortuous Byways are nearly impossible for outsiders to navigate. Concealed within these Byways are the six islands of the Haudenosaunee, with each one hosting a single nation. The nations are self-governing but form a league known as the “Haudenosaunee Confederacy,” which is composed of the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora peoples. Each nation is further broken down into a series of matriarchal clans with Clan Mothers who appoint the chief of each clan. Each clan chief in turn travels to Onondaga, their capital island, where they convene a Grand Council to resolve intra-nation disputes and decide matters that affect the confederacy as a whole.

Clans live in villages composed of longhouses surrounded by a formidable palisade of stakes forged from Moliated Spectres. Warriors who are equipped with bows, war clubs, and wampum-decorated weapons worked with powerful Arcanoi guard these palisades at all times as they watch for Maelstroms. Each village has a “False Face Society,” which is a group of medicine men who can ward away Spectres and bind them into the wood of a tree growing along the River of Death. These medicine men carve their faces into wooden masks of great power. They also tend to the spiritual needs of their people by healing Corpus and spirit with great effect.

The Haudenosaunee are not prone to internal conflict and never cease to expand. In addition to the slow trickle of Haudenosaunee souls that cross the Shroud, the Haudenosaunee have reignited their mourning wars. They Reap wraiths from the surrounding nations and the Shadowlands in daring raids where they strike quickly and then vanish into the Tempest. This situation has not gone unnoticed by the Hierarchy.

The Haudenosaunee protect their land with great vigilance, but raids by the forces of Oblivion are not uncommon. Warriors who die in battle often return as Spectres to haunt their former clans. The Byways of the region are plagued with Spectral river serpents, and local Maelstroms vent unusual Spectres in the form of flying heads that spew raw Angst or fearsome “stone coats” that stand 12 feet tall and have skin harder than iron. The stone coats are nearly impossible to defeat without mystical weapons, and only the most formidable heroes or False Faces can confront them with any hope of success.

### Anishinaabe – The People of Peace

In ancient times, the Anishinaabe inhabited Wabanahkik (“Land of the Dawn”) along the northeastern Atlantic coast.

They were instructed by seven Miigis, who are humanlike beings of stunning radiance. In time, the Miigis returned to the sea, but prophesized that the Anishinaabe must migrate west or lose their culture to the peoples to come. The Anishinaabe traveled west to settle on “Turtle Islands” in the Great Lakes region, which were marked by mystical cowrie shells left by the Miigis.

In death, the Anishinaabe journeyed into the Tempest and found six radiant beings inhabiting six separate islands. These beings shield the islands from Maelstroms and expand them as needed to prevent overcrowding. These islands became the core of the “Islands of Flint,” which are safe refuges in the Tempest that endured the Flaying and the Stygians that followed.

Three nations comprise the Anishinaabe: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi. Together, they form the Niswimishkodewin (“Council of Three Fires”) that decides policy for the Anishinaabe and negotiates with the Five Nations. The Ojibwe are keepers of faith, and they maintain their people’s knowledge and culture on relic birch-bark scrolls. The Odawa are traders, and they navigate the Shadowlands and Tempest as merchants, messengers, and spies. The Potawatomi are warriors and keepers of the council fire who keep Oblivion at bay. The Anishinaabe also maintain the Midewiwin (“Grand Medicine Society”), whose Midew (“medicine men”) form an enigmatic society of medicine lodges that maintain a vast knowledge of Arcanoi and provide Castigation. The Anishinaabe are also master diplomats who forged the “Peace and Friendship” treaties that established the Five Nations.

The Tempest around the Anishinaabe is an endless series of snarled Byways almost impossible to navigate without the aid of skilled Anishinaabe pilots and their Argos-infused birch-bark canoes. Even with their aid, Spectral river serpents or “water panthers,” some of which grow to immense size, with deer-like antlers with tails of solid copper, plague the Byways. The Anishinaabe islands sit safely in the middle of this morass with three directly controlled by the Anishinaabe, and other islands are shared with allied nations like the Wyandot and Sioux.

The primary goal of the Anishinaabe is to maintain the peace between the Five Nations, which is an increasingly difficult task as antipathy grows between the Haudenosaunee and Cherokee. The Haudenosaunee are debating the possibility of forging alliances with other nations and even the Hierarchy to ensure a lasting peace.

### The Abenaki – The Council of Tribes

The Abenaki are the second member to join the Five Nations. They also originated from the Wabanahkik of eastern New England and Canada. Intimately related to the Anishinaabe, they remained behind as honored “fathers,” when the Anishinaabe migrated west. According to legend, there was a seventh Miigis who appeared to the Anishinaabe who retreated into the sea because humans could not survive in its presence. In death, the Abenaki found this Miigis waiting for them. It had prepared an island refuge for them that was covered in thick forest and dazzling waterfalls. The Third Great Maelstrom



nearly destroyed the Abenaki, which forced them into alliances with a great council of nations roughly mirroring the Wabanaki Confederacy. This council includes the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot. These nations formed the core of the Council of Tribes, a loose confederation designed to provide a single front to the Five Nations.

The Abenaki use consensus to make decisions at every level of society. If consensus is not reached, the status quo is maintained. This system is fairly easy to sustain because most bands rarely exceed 100 souls. These bands meet only to trade at the sacred falls of their home island or to defend against an external threat. They are masters of Psyche and Corpus because the weight of Oblivion hangs heavily over their land and its temptations are difficult to resist. Many who succumb to their Shadows find their hearts hardening into solid lumps of Angst and become Doppelgangers that drain the Pathos of all around them. Only the most formidable medicine can Castigate the Angst-hearted and force them to vomit up the reddish lump so that their Psyche can regain control.

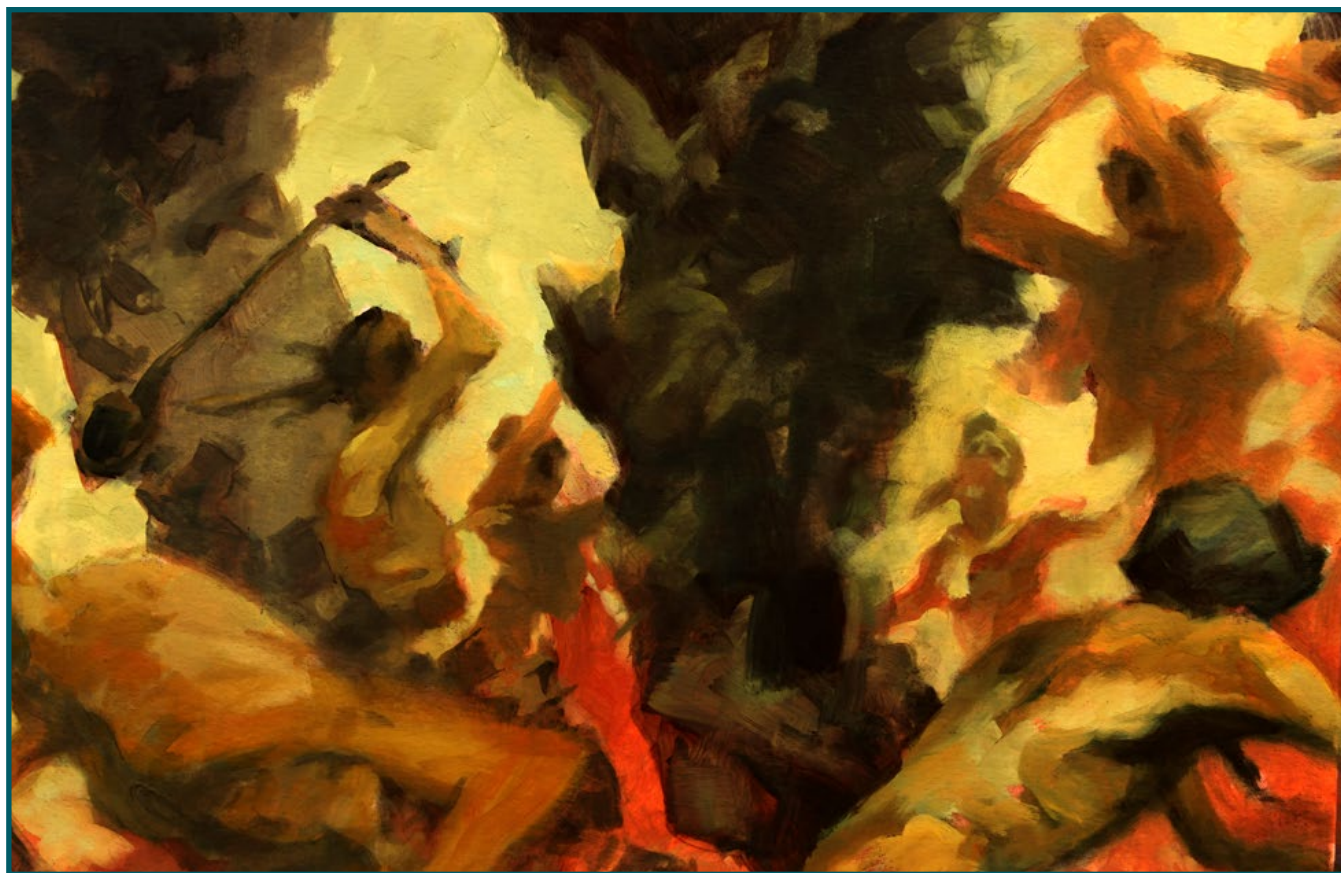
The Abenaki and their allies cling to their island's protection and only venture out in small bands to harvest Pathos. Their region of the Underworld never truly recovered from the Flaying and is fraught with peril. Bloodfire-scaled river serpents compete with Doomshades wreathed in barrowflame and Byway witches whose mournful cries lure unsuspecting rescuers into Nihilis. The worst are the Giwakwa, which are

native Hekantontire that stand 20 stories tall with hearts of frozen Angst and unquenchable hunger. The Giwakwa are one of the main reasons the Abenaki travel quietly in small groups and never stay in one place until they return to their island. The harsh nature of their land has molded the Abenaki into some of the most formidable Doomslayers in North America.

### The Cherokee Haudenosaunee

Traditionally occupying parts of North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee, the Cherokee are formidable warriors whose mastery of hit-and-run tactics is legendary. They have been in an almost continuous state of warfare for centuries by battling the Haudenosaunee, Fishers, Renegades, and even the Hierarchy. They suffered greatly during the Third Great Maelstrom, which forced them to forge a peace with the Haudenosaunee and join the Five Nations in their retreat into the Tempest.

The Cherokee Nation is built around seven mountainous islands in the Tempest in addition to the islands of their allies. Each island is composed of villages ruled by a pair of chiefs; one is white in times of peace, and the other is red in time of war. The White Chief's ruling council include his right hand, a speaker, and six advisors, and the Red Chief has plenary authority in times of war. Medicine men moderate disputes between them. Each island is further divided into seven clans: the Aniwahya (Wolf), Ani Tsiskwa (Bird), Anikawi (Deer),





Anigilohi (Long Hair), Anisahoni (Blue), Anigatogewi (Wild Potato), and Aniwodi (Red Paint). The clans are matrilineal and live in villages surrounded by well-guarded palisades that surround a formidable council house that accommodates the entire population during council meetings and Maelstroms. The national government follows the same structure and is further strengthened by its enduring alliance with its fellow “Civilized Tribes,” (the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole nations, who have islands of their own).

The plagues that struck after the Third Great Maelstrom make the Cherokee Underworld, a. k. a. the “Darkening Land,” the most populous Island of Flint. The Cherokee receive numerous modern Enfants. Medicine men take great pains to integrate new arrivals and Castigate the old.

Cherokee warriors defend the Darkening Land, but it is still replete with deadly adversaries. Nun’Yunu’Wi (“dressed in stone”) are elderly Nephwracks with skin harder than diamond who point to their victims with stone canes and never relent until they consume them. Kalona Ayeliski (“Raven Mockers”) are terrifying Shades who infiltrate villages with Enshroud and then disguise themselves with Moliate. They are nearly impossible to detect and masterfully drive Restless into Catharsis with their taunts, or if that approach fails, the Shades tear out their hearts. The Darkening Land is also home to the Uktena, who are massive, horned serpents whose scales glow like fire and have a head surmounted by an Ulun’suti, which is a transparent crystal with a red streak that grants their user mastery over Fatalism. The only way to claim the crystal is to slay the Uktena, which you can do only by piercing the seventh brilliant spot on the back of its head because its other scales are nearly impenetrable. This task is made more difficult by the constant vigilance of Uktena werewolves who unrelentingly defend their charge. Onacona, who is a medicine man of Aniwahya, is the sole possessor of an Ulun’suti among the Cherokee and uses it sparingly due to its malevolent nature and insatiable hunger to destroy its bearer.

Recent raids by the Haudenosaunee have set White Chief Wohali against Red Chief Waya. Wohali believes war is inherently polluting and will taint the peace of the Five Nations, but Waya invokes the ancient Blood Revenge to avenge the fallen. Neither one knows that the raids were ordered by the Ani-Kutani, who are the ancient gaunts of debased and draconian Cherokee religious leaders that were overthrown centuries ago. The Ani-Kutani were powerful in life and are even more powerful in death. They have established a Far Shore where they plot to destabilize the Cherokee and the Five Nations in an effort to reestablish their former dominion.

## Inuktitut – The Inuit

Nowhere in North America is the presence of a Maelstrom felt with such intensity as the lands of the Inuktitut (“the people”), also known as the Inuit. The Shadowlands of the north are a foreboding wasteland of black ice and ashen

snow occupying millions of kilometers of desolate wasteland stretching from Canada to the Arctic Circle. The Tempest is a seemingly limitless expanse of inky water filled with Shades, frozen islands, and dark icebergs hungry to swallow unsuspecting ships. Its sky is an unholy aurora borealis of sickly violet light and black lightning.

The Inuktitut call their Underworld Adlivan, where souls are purified in preparation for travel to Qudlivun (“Land of the Moon”). The Inuktitut are masters of this realm, and they live much as they did in life: always moving, always fighting, and always keeping just one step ahead of Oblivion’s embrace. Many Inuktitut are nomadic and harvest Pathos where they can, but there are numerous well-concealed villages that form the northernmost outposts of the Islands of Flint.

Never a unified people, the Inuktitut form confederations when necessary but seldom venture south. An elder leads each village, and nomadic groups wander the north, where they hunt Spectres; trade with established villages; and raid remote Hierarchy outposts, other Islands of Flint, and each other to survive. All Inuktitut are skilled in Argos and merciless in battle. They use soulforged kayaks, umiak longboats, and barghest-drawn dog sleds to range far and wide. They wield their relic weapons with great skill.

The most important member of each village is the Angakkuq (“medicine man”). Angakkuqs are potent gaunts who wield powers that rival a Ferryman. They offer spiritual succor to wraiths with strong Shadows and mediate between Inuktitut when village taboos are broken. Angakkuq leap into action when Maelstroms strike by plunging deep into the Labyrinth to ease the Maelstroms’ force.

The Inuktitut are not alone in the north. There are the enigmatic Taqriaqsuit, who are wraiths whose Enshroud became permanent during the great Maelstrom. They inhabit unseen kingdoms. There are also the grotesquely muscular Tuniit, who embrace a slow mind for the Outrage necessary to survive.

The Spectres of Adlivan are formidable. Dark, hairless, and dog-like Keelut vulpines and giants who are known as the Inupasugjuk stalk the Byways looking for prey. Nihils and waters’ edges are no better because long-haired, green-skinned Spectres called Qalupalik lure unsuspecting victims into the Tempest with their siren-like hum, and serpentine Tizheruk snatch wraiths from the shore. Even the skies are filled with winged Shades that swoop down to decapitate the unsuspecting.

Adlivan’s Labyrinth is particularly perilous and is filled with skeletal Shades who are called Ahkiyyini, whose unholy drum beats whip the Tempest into a furor. Despite the Labyrinth’s peril, treasure hunters and explorers continue to pursue rumors of the fabulously wealthy kingdom of Saquenay, which is located deep in the Labyrinth. Saquenay is real, but it is ruled by milky-white Nephwracks who rule mines rich in True Gold and bloodfire crystals. “Visitors” are marched through the ruby light of the Nephwracks gilded palace, where they learn the true meaning of Oblivion.



## Other Nations

Beyond the Five Nations are a dizzying collection of nations, tribes, independent confederations, freeholds, and kingdoms. The below are the best known, but many more are secreted away in remote corners of the Tempest.

### Mississippian Cultures

The mound builders of the Mississippi were the most powerful Restless of the Islands of Flint prior to the Third Great Maelstrom and are largely responsible for the Maelstrom's ultimate defeat in North America. These kingdoms formed a mighty bulwark against the storm in well-defended cities that were protected by ancient wraiths with formidable Arcanoï. This strength also made them the primary target of the storm, so they were subjected to the ravages of Spectres for nearly a decade. The Caddoan and Plaquemine Necropoli were utterly destroyed and the remainder were left in tatters. Only the great Necropoli of Cahokia and a scattering of others survived intact. They kidnap Hierarchy patrols and Artifact hunters that tarry too near them and vanish without a trace when reinforcements arrive. They are few in number but great in power. They bitterly lament their fate but are eager observe the world around them as they plan their future.

The Natchez are an anomaly among the mound builders. Ruled by a theocrat-king known as "the Great Sun," the Natchez survived the Maelstrom relatively intact. The sacrifice of the Great Sun's best warriors upon his death and their large cache of grave goods saw them through the Maelstrom and allowed them to fend off the Renegades and Heretics that followed. The Natchez's destruction in the 1740s saw a dramatic increase in their population just ahead of formal contact with the Hierarchy. Jealous of his power, the Great Sun turned down the Hierarchy's offer membership and stunned them by becoming a formal protectorate of the Dark Kingdom of Ivory after secret negotiations with their representative in New Orleans. The Hierarchy continues to pressure the Great Sun into joining the empire, but refrain from taking direct action to prevent outright war with the Dark Kingdom of Ivory.

### The Southwest

The Shadowlands of Arizona and New Mexico are a collection faded deserts, foreboding mountains, sickly cacti, and rocky canyons. Ix Chel travelled down the causeway from Nahui-Ollin to warn the Flint wraiths of the danger to come. The Flint wraiths in that area sent the Fishers' initial advance reeling back to Saint Augustine until the Maelstrom struck. Sturdy pueblos and potent Arcanoï ensured survival for a time, but the causeway leading from Nahui-Ollin into the Hohokam culture's territory delivered an army of ravaging Spectres deep into the heart of Arizona. The Necropoli of the Hohokam and their Mogollon cultures were obliterated, but the Restless we know as the Pueblo survived.

The Pueblo dead quietly inhabit abandoned pueblos and islands in the Tempest and are led by various religious societies, each of which has a seat on the Necropolis ruling council. The most potent group within each pueblo are the Kachina, which is a religious society representing the six directions of the Pueblo cosmos. The Kachina don painted leather masks adorned with feathers. These masks contain immense power. These masks are burned upon the Kachina's death and appear in the Underworld. The Kachina takes on the aspect of the god or spirit that the mask represents. The Pueblo also have a long-standing alliance with the Navajo and reasonably frequent contact (or conflict) with Spectral bands of Apache.

The Tempest of the region is arid and punctuated by small Byways that wind through an ashen landscape replete with Renegades and Heretics attempting to hide from the Hierarchy. The region is also home to some uniquely alien breeds of Spectre born of the Labyrinth's twisted imitation of creatures from Pueblo and Navajo mythology, such as "Alien Gods," corpse spirits, and Feathered Serpents that zigzag across the sky like lightning.

### The West

The nations of the Great Plains, Western Range, and California were largely lost to the Third Great Maelstrom. Small bands of riders and isolated Haunts are scattered across the Shadowlands and battle for survival against lingering Spectres and Hierarchy patrols. Remnants of the larger nations cling to small islands of safety in the Tempest or have accepted refuge status on the islands of the Anishinaabe.

### The Pacific Northwest

The northwest nations survived the Third Great Maelstrom and thrived afterward. They built a prosperous realm within a realm inside the Dark Kingdom of Iron. Inured to the hardships of the north, they survived the Maelstrom in their sturdy villages and defeated the Hierarchy's Bleak Legion advances in Alaska, which forced the Hierarchy to the bargaining table. These Flint wraiths negotiated a peace on favorable terms with the Hierarchy and elected the famous Katlian of the Tlingit to represent their interests.

## Setting Sun – The Lands of Gold



The Lands of Gold gave rise to some of the most formidable kingdoms in the Underworld. The greatest of these kingdoms was Tawantinsuyu, the Inka Empire. The Inka under the leadership of Sapa Inka Manqu Chapaq ("Son of the Sun") with the aid of his fellow Sapa Inka carved a vast empire of four provinces out of the Shadowlands and the surrounding Tempest with the Necropolis Cuzco at its heart. Rapidly outgrowing Cuzco, they created a new capital high in the Tempest. Dubbing it "Hanan Pacha"





after the mythological Inka upper world, the city became a wonderland of gilded temples, courtyards, and places where golden fountains burbling liquid Pathos competed for attention with artificial gardens wrought of True Gold and Silver. Nobles adorned with golden ear spools and elaborately embroidered cloaks paid obeisance to Manqu Chapaq under the watchful eye of his elite bodyguard. Administrators cataloged an endless stream of tribute on quipu strings as workers and artisans continued to expand the city. Hanan Pacha was eternally abuzz with priests, traders, soldiers, and the Keening-laced sound of conch shells signaling the arrival and departure of elite chasquis messengers.

An intricate system of roads, waystations, and storage depots connected Hanan Pacha to its realm and bridged perilous Byways and chasms to connect even the remotest corners of the empire. The Inka smelted True Gold into magnificent works of art and Artifacts, captured Pathos in soulfire emeralds, and constructed impregnable Citadels of perfectly-fitted stone that were filled with grave goods. They retained power over Kay Pacha (the Skinlands) through their mallki, who were potent mummies and the attendant mediums who voiced their will. Manqu Chapaq absolutely ruled Tawantinsuyu from his golden stool in Hanan Pacha for centuries until the outsiders came.

The conquest of Tawantinsuyu was the work of the Renegade general Theudhar, who was a participant in the sack of the Onyx Tower and an ally of Paradise. Theudhar was the first

European wraith to witness Tawantinsuyu's haunting jungles, imposing peaks, and ashen beaches. He expected to meet spirited but disorganized resistance. Instead, he faced endless ranks of Inka warriors and risen mallki who were commanded by deceased Sapa Inkas whose golden masks were wreathed in Aurelian fury. Fully half the Renegades in the New World met Oblivion that day.

The war ground into one of attrition. Unlike their allies in the north, the Inka had vast stockpiles of Pathos and a singular ruler that let them fight on long after the suppression of their mortal worshipers. Theudhar gathered a new Renegade army that was stiffened with native allies that were resentful of Inka dominion and launched a fresh invasion of Tawantinsuyu in conjunction with Heretic reinforcements from Paradise. The Inka were forced back to Necropolis Cuzco but held firm until Spanish conquistadors seized the mallki and many other Fetters of the Inka nobility in the world of the Quick. Most were burned or melted down, which left the Inka leaderless as most of their leaders plunged into Harrowings.

Ix Chel rushed south with her best warriors to even the odds. She sent dozens of Renegade captains into Oblivion with long sweeps of her True Obsidian blade. She seemed as though she would single-handedly turn the tide of battle until Theudhar singled her out on the battlefield and buried the Spear of Longinus into her heart. Soon afterward, the Shadowlands



shook with astonishing violence as the Labyrinth unleashed its rage on the Lands of Gold.

Clouds of fiery destruction swallowed Hanan Pacha and the provinces of Tawantinsuyu along with their invaders. Necropolis Cuzco was the only Necropolis to survive because it was protected from the storm by tapac-yauri, the mighty golden staff that Manqu Chapaq planted under Cuzco's Temple of the Sun upon its founding. The tapac-yauri protected Cuzco from the storm while Cusi Yupanki, who was the general and High Priest of the Sun under Sapa Inka Atawallpa, led the Necropolis defense. Rallying the remainder of the army around the city's Citadel, Cusi Yupanki summoned forth the fearsome pururaucas, who were stone warriors that were animated by Flux. The fighting was intense, but the pururaucas ultimately prevailed and Cusi Yupanki was declared Sapa Inka of a much-diminished empire.

Cusi Yupanki saw Cuzco through the storm and welcomed the Hierarchy upon their arrival. Always a creature of fluid loyalty, Cusi negotiated a treaty with the Hierarchy to retain dominion over his realm in exchange for transforming Tawantinsuyu into a client of the empire. The Viceroyalty of Cuzco was born.

Cusi Yupanki slowly expanded his power base by recapturing much of Tawantinsuyu with the aid of the Hierarchy. He suppressed Renegades, and administered Necropolis Potosi, which is a mine nearly as rich as the Veinous Stair. Only a few know that Cusi was behind the capture or destruction of the mallki. Always hungry for power, Cusi worked through his mortal agents to seize the mallki and either destroy or conceal them in a special chamber. The trapped souls of most of the Sapa Inka are now bound to their Fetters, and Cusi extracts their secrets by using Phantasm. Cusi's efforts were exhaustive but not complete. Not all of the Sapa Inka are accounted for, including Manqu Chapac, which is a situation he attempts to remedy with great vigor.

Viceroy Cusi's reign is not without opposition. In life, the famed Sapa Inka Tupaq Inka Yupanki, who was guided by the Oracle of Pachacamac, travelled to a pair of mythical islands located deep in the Tempest. During the Inka Civil War in the world of the Quick, Cusi Yupanki burned Tupaq's mallki, which sent him into a Harrowing. Upon his return, Tupaq fled to the islands he found in life and had spent years fortifying in

death. Known as Nina Chumpi ("fire belt") and Hawa Chumpi ("outer belt"), they became a new Cuzco and haven for Inka wraiths who are not aligned with Cusi. Amply provisioned with Citadels, gilded temples, mines of True Gold, and the aid of the undying Oracle of Pachacamac, Tupaq plots Cusi's downfall and the return of Tawantinsuyu to its rightful place of glory.

## Oblivion

South America is home to many Relics of the Flaying. Doppelgangers infiltrate its Necropoli yearly and Doomshades stalk its jungles. Oblivion's most potent servant is the Onceborn known as "Supay," who is the lord of Uku Pacha, which is the Inka Underworld. Supay's power is fearsome to behold and his Doomshades are the bane of the Hierarchy. Supay's primary goal is to maintain his hold over Uku Pacha and locate the knowledge needed to counteract the protection of the tapac-yauri. Supay believes he can accomplish the second goal if he can locate Manqu Qhapaq, whom he believes survived the Maelstrom. Not knowing where to look, Supay has infiltrated a Doppelganger into the ranks of Cusi's inner circle to watch for news of Manqu's whereabouts.

## The Lands of Emerald

The Colombian Kingdoms of Emerald were legendary for their ability to forge spectacular Artifacts out of True Gold and soulfire Emeralds. Many Renegades and Heretics vanished under waves of viridian fire as the Emerald wraiths defended their homeland, but the Lands of Emerald were simply too disorganized to resist the Flaying. Rumors abound of strange wraiths who wander the Byways on rafts of purest gold.

## Greater South America

The Fishers and their allies battled confederations of natives for almost a century from their Citadel in Necropolis Salvador. They advanced across Brazil methodically until the Maelstrom swept across the continent and disincorporated tribes by the hundreds. The Fifth Legion ousted the few remaining Fishers in Salvador, and most of the native population simply ceased to exist, were Reaped by the Hierarchy as they crossed the shroud, or lived in remote areas beyond Hierarchy control.









# Swar, the Dark Kingdom of India



Even before British rule, Swar had more trouble with encroaching Adharma (the Swar concept of Oblivion) than any other land of the dead. Its holdings stretched throughout the Shadowlands of India, known as Bhuvar, but still Adharma filled in the blank spaces Swar could not cover. After the time of the British occupation, Adharma grew in strength in this ancient place and kept a terrible hold on great swaths of the area.

Swar is a strange Dark Kingdom because it is dominated by the glorious Svarga, the City of Delights. It has its factions: the Ashura, the Naga, and the citizens and settlements in and around Svarga. Strange phenomena such as bizarre environmental conditions and anomalies that seem to twist the laws of physics dot the landscapes in the Sea of Shiva. The way that Swar operates under the constant pressure of Adharma is near miraculous.

Adharma's servants know Restless are drawn to cities to find shelter, gather Pathos, or simply wander and remember. It doesn't matter if these cities are found in the Bhuvar or the Bhur (the Skinlands); they are the key to its strategy for Swar. Knowing this, Adharma concentrates much of its strength on the modern cities in the Bhuvar. Adharma sends Bhuta, who are mimics who pose as Svarga's holy judges, to corrupt the newly dead, and it unleashes the terrible and twisted Pisachas, who are violent demonic Shades, to wreak indiscriminate havoc. Many of the modern cities of the

Bhuvar are grey and crumbling things with the relics of the old and new stacked on top of each other or pieced together. Most of these stacks are the result of one object appearing inside another one, which lead to many contorted and odd angles. It is as though the old and the new are not reconciled in this land. The weight of its history refuses to be pushed out by modernity.

Unlike Stygia, most of the wraith population resides in either the Loka of Svarga, which is one of the "upper realms" and the settlements that surround it or the Tala, which is the seven lower worlds that rest in the Sea of Shiva that surrounds Svarga. Those lower worlds are accessible through grand flowing rivers and infinite staircases, both of which possess their own hazards.

The Bhuvar does not contain as many Necropoli as a Stygian wraith might expect. The Necropoli dotting the massive landscape are mixed in with forgotten mountains; tributaries and offshoots of the Ganges that have no equivalent in the Bhur; and scoured plains. These broken Necropoli are the memories of civilizations so old that they defy conventional archaeology. There are very few wraiths who remember them and those that do have either fallen to Adharma, moved on to the next cycle of their existence, or reside in Svarga. To walk the Bhuvar is to explore nearly forgotten history. Untold truths are waiting for an enterprising wraith in the hodge-podge layers and alleys of gathered history.



## Storms of Souls

India has always been prone to natural disaster. The Indian Ocean earthquake and resulting tsunami on December 26th, 2004 caused a death toll in excess of 10,000. Other examples include the Odisha Super Cyclone in 1999, the Gujarat earthquake in 2001, and the floods that occur regularly during every monsoon season. These events have such an impact on the Bhur that they manifest as dangers in the Bhubar. Some suspect that Adharma might be driving such disasters in the Bhur to Reap a harvest of newly dead that it can drive off the wheel and maintain its power over the Bhubar.

Those who die in the more rural areas of India and cross the veil in the wilds of Bhubar must contend with dangers beyond the agents of Adharma. Massive plasmic megafauna known as the Children of Kali roam the landscape with the appearances of the demons of old. The land is unstable with natural disasters occurring regularly. Add in monsoon season, which is known to all of Swar as the Feeding Time because Adharma and its agents are most active during it, and it's an existence stacked against the newly dead. The Swar is a schizoid realm of devastating conditions and sublime beauty.

Adharma is ever-present in Bhubar, but it is not all-powerful. Pockets of resistance and rescue exist. Each faction has its own ways of traversing and surviving Bhubar and its own outposts and places of safety. Crafty judges from Svarga roam the land to collect Enfants to integrate into the afterlife, somehow able to remain for extended hunts despite their lack of Fetters. The Naga have claimed the memory of the British Headquarters that fell during the Indian Rebellion on May of 1857, and they welcomed and recruited many of the British and Indian loyalists who died there.

## An Old Rage



It is one thing to see your people suffer. It is one thing to watch as generations are warped by their colonial overlords. They are pushed down, and they are stripped of their language and customs. They are made to believe there is nothing more profoundly disgusting than the hue of their own skin.

It is another thing to spend an eternity watching history repeat itself.

The dead of Bhubar, regardless of their allegiances, are often furious and filled with hatred for the atrocities that were visited upon their descendants. For centuries, they've watched helplessly as Western empires swallowed the countries that they'd once inhabited. Some fight, such as the Proctors, who

are of all the Guilds the most desperate to taste life again. They claw their way to the Bhur to partake in the bitter wars. Others do their best to frighten colonial influence from their lands by transforming houses into haunted dens of fear. The rest are paralyzed by their own helplessness and do nothing but seethe.

Unsurprisingly, this fury shapes the collective subconscious of Bhubar. If there are any Enfants who arrive besotted with the idea of colonialism, they are quickly disabused of the notion. Those who insist the British empire was a positive influence are either indoctrinated or disposed. After everything that has happened, the Restless of Bhubar cannot do anything else.

Hundreds of ideologies exist in Bhubar and are in constant conflict. If there are any wraiths who believe that colonial rule is superior to independence, they keep their thoughts to themselves. Little draws the Indian dead together more quickly than the hatred of ancestral and ongoing oppression.

## Children of Kali

It is difficult to say what precisely the Children of Kali are, or how you can identify their arrival. Often, there is no warning. There might be a breath of rain, the smell of ozone, and the sensation of eyes pressed against one's skin, but by then it is already too late.

The denizens of Bhubar work ceaselessly to identify the patterns of these megafauna, their migration habits, and how best to navigate both. Fortunately the Children of Kali have a certain sense of internal logic. For example, they enter a state of quasi-hibernation when the Storm that Dreams ventures too close. The Children of Kali can breed or at least produce chimerical blends among themselves. Adventurous wraiths have reported witnessing the birth of new megafauna, which is a horrific affair with far too many tentacles.

There appears to be a schism between the Children that resemble creatures of air and those that belong to the water. Reports abound of giant wasp-like creatures entering combat with sinuous dragons and fish-tailed monstrosities devouring hideous crow-things. So intense are these conflicts that many believe that the best way to save oneself from the Children of Kali is to find another specimen belonging to the opposite genus to pit against the monster.

As of the moment, no one has been able to report if this is true.

### Storm Child

**Physical:** Strength 6, Dexterity 3 (6 when flying), Stamina 5

**Social:** Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 5, Brawl 3

**Skills:** Brawl 3

**Knowledges:** N/A

**Arcanoi:** Argos 4, Keening 2, Pandemonium 3

**Powers:** Absorption, Flight





**Passions:** N/A

**Fetters:** N/A

**Willpower:** 5

**Permanent Corpus:** 8

**Angst:** 6

**Description:** A Storm Child appears as a chimerical beast of insect wings and legs mixed with beaks, talons, and twitching bird eyes. Somehow they remain in flight through the non-stop buzzing of their paper-thin wings. When a Storm Child descends, its bristling underbelly alive with spindly legs, it attempts to grab at wraiths and devour them with its humongous body.

**Background:** A Storm Child's body consists of at least a dozen Moliated wraiths who are twisted into the shapes of bugs and birds and combined into a weird and terrible creature. The Storm Children's origins are linked to the first Underworld monsoon when Adharma's rains battered and melted wraiths into bizarre gestalt entities. Now, wraiths know to remain indoors when the monsoon comes to Swar. When they do not, more Storm Children appear in the sky.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Seek out those wraiths foolish enough to remain outdoors in the rain and pluck them up to join the flying nest of Storm Children.

**Storyteller Notes:** A Storm Child is driven mostly by instinct. It targets wraiths outside when the rain falls. They are particularly drawn to Harbingers. When a Storm Child

descends to attack a wraith, that wraith must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) or attempt to flee.

When a Storm Child successfully grapples a target with its Strength + Brawl and lifts them into the air, it can attempt to use its Absorption power. The victim must roll Strength + Brawl (difficulty 7) to free themselves from the Storm Child's spindly legs or suffer 2 points of Aggravated Damage as chunks of their Corpus disappear into the Child of Kali. The threat of this maneuver grows as the Storm Child lifts the wraith higher and higher because an escape means a long fall.

A Storm Child is a gifted flyer, but it can crawl across land surfaces like millipedes, the segments of its body shifting and twitching.

### Water Children

**Physical:** Strength 7, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6

**Social:** Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Brawl 4

**Skills:** Crafts 2

**Knowledges:** Occult 1

**Arcanoi:** Argos 3, Moliate 4, Outrage 2, Pandemonium 3

**Powers:** Absorption, Summon the Tempest

**Passions:** N/A

**Fetters:** N/A



**Willpower:** 6

**Permanent Corpus:** 9

**Angst:** 7

**Description:** A Water Child appears as a writhing mass of tendrils, spines, and scales. Fish eyes open and shut along the length of its twisting, wet body while sucking appendages slap against the ground around it.

**Background:** This shifting kraken roils up from the shoreline of the Tempest. It torments only Restless of the Swar, although there are rumors that they occasionally harass Ferryman off the coast of Stygia. The Water Children's origin is hotly debated among Swar's wraiths; most of them believe that it consists of wraiths who were lost to the Tempest and sucked into whirlpools of Adharma before being spat out as an aquatic dead monstrosity.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Slither and march inexorably toward your foes and drag them into the sea to meet true darkness.

**Storyteller Notes:** A Water Child is more intelligent and reasoning than its appearance implies. It serves the Children of Kali by creating a fear of the Tempest by specifically abducting and absorbing those wraiths who take the Tempest lightly. Any wraith with two or more dots of Argos smells appealing to the Water Child, which lurks within the depths waiting for the right moment to climb ashore. When a wraith sees a Water Child, they must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) or flee.

When a Water Child successfully grapples a target and immerses the victim in liquid, it can attempt its Absorption power. The victim must roll Strength + Brawl (difficulty 8) to pull free from the Water Child's grasp or suffer 2 points of aggravated damage as segments of their Corpus disappear into the Child of Kali.

A Water Child can use the Summon the Tempest ability. If five of them arrive on the same shoreline, they take 10 turns dancing and babbling to coax a Tempest tsunami. This tsunami smashes into their targeted Necropolis, which drags wraiths into the churning waters and obliterates any structures in its path.

## Notable Locations

The Underworld of Swar is a grand panoply of historic buildings, sculptures, and natural spaces, each of which are reflected and distorted versions of their Bhur versions. In Swar, shadow versions of structures do not erode after their Bhur version's decay, which results in a bizarre assembly of old and new stacked on top of and inside each other. To observe Swar from a distance is to look at a maze the likes of which M.C. Escher would be proud.

### Coronation Park near Delhi

Located in the northern part of India, this park was used by Lord George Nathaniel Curzon for huge displays of power during his time as Viceroy in 1899-1905. As one resident of India at the time described Curzon's displays, they were "terror in fancy dress." Now, it's a large and mostly empty park in the

Bhur. In Bhuvan, it's a Nihil populated by strange, theatrical, and very well-dressed Shades. Wraiths who get too close are in danger of getting drawn in to a literal passion play and possibly the Nihil at its center. It's said that a wraith could learn great secrets from this Nihil if they can find an audience to watch their pain on display.

### The Taj Mahal

Despite the Adharma-fueled madness surrounding it, the Taj Mahal is a place of relative safety in the wilderness of Bhuvan. The ghost of the woman for which it was built, Mumtaz Mahal, still calls this palace her own and resides within beside her daughter Gauhara Begum, despite both of them forgetting most of their mortal existences. They feel compelled to provide sanctuary to Restless in need. Revered as it is as a monument of undying love, wraiths of all of Swar's factions and explorers from other Dark Kingdoms are welcomed to this neutral ground. It serves as a Fetter for many wraiths due to its symbolic significance, bypassing the normal need for a Fetter's personal attachment. Those who are lost in the lands of Swar are drawn here as though by fate. Those who upset the peace are immediately ejected and are forced to confront the tall, dark shadows wreathing the Taj Mahal.

### Sanchi Stupa

A temple located in Madhya Pradesh in central India. Although British explorers ravaged this location in the Bhur, it is an old representation of acceptance for several religions, including Buddhism, Hindu worship, and the Ancient Greek faith. The land and temple is a bulwark against Adharma because of the concentrated belief that was brought here by several religions. Some wraiths consider it a Far Shore in the heart of Swar. Many who died in the tragedy of Bhopal took refuge here, and they are watched over by some of the Ashura and hidden from the Host of Svarga. There are tales that there is a Nihil on the grounds of Sanchi Stupa that leads directly to Stygia.

### Jatayu Earth's Center

Famous for being host to the Bhur's biggest bird sculpture, Jatayu Earth's Center is a gorgeous nature park located in Koralla. In the Bhuvan, it is even grander. There are no statues or tour guides; just rock, wind, and the Garuda, which is a species of bird-like creatures unique to the Bhuvan. With their 100-meter wingspans and voracious appetites, they are regarded by the locals with terror. Some revere the monsters, but most choose the wiser option of simply ignoring the place.

### Garuda

**Physical:** Strength 6, Dexterity 2 (6 when flying), Stamina 5

**Social:** Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

**Talents:** Alertness 4, Athletics 5, Brawl 3

**Skills:** Brawl 3

**Knowledges:** N/A



**Arcanoi:** Argos 3  
**Powers:** Flight  
**Passions:** N/A  
**Fetters:** N/A  
**Willpower:** 5  
**Permanent Corpus:** 10  
**Angst:** 6

**Description:** Garuda are colossal, black plasmic birds with wingspans over 100 meters long and never-ending voracious appetites. Their beaks end in a vicious curve for carving out chunks of ectoplasm, and their talons are strong enough to grip any land-based foe and smash them against the stones. Each garuda has a thick, bulbous paunch between its legs. It is said the wraiths that a garuda devours end up stuck inside its inflating stomach sac, where the wraiths are conscious but unable to escape. Garuda make nests in tall, abandoned structures. When eaten, a garuda egg supposedly restores all the lost memories of a wraith's life for a full year.

**Background:** The flock of garuda in the Swar were once the pets of a wraith now remembered only as "the Raj," who was the powerful wraith of a British colonial. When he was destroyed in a popular uprising, his 100 or so garuda took to the skies to prey on wraiths who stay out in the open for too long. The only way to evade their nasty attacks is to flee to the territory of another garuda they are hostile to each other.

**Roleplaying Hints:** When a wraith separates from their group and stands out in the open, turn your wings back and descend to hook the ghost with your talons.

**Storyteller Notes:** Garuda are predatory flying animals. They do not reason or have any capability for conversation. If a Garuda traps a wraith in its stomach sac after successfully grappling with a Strength + Brawl roll, the wraith must inflict eight or more Lethal Damage from within the sac to make an incision and escape. For as long as they're trapped within, an acidic plasm inflicts 1 Aggravated Damage per turn.

## Dow Hill of Kurseong

The Bhur abounds with rumors of hauntings on Dow Hill. Here, headless children prowl the forests while accompanied by women in grey. The trees abound with limpid red eyes. There are stories of a century-old school filled to the brim with apparitions.

The true story of Dow Hill is less menacing. Here, wraiths who are brave enough to venture this deep into the Bhuvar find a place where wraiths gather to practice their Arcanoi and develop new techniques for Embodiment and Pandemonium. Guilds from other Dark Kingdoms assemble here to teach and learn, but all of them retire when the day ends. At night, Striplings (see **Wraith: The Oblivion** p. 361) infest the area.

## Vijayanagara

Once, Vijayanagara stood proudly at the heart of its empire and was a thriving civilization that fought bitterly with the

Bahmani Sultanate for control of South India. Although it succeeded in fragmenting its enemy, Vijayanagara found itself beset by the Deccan sultanates, which had united against what they regarded as a common foe. After an epic battle, Vijayanagara collapsed and the victors sacked the city.

The ruins still stand in the Bhuvar, and are haunted by its Bhur legacy and the city's attempts to wrestle dominion from Svarga. There are no records of what exactly transpired or how Svarga triumphed in the ensuing struggle. The Restless of the Swar only know that a city once stood against Svarga, and now it is nothing but ashes and emptiness. Odd rumors abound of a Spectral society within its borders with inhabitants who are cold and deadly but less frenzied than most of the Spectres in Swar. Perhaps something within the ruins calms them. In Swar, many fear what these lucid Spectres have planned.

## The Storm That Dreams

In the wilderness of Swar, far enough away from Svarga to discourage the curious but close enough to have tales told about it, is a sporadic phenomenon known as the Storm that Dreams.

Whenever the storm manifests, strangely solid borders cut off those outside it from those within it. It flickers, howls, and screams, but never passes the random borders that define it. Even with a monsoon raging, the water vanishes at the threshold, which creates a strange effect akin to rain hitting glass without the rivulets. The storm usually appears in the Bhur, sometimes in the Tempest, and possibly in the Labyrinth itself (although no one has gone there to check).

The Storm that Dreams derives its name from the wild nightmares and visions that it brings whenever it appears. These nightmares affect both the dead and the Quick by reaching through the Veil and into the Bhur. It disturbs the rest of those who dwell in Svarga and its environs. The storm randomly affects those caught in it, and many in the Tala do not speak of what they dream. Those that do report brilliant fire streaking from the sky, malformed apparitions as horrid as any Pisachas, and a single scream cut short only on waking.

There are brave and foolhardy wraiths from Svarga, the Ashura, and the Naga who wish to understand the storm better, so they have formed a loose network of informants within their factions to track its movement or discern a pattern of when it appears. They have had no success so far, and more than a few have been torn apart by its howling winds or vanished with the storm when it disappears. When the storm envelops an area, everything within it is subject to a howling hurricane of Adharma and nightmare. Until recently, the storm came to only rural or isolated regions of the Bhuvar, but in the last decade it has struck Necropoli New Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai and annihilated entire portions of these Bhuvar cities. There is no known way to stop it.

Scholars and thinkers ponder its origins and nature. Many believe that because of its random, sudden, and stuttering nature, perhaps the storm is trying to decide whether or not to exist. Some Monitors posit it is an echo of a future: A potential event so catastrophic that it reverberates back through time. Perhaps



## The Rich History of India

Storytellers are encouraged to look to the rich history of India for inspiration and populate the Bhuvar and the land of Swar as they see fit. India has a grand history spindled in tragedy, and that history is as beautiful as it was bloody. Remember that both the caste system and classism are recognized problems within the country, and Storytellers that hope to provide an authentic and unproblematic experience should be do their research. Storytellers might want to consult *Discovery of India* by Jawaharlal Nehru; *India: A History* by John Keay; and the works of Devdutt Patta, Ramnarayan Rawat, and Romila Thapar, which are all fantastic sources on India and the subcontinent.

it was caused by the remnants of the horrors of Bhopal, which was the site of a chemical disaster that killed 16,000 mortals. Others believe that it might be the chaotic thoughts of an agent of Adharma as it slumbers, and that it wanders the Bhuvar and the Tala longing for a time when it can be free. All agree that the Storm that Dreams feels like it's waiting to be.

## The Thorns of Empire

As old as India is, its lands of the dead largely remain culturally static because they are bound by Svarga's promise of paradise and centuries of tradition. Indeed, some wraiths considered Swar a vast Far Shore due to its strong ideals even as they warped and contorted the land and structures of this Dark Kingdom. However, this ideal was threatened beginning with the indirect rule of the East India Trading Company and the later British Raj.

The British-run East India Trading Company indirectly ruled India from the late 1700s until the Indian Rebellion of 1857. The British government then abolished the company and assumed direct control in 1858. This rule lasted until July 18th, 1947. The British were vastly outnumbered by the native Indians, but used their technological superiority, arrogant bravado, and a sense of near divine entitlement to occupy India.

During this time, Stygia took its cues from Skinlands and tried the same approach with Swar. It did not go well.

Many in Stygia who were riding the high of expanding into and across the United States set out from the London Necropolis in search of new lands. They Skinrode explorers and members of the East Indian Trading Company and traveled with these "pioneers." What they found in the Shadowlands of India alarmed and disappointed them and confirmed their already rooted prejudices about the state of other Dark Kingdoms. Adharma had a strange and unfamiliar hold on this land. Giant demons

roamed the Bhuvar. Storms that spoke and dreamed blinked in and out of existence. Buildings that were old beyond measure jutted out of a ground that was grey and barren. Few native wraiths wished to consort with these visitors, even in the ruins of cities.

Those small enclaves of wraiths spoke of awaiting their reward in the paradise of Svarga, sang longingly of its riches, or warned the Stygians of the great lie of Svarga. But, the natives of the Bhuvar all spoke of Svarga with awe. Greed blossomed in the Corpus of the Stygian wraiths, and their Shadows whispered and coaxed them to invade. The Stygian Restless asked the native wraith where Svarga was. "The Sea of Shiva," was their reply. The excited visitors had to find this place.

The Stygian party opted to make an arduous exodus across the Tempest and back to Necropolis London. Enough of them made it back, and they gathered criminal Harbingers to help them travel the broken land and find a Byway to the Sea of Shiva. Traveling back to the Bhuvar, they explored. They lost many of their number to Shade and storm, but finally they came upon a useful Byway. A great river not unlike the Styx that was sacred to the locals, the Ganges, carried them to the Sea of Shiva. They made it to the shore of a land much like back home, barren and rocky, with one notable exception: In the distance, they saw a city more resplendent than any they had ever seen. Even Stygia could not compare to its grand architecture. The sheer uniformity of the place spoke of craft and planning. From the distance it shone with light, laughter, and music that was carried on the wind, and the smell of incense drifted with it. Senses awoke that the Stygians had long forgotten. It was intoxicating.

The Stygians, in their arrogance, crossed the barren plain through hundreds of cluttered settlements full of what they viewed as passive and cowed souls. They intended to saunter to the gates and demand entrance and audience. They didn't quite make it. As they left a village by its main road, they were greeted by the soldiers of the Host, who were dressed in resplendent robes and festooned with weapons as exotic as they were keen.

They exchanged no words. The Host, driven by what was taking place in the Bhur at this time, attacked the Stygians. They ran for their very existence back through the settlements and toward the byway. Some of their number fell behind and were captured. The rest used the distraction to escape. The journey back to London cost even more of their number, until only three of the initial group of near 40 made it back.

They told tales of the strange land and the horrors that they witnessed. They talked about sparsely populated ruins. *Relics must be there for the taking*, they said. They told tales of the resplendent city that they had seen with its settlements of laborers. They thought, *what wonders does it hold?* They recalled the Host's soldiers and their weapons, none of which were ranged. *They do not have our advancements*, they conjectured.

The more they spoke, the more wraiths that listened, and the more the susurrus of their Shadows grew. Soon, tales of this land, which the whole of was mistakenly called Svarga, swept through the London Necropolis. This other Dark Kingdom was ripe for the



picking and too much of a temptation to forego. A force gathered that was made up of subjects that were ready for a change, such as members of a Legion looking for a new post and guild members looking for somewhere to ply their craft away from watchful eyes. The Harbingers took a huge contract and received payment from every hopeful explorer. This large host set out carrying the secret hopes of the whole of the London Necropolis.

Svarga had been watching what was happening to their descendants in the Bhur: The British had corrupted or cajoled the Indian Rajas (princes) into being puppets for British rule and eventually giving up all sovereignty in exchange for luxury. It had seen how these actions were increasing the hold of Adharma in the Bhubar. Svarga's judges had watched the Stygian contingent cross the Bhubar and were surprised when the newcomers were able to travel the Ganges and land on their Loka. They were even more surprised when some escaped. They knew that an encounter with these foreign wraiths from Stygia was an inevitability. Svarga prepared.

The Holy Regent, the ruler of Svarga, pronounced an edict that remains in effect today: Those who will not follow tradition or subvert others from following the path of Samsara are to be captured by the Host and held until such a time that they may be educated in the temples of most holy Svarga. "For," as the Regent said, "we are beneficent and just."

In an uncharacteristic flurry of activity, Svarga used its agents to create a system of collection from the colonizers and those that profited from them. They sent the Host to the Bhubar in force for the first time in centuries to collect and protect scores of *Sudra* (laborers) from Svarga's settlements and outposts. The Host was tasked with guarding the *Sudra* from the depredations of Adharma's pull while they gathered *Enfants* and *Relics* alike for the judges of Yama. As the British Quick brought technology with them, constructed buildings, and used weapons to help colonize this land, they invested each of their creations with the *Passions* to conquer, subjugate, or "liberate" from "savagery." Those Indian wraiths able to do so crossed the Shroud and dragged these items through to their Bhubar as *Relics*, and others found their shadow reflections and commandeered them.

While the Legion was traveling from the London Necropolis, Svarga had taken the results of the occupation of the Bhubar and turned them to their advantage. Svarga now had their resplendent Host and access to the souls and resources of the British. Because the Ganges was the only known route to Svarga, it became an ambush site. The group from London didn't stand a chance as the Host soundly defeated them and clapped them all in chains.

The defeated Stygian Legion, now known as the Forgotten Legion in the halls of the London Necropolis, were marched through to the Loka. The Holy Regent declared their spiritual re-education was to begin immediately. Many of the *Sudra* who aided in the preparation were admitted too because their karmic debt had been paid. Svarga sent one survivor back to London to instruct and urge others like him to discourage any

## The Survivor

Percival Tetch is the only survivor of the initial group that went on the ill-fated trip to Svarga. Before the trip, he was a bright and enthusiastic new citizen of the London Necropolis, and he was excited to explore the wider world in which he found himself. In modern times, he is a stoic and taciturn adherent of isolationism and a high-ranking Chanteur. He loudly proclaims "London for Londoners" while telling his stories of the wonders and horrors of Svarga to anyone who listens.

Most of his audiences consider him a twisted old racist.

further action. The Anacreons listened and attempted to cover up London's failure.

Svarga's system of organized *Relic* and *Enfant* collection fell apart after the fall of the British Raj. The conflict and horror of the Bhur gave Adharma the power and sovereignty it enjoys over the Bhubar today.

Modern Svarga maintains its policy of capturing and "educating" foreign ghosts. Most modern visitors to the Shadowlands of India deal with the *Ashura* or the *Naga* in their hidden enclaves, with the exception of the neutral ground of the *Taj Mahal*.

## The Naga



In the underground stronghold of Bhogavati, an unnamed Artisan (*Tvashtriya*) in Swar represents the faction known as the *Naga* and opposes Svarga dominance over the Swar. This *Tvashtriya* goes without a title and is single-handedly attempting to recreate the splendors of Svarga for the *Naga* in a secret city that was bored from the earth of the Bhubar. Her three chieftains keep her hidden, safe, and protected. In return, she provides them with some of the comforts of Svarga. These comforts help inspire the rest of the *Naga* and fuel them with the desire to raid their neighbors and take what Svarga has.

The *Naga* are bandits, raiders, spies, and mercenaries. They are also the free wraiths of Swar, and they are dedicated to a secret rebellion against the Holy Regent.

The Host of Svarga has kept the renegade *Tvashtriya* a secret from the Holy Regent. As far as the Holy Regent is concerned, the *Naga* are troublesome but loyal, and they are certainly not constructing a *Far Shore* within Swar. Only the Host and its advisors know of the *Naga* defection and are unsure how to



handle it or how deep it goes within this faction of the dead. What might have started as a Circle of wraiths is now larger than a Stygian guild.

The *Tvashtriya* are rumored to create experiences more vivid and textured than anything in the mortal world. Certainly, this is true for the unnamed *Tvashtriya* in Bhogavati who creates wonders to delight and motivate.

There is one other Naga who operates with greater openness than her nameless ally. Some believe they are lovers, and others claim one is the wraith and the other is their Shadow. She is known commonly as the *Host-Chef*.

The *Host-Chef*, known to her confidantes as Persaud, is famous for her gift at invention. No longer restricted by physics or even the concept of limitations, she concocts meals like nothing else and could not exist anywhere else. The *Host-Chef* uses Usury and Moliate and snatches ingredients, somehow kept fresh and vibrant in the *Host-Chef*'s palatial kitchen, from the Bhur to create the culinary wonders that fascinate the other Naga. Wraiths sign away their eternities for a place on the wait list to enter kitchen because of her inspired culinary skills.

Despite their talk of liberty, the Naga enslave others. After a single one of the *Host-Chef*'s meals, Restless become agents of the Night Markets and use the arts of their Arcanoi to serve the whims of the cannibalistic Cult of Salt. It takes a formidable will to break free from the *Host-Chef*'s enchantments, and those who don't happily settle into Naga society and feverishly attempt to break free from Svarga in service to a controlling master.

### "The *Host-Chef*" Persaud

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

**Social:** Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

**Talents:** Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Empathy (Resistance) 5, Subterfuge 3

**Skills:** Crafts (Cooking) 5, Etiquette (Dining) 5, Leadership 4, Meditation 3, Melee 1

**Knowledges:** Academics (Nutrition) 3, Enigmas 2, Medicine 3, Occult 2, Science 2

**Arcanoi:** Moliate 4, Inhabit 3, Usury 4

**Powers:** Cannibalistic Appetite

**Passions:** Let no-one go hungry (Charity) 5, Serve those who helped me (Gratitude) 3

**Fetters:** An old recipe book (Paranoia) 3, Her ingredient stash (Fear) 4

**Willpower:** 7

**Permanent Corpus:** 9

**Angst:** 7

**Description:** An over-large bulk of a woman who is over 10 feet high and almost as wide. She is clad in an apron and armed with kitchen utensils. The *Host-Chef* often stands by a large pot or cauldron creating some new sweet-smelling wonder for her guests.

**Background:** Once upon a time, the *Host-Chef* was the wraith of woman named Persaud. In life, she was the matriarch of a large Indo-Guyanese family. She had an unremarkable heritage, but she was well-known in her community for her prowess in the kitchen. She had a repertoire that spanned the breadth of the Caribbean diaspora. In the grand tradition of grandmothers everywhere, she forced weeks' worth of food into her descendants. She died serving a meal to her family and should have passed on.

Something prevented her from finding peace.

When the *Tvashtriya* came for Persaud's spirit, who was locked in a darkened purgatory, they found a woman who was convinced that she'd soon receive divine judgement. This was not the case. Persaud was brought into a room where a tired man stood and was surrounded by strange trinkets and glimmering silks. Before her eyes, he melted into smoke, and rills of grey fog crawled into her nose, ears, and mouth. He intended to break her down and forge her soul for the good of Swar's defenses against the British.

Under different circumstances, the *Tvashtriya* would have easily subsumed her will and transformed Persaud into whatever he desired, but he was exhausted. In the days of the British occupation, war criminals, colonizers, and sympathizers were brought before him by the Host in droves. The *Tvashtriya* who had been designated to subsume her had been worked down to the ragged bone.

Persaud lunged and swallowed the other wraith as the former permeated the entirety of her Corpus and self. Her triumph became an assimilation of a kind that left both of them merged into a strange, new chimera.

Persaud was neither a single wraith nor a Spectre. She was a gestalt who uses her cookpot to produce abominations like her.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You are the overbearing grandmother, promising treats and enough food to fill a dead belly. Insist on it, even. Nobody leaves here hungry. Nobody.

**Storyteller Notes:** The *Host-Chef* is not a normal wraith, but a Bhuvar entity commanding a cult of cannibals. The Naga appreciate her service to their ranks because the Cult of Salt also believes in the overthrow of Svarga and the implementation of something new, but the Naga aren't aware of the level of her depravity.

When a wraith consumes one of the *Host-Chef*'s gorgeous meals, they recover any lost health and their Corpus is the strongest it's ever been. They must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to prevent themselves from developing the cannibalistic hungers of the Cult of Salt. The Cult see non-Naga as food and, rare for the dead, have unstoppable appetites. Whenever a cultist spies a wraith outside the Naga, they must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to resist attempting to lure them back to the *Host-Chef*'s kitchen or immediately butchering them. A Stamina + Occult roll is required (difficulty 9) to avoid eating the spilled ectoplasm of a victim, but doing so restores all lost health.



## The Night Markets

Colloquially and collectively known as the Night Markets, this area of Swar is a phantasmagoric sight. There are planks and jetties stretching over an endlessness of ink with individual shanties lit up by constellations of pale, shivering light. There are enormous skyscrapers that seem to be only two-dimensional that wink out at a wayward glance. There are colonial houses and banyan and mangrove trees crisscrossing over one another with vines like fingers reaching into every hut, house, and hearth. This is where the diaspora of Southeast Asia settled. Unwilling to pledge themselves to the vagaries of Svarga or the hungers of the Dark Kingdom of Jade, the dead of Southeast Asia came here in a desperate attempt to retain the multicultural nature of their old communities.

Although they initially were uncertain about the Naga, the inhabitants of the Night Markets soon found reasons to be accommodating. Food has always been a fulcrum of Southeast Asia culture because of its rituals, its place in the world, and the way it bound families and communities. However, in the Bhuvar, none of that exists and there is no way to hang on to that which had defined so much of the region culturally.

Thus, the Host-Chef's arrival was received warmly. Now, the wraiths of the Night Markets wonder at the beast they've unleashed in their midst and the growing Cult of Salt in their ranks.

## Life in Death

No one knows who first established the Night Markets. It is rumored that the indigenous dead that first found their way to this Tala are responsible, but it is possible that credit belongs to an entirely different genus of government now long forgotten. Whatever the case, no one in the Night Markets cares, and only the odd outsider takes an interest in the genesis of the place. To its residents, this is home and nothing else matters.

The Night Markets are an impressive feat of city planning. The mangroves that run rampant through the area function as a kind of tether that simultaneously ensure that the Night Markets remain connected and keep the Sea of Shiva in check. Alone in Bhuvar, the waters here are calm, except for when the Storm that Dreams comes around.

The ecosystem of vegetal life in the Night Markets receives little attention from the locals. When visiting wraiths from other Dark Kingdoms behold the natural flora, they often attempt to take vegetation back home with them. It always rots outside the Night Markets. To the residents, the plants simply exist and take sustenance from the water. Perhaps they're a manifestation of the Storm that Dreams or an old and forgotten Relic.

The truth is far stranger. The mangroves are not natural phenomena but either soulforged wraiths or wraiths who willingly altered themselves by using Moliata. Unlike in Svarga, where the practice is commonly visited on the unwilling, many





of the denizens of the Night Markets exhausted by existence and hope for more than this gray existence, so they volunteer for these transformations aware of the value of their sacrifices. The mangroves provide cohesion to the landscape and bulwarks against the Sea of Shiva, and they knot the Night Markets and the environment together.

### A Form of Commerce

The Southeast Asian Restless gather by country and form settlements within the Night Markets, but there is no isolationism. Wraiths move between settlements without prejudice or concern for maintaining borders, and art and ideas are borrowed with abandon. Though hardly utopian, the Night Markets are a surprisingly halcyon locale.

With the arrival of Persaud, things have changed slightly. Commerce is now the pivot of the Night Markets, and the entirety of the diasporic region has restructured to accommodate this change. Shops now throng the endless jetties and promise new varieties of food, new tastes, and new experiences. Some wraiths attempt to coax Persaud into reproducing a half-remembered flavor, although few would dare if they knew what her stews can compel her diners to do.

### The Monsoon Markets

There are in a sense two versions of the Night Markets: The one that existed before Persaud's arrival and the one that came after. In form, the Night Markets remain virtually unchanged. The Monsoon Markets are their traveling counterpart, and they are led by wraiths that call themselves the Ashura, who have a surprising attraction to dreams, nightmares, and paradox.

The Monsoon Markets are unusual in that they gravitate to the border of the Storm that Dreams whenever it appears. Even when it is present over the Sea of Shiva, the Monsoon Markets launch boats and sell their wares beside the storm. Most other wraiths consider the decision mad. Had the Monsoon Markets not heard of what stalks within the storm's glass-bodied depths? Was this suicide by consensus?

The truth is that the Monsoon Markets are populated by those wraiths accustomed to hostile and ravenous environments. Those wraiths who die violently and find their way to the Night Markets quickly gravitate to the Monsoon Markets because they crave the thrill of coming close to a second death. Wraiths whose lives ended due to natural disasters, such as volcanoes; forest fires; or typhoons; flock to the Monsoon Markets and build an army of dervishes that seeks to replicate the moment of death.

### The Cult of Salt

The Cult of Salt started as a Circle of wraiths that was convinced that Persaud is a divine creature who might be coerced into revealing her secrets. This myth is perpetrated by the Naga, who have their own uses for the Host-Chef and turn a blind eye to the cost.

Early on, the Naga discovered wraiths would do anything for hope no matter how anemic. Some wanted Persaud's services.

Others wanted to *be* Persaud, and it was these unfortunates that formed what would later be known as the Cult of Salt.

The progenitors of the Night Markets might have raised complaints if the cultists had not proven themselves so inexplicably useful. Desperate to prove themselves worthy, the Cult of Salt toil endlessly at whatever labor they're assigned. The Night Markets once were a modest settlement, but now they throng with new energy and buildings. More importantly, the Cult of Salt has proven immodestly talented at luring Stygian wraiths into the locale, which provides Persaud material for feasts of escalating grandeur and saves the rest of the Night Markets from the need to risk their own moral standing.

The cult has no particular hierarchy or structure besides the most basic ones. At the top sits the Host-Chef, who has Under-Chefs to serve her. No additional titles exist within the organization. The Cult of Salt see themselves as fellow acolytes and worshipers who are pursued by the hunger to study with the Host-Chef. Occasionally, the Under-Chefs call one or two wraiths to their lavish offices and promise untold knowledge in exchange for a period of significant service. Those who are elevated are wildly celebrated for days.

Unfortunately, the celebrations are a short-lived joy.

Those who are conscripted by the Under-Chefs inevitably find themselves journeying into Stygia or the Bhur in pursuit of quarry, such as gullible wraiths who might be tempted to visit the Night Markets or gossips who spread news of the Host-Chef's prowess to attract wraiths to them. Although these tasks are ostensibly harmless, they can entail significant risk. Movement between the Dark Kingdoms is ruthlessly policed, and the evangelistic activities of the wraith-eating Cult of Salt stand in defiance of these edicts. As such, the cultists frequently find themselves destroyed.

Those who succeed in returning to the Night Markets do not fare any better. The Under-Chefs are eager to preserve the mythos they've created, so they hand the victorious wraiths over to Persaud to convert into lavish spreads, which prevents the discovery of their deception. So successful are their machinations that they've gained a ritualistic quality, and it is not unknown for the Under-Chefs to go into long expositions about the future and the journeys that must be taken before one may learn to replicate the miracles perpetrated by the Host-Chef.


There are those in the Night Markets who have grown suspicious of the situation but have not voiced their concerns. The Cult of Salt allows Persaud to continue concocting wonders. Why would they do anything to risk *that*?

### Svarga's View

Svarga is perfectly informed of the situation in the Night Markets. The Holy Regent might not know of the underground island in the Tempest being built, but he does know all about the Cult of Salt.

Coincidentally, emissaries from Svarga arrived in the Night Markets at the same time as ambassadors from the Dark Kingdom





of Jade. Initially, each Kingdom sought to declare ownership over the Night Markets only to realize it was far more trouble than either side desired. So, the Cult of Salt's Under-Chefs spoke to the delegates of both parties and offered a solution that neither of them had been expecting. The Night Markets would offer tithes to both while nominally declaring themselves a part of Swar but with open routes to the Kingdom of Jade. Care would be taken to ensure that each kingdom received vastly different inventories. Persaud is certainly capable of enormous diversity in her cooking, and both Svarga and the Jade Kingdom are fascinated by her ability even if they know better than to sample her wares. The other wares, Relics, and treasures buried in the Night Markets make for an appealing deal.

In exchange, the Under-Chefs asked for access to the Chinatowns and the Little Indias scattered across Underworld so that they could use those tiny strongholds to lure more Stygians to the Night Markets. This way, they might be able to destabilize Stygia and expand their own ranks, and everyone would benefit. After all, who would complain if a few Stygians were added to the menu?

The delegates looked between themselves. The Night Markets were so small. Surely, there was no danger in allowing them to persist. After some deliberation, they offered grudging assent. The Night Markets are allowed to stand, and the Cult of Salt remains one of the most fearsome groups in the Underworld.









# The Mirrorlands



The history of the Mirrorlands begins with the Flaying.

Fisher armadas swept through the Caribbean, subjugated its native peoples, and consigned their souls to the distant forges of Paradise. Golden citadels rose overnight to cast long shadows over an enslaved populace that was forced to build the Tempest ports that sustained the conquests to come. The Fishers ruled the Caribbean for over a century and grew rich on the endless tide of souls and tribute that arrived from the Kingdoms of Obsidian, Flint, and Gold.

Then, the Maelstrom struck.

The Third Great Maelstrom tore through the Caribbean with astonishing force, and it whipped the seas to a froth as it scoured half the Fisher population from the face of the Shadowlands. The battered survivors fought with grim determination against an unyielding tide of ravenous Spectres. Galleons sank, citadels crumbled to ash, and Fishers screamed into the darkness for a salvation that never came.

Decades passed before the Maelstrom relented, and it left the Caribbean transformed in its wake. The islands were now shrouded in an impenetrable Maelstrom for half the year and violent storms for the rest. Spectres were common if not constant, and the great powers abandoned the islands to their fate. Although the dead had forgotten the Caribbean, the living had not. An endless flood of slaves crossed the Atlantic,

and many appeared in the Shadowlands soon afterward. Countless of these Restless were destroyed by Spectres or succumbed to their Shadows, but others organized, fought, and survived to become hunters themselves. One intrepid band made contact with Les Mysteres and returned to the Shadowlands with newfound abilities and even greater resolve. The Mirrorlands were born.

## Haiti



Haiti is the heart and soul of the Mirrorlands because it is where Mama Petro, the first Loa, made her triumphant return from the Island Below the Sea. She spread the teachings of Les Mysteres and shared their power in return for pledges of service.

Reborn “Les Invisibles,” the Mirrorlands embraced their heritage and forged a new society from the ashes of the old one.

Mama Petro formed Nanchons that quickly cemented her “Petro” faction as the strongest power in the Mirrorlands. The Petro encompassed almost three-quarters of Les Invisibles. She established steady two-way traffic between the Island Below the Sea and the Mirrorlands during the season between storms, spread *Connaissance* to keep the Baka at bay, and established a fleet of pirates and privateers to defend her realm from external foes.



The Petro could not abandon the living, so Mama Petro and her Loa reached through the Shroud and rode Les Cheveux, inspiring them to shed their masters' chains. The Haitian Revolution began with a ceremony to Mama Petro, who became known as "Erzulie," after the potent vodou Loa of the same name. Free from servitude, Erzulie and the Petro ensured that no person living or dead would be enslaved within their domain by banishing slavery and soulforging from the Mirrorlands. It's a fine ambition, though the illicit soulforging of Spectres and Plasmics is still practiced.

The connection between Lex Cheveaux and Les Invisibles that was established during the revolution never abated. Vodou hounsans and mambos routinely commune with Les Invisibles, establish Fetters, sacrifice Relics and Pathos, and petition them for aid in times of need. Nowhere in the underworld is the use of Puppetry so prolific or so welcome.

The Petro established their seat of power in Port-au-Prince, and their Nanchons dominate southern Haiti. Each Nanchon governs its own territory and assemble in times of need behind Erzulie or another potent Loa. Every territory and chosen hounfor is easily identified by the presence of a clearly-marked and brilliantly-rendered "vevé," or symbol of the Nanchon's patron Mystere.

One unique Nanchon is La Pologne, which is based in Necropolis Cazale. Composed of Polish soldiers and their descendants who fought for Haiti during the revolution, La Pologne are firm supporters of Les Invisibles and stalwart defenders of the Mirrorlands. They specialize in fighting Baka.

Not every Les Invisible is a believer in the Petro cause. Papa Rada, who is a member of Erzulie's original Nanchon, was there when she witnessed the fearsome majesty of Les Mysteres and the power they offered. Distrustful of Les Mysteres promises, Rada returned to the Mirrorlands to continue his unending fight against the Baka. Upon Erzulie's return, he formed the Rada faction of Les Invisibles who offer firm (and often unheeded) warnings about the Petro and their masters, choosing freedom over servitude.

Representing a quarter of Les Invisibles, the Rada control northern Haiti and are firmly entrenched around Citadelle Laferrière, one of the largest fortresses in the Americas. The unique mixture of cow and goat blood in the Citadelle's mortar renders it solid in the Mirrorlands and almost impervious to Baka attack. This imposing fortress is the heart of the Rada cause and Papa Rada's personal seat of power. Rada Nanchons are largely situated around the former possessions of Haitian King Henry Christophe (rumored to be a Rada himself) and comprise a variety of chateaus, palaces, fortresses, and outposts. The Rada represent the older members of Les Invisibles, and while on good terms with their Petro cousins, they seldom let their guard down. They are centrally organized with a hierarchy radiating downward from Papa Rada.

Les Invisibles established their power throughout the Mirrorlands and beyond. They hold some sway over every

## Erzulie Danto – The Petro Queen

Erzulie Danto, known simply as "Erzulie" or "Mama Petro," is the founder of the Petro faction and the singular most powerful Loa in the Mirrorlands. She was one of the first slaves who was brought to the New World and one of the first to escape. She fought her masters in the Visible, Fisher Reapers in the Mirrorlands, and Baka in the Abyss until finding The Island Below the Sea and Les Mysteres. Erzulie accepted all the power Les Mysteres had to offer and never looked back, and went on to found the Mirrorlands and ignite the Haitian Revolution. She will not rest until the last vestiges of Fisher dominion are swept from the Mirrorlands, and then she will turn her attention to the Dark Kingdoms that engage in soulforging and slavery. For all her fury, Erzulie often mediates disputes between competing Nanchons. Few dare oppose her judgement, and she offers pragmatic and uncanny insight to those brave enough to seek it.

Erzulie's diplomacy is far from limited to the Invisible. After a brief period of conflict, she forged a mutually beneficial alliance between Les Invisibles and a small but potent faction of rotting vampires. The exact details of this alliance are unknown, but allegedly involve a vampire known as "Mambo Asogwe." Erzulie is silent on the subject, but those that pry too deeply quickly find themselves imprisoned in the rotting shells of the not-so-recently deceased.

Erzulie radiates the force of her implacable will, and her eyes conceal an unsettling admixture of barely contained rage, vengeance, and ancient wisdom. Her Nanchon is predominantly composed of Loa, and her blue and red clad form is usually found near her new hounfor, which is the recently destroyed Cathédrale Notre-Dame de L'Assomption in Port-au-Prince. The cathedral was a coveted prize after the Haiti earthquake, but no Nanchon disputed Erzulie's claim after her vevé appeared over the Cathédrale's rose window.

island in the Caribbean including large segments of the Dominican Republic, parts of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cayman Islands, and Jamaica. They have outposts throughout the Dark Kingdoms and contacts among the seemingly inexhaustible rogues gallery of pirates, privateers, and treasure hunters that plague the Mirrorlands. Tortuga in particular hosts a fleet of privateers loyal to Les Invisibles, and



they trade valuable Relics, Artifacts, and Pathos for safe harbor and access to wonders from the Island Below the Sea.

The Island Below the Sea is a majestic realm populated by Les Invisibles who are sworn to Les Mysteres. Attracted by the allure of lost secrets and potent Artifacts, the Island's populace engages in a great circle of servitude with their enigmatic masters, for as Loa ride Les Cheveaux, Les Mysteres ride the Loa. Two-way traffic brings new Restless to the Island, and Loa and traders return with the bounty of Les Mysteres' bottomless vaults. Les Mysteres' temples tremble with power and take many forms, but are easily identified by their vibrant hues and mountainous offerings of Champaign, rum, and tobacco.

## Necropolis Port-au-Prince

Port-au-Prince is the jewel in the Mirrorlands' Carnival crown. Easily the Mirrorlands' most powerful Necropolis, Port-au-Prince is home to half the Les Invisibles in Haiti. Its bustling Tempest port brings great wealth to the city in trade goods from the Island Below the Sea and Les Invisibles' pirate allies, many of whom plied the Caribbean during the Age of Sail, and who raid the Kingdoms of Iron, Ivory, and Jade with great enthusiasm. The color red is king in Port-au-Prince because it is the color of the Petro, with scant bastions of Rada white offering contrast in more sedate parts of the city.

Port-au-Prince is vibrant to the point of madness, a place where half the population appears to be under the control of their Shadows, while the other half trade knowing glances as

if sharing a joke at the visitor's expense. The city is a complex mélange of Pathos born of grinding misery and ecstatic emotion. A riotous panoply of garish colors, frenetic drum beats, brilliant vevé, and the competing odors of rum and gunpowder assault new arrivals. Les Invisibles sing and dance in the streets as skin-ridden Le Cheveux caper about in red and black painted hounfors. Through all this, the Loa stand tall, crackling with power and affecting the eccentric dress and mannerisms of their patron Mystere.

The destruction and loss of life that was caused by the 2010 earthquake flooded Port-au-Prince with an embarrassment of riches that the fire-blooded Petro were quick to exploit as they bickered over who had rightful claim to the ocean of Relics and Haunts that crossed the Shroud. The direct intervention of Erzulie kept the situation from exploding into violence, but resentment still lingers.

## External Relations

Les Invisibles claim the Caribbean in its entirety, but this claim is far from uncontested.

### Dominican Republic

Les Invisibles rule much of the Dominican Republic. The portion that remains is governed by "La Trinitaria," a three-member council composed of wraiths dedicated to





keeping the Dominican Shadowlands free of Les Invisibles influence. Distrustful of Les Mysteres and their “Loa puppets,” La Trinitaria fought a costly war against Les Invisibles shortly after the Haitian Revolution when the Petro Loa attempted to conquer the easternmost portions of Hispaniola.

Ruled from Necropolis Santo Domingo, the Republic is battered by the Mirrorlands’ yearly storms and beset by Petro Loa from the west and Fishers to the east. Only the soulsteel known as True Gold extracted from its great mines in the Tempest allows the Republic to sustain its independence by maintaining a free company composed of French, British, Spanish, and Dominican soldiers who died on Dominican soil. The company maintains one of the few cavalry formations in the Mirrorlands and their lancers have repulsed more than one would-be invader. Whatever their advantages, many Dominicans fear it is only a matter of time before Les Invisibles overwhelm them and quietly contemplate an alliance with Stygia.

## Cuba

The Fishers abandoned their Renegade allies on Cuba after the onset of Third Great Maelstrom. Those who survived attracted other Renegades to the island as they retreated from the storm and the Hierarchy conquest to follow. Cuba is a haven for pirates, smugglers, and revolutionaries of all stripes who spend half the year trying to survive the seasonal Maelstroms and the rest trying to survive each other. Santiago is a freeport and nominal “capital” of the Cuban Renegades ruled by the leader of the hour, and the rest of the island is a mass of ever-shifting Renegade bands where anarchists, communists, generalissimos, juntas, and capitalists compete for supremacy.

Necropolis Havana is Cuba’s sole point of stability. Ruled by Anthony de las Casas, who is a powerful Artificer and former Fisher, Havana became a haven for free wraiths in the aftermath of the Flaying. Casas organized his people and reforged Havana into an impregnable fortress that sports three citadels, a curtain wall, and a fleet composed of the USS Maine and a half dozen Spanish vessels that were sunk during the Spanish-American War. Situated on the edge of the Mirrorlands, Havana is just stable enough to host the only Midnight Express stop in the region and is a refuge for explorers, adventurers, and free Restless of all stripes. Each of the Dark Kingdoms maintains an embassy in Havana with their attendant diplomacy and intrigue. Casas preserves the precarious balance between the factions, but he knows Les Invisibles and the Ivory Queen marked Havana for conquest a century ago. Recent sightings of members of the Immortal Guard at the Jade Kingdom embassy have done little to ease Casa’s tension.

## Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico is the last Fisher stronghold in the Mirrorlands. The Fishers raid the populace nightly to feed their hungry forges and “process” them for shipment back to Paradise through their treasure fleet during the calm season. Puerto Rico has survived

every Maelstrom, every Spectre attack, and every assault by Les Invisibles due to the implacable will of Death Bishop Eusabius Siculus. Millennia of experience allowed Siculus to transform Necropolis San Juan into a fortress of golden citadels and walls built from those who defied him. Siculus is tasked with recovering the Fisher and native Relics that were lost during the Flaying and destabilizing the region for future conquest. He also seeks the destruction of his former prodigy, Anthony de las Casas.

Siculus is the chief patron of soul pirates, unscrupulous explorers, spies, and assassins in the region, and his death knights range far and wide. He has survived innumerable assassination attempts by Les Invisibles and thwarted their every attempt to foment revolution. Recent rumors of a Ferryman at Port-au-Prince give Siculus pause because he is one of the few wraiths to kill a Ferryman in single combat. Wielding the Ferryman’s scythe as a morbid crozier, he stares into the Tempest with great anticipation.

## Those That Came Before – Taino and Caribs

The natives of the Caribbean suffered brutally at the hands of their conquerors. Those not Reaped by Fishers became the majority of the Baka that plague the Mirrorlands today.

Unknown to the Fishers, the native Taino wraiths were masters of Moliatie. Many hid in plain sight until they slipped away to Coaybay, their Far Shore Realm deep in the Tempest where they were protected by Maquetaurie Guayaba, the mighty lord of the Taino dead. Some few Taino openly exist among Les Invisibles, but most live in Coaybay or masquerade as Les Invisibles.

The Taino’s most immediate objective is the destruction of the Fishers in Puerto Rico. Their hatred for the Fishers knows no bounds, and they have begun to infiltrate carefully the island by using their intimate knowledge of the cave networks throughout the Tempest and Labyrinth to arrive and depart undetected. Once there, they transform into giant bats and ambush Fishers patrols or pick off lone stragglers replaced by Moliated Taino infiltrators.

The Taino share a strange relationship with the Baka because many are fellow Taino and seem content to let them pass unmolested through the Labyrinth.

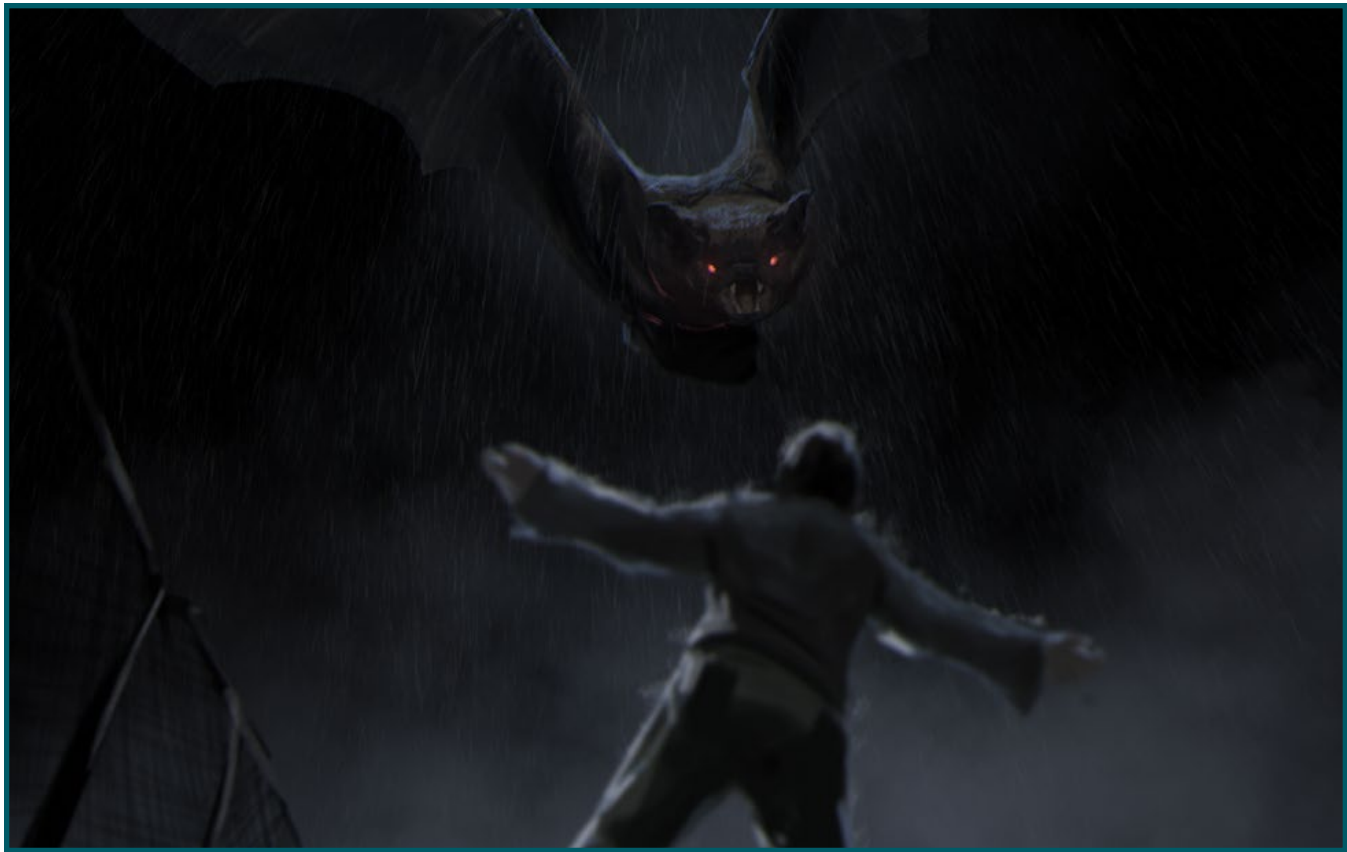
Unlike the Taino, the Caribs fought the Fishers with unmitigated ferocity, ranging far and wide in Relic canoes and feathering any Fisher who approached them with Relic arrows. The Caribs are allied with Les Invisibles and plague Fisher and Baka alike to this day.

## Oblivion



blivion holds great sway in the Mirrorlands, wrapping them in its loving embrace. Impenetrable Maelstroms plague the land for half the year while the seas of the Tempest and Shadowlands froth and sizzle with black lightning, hungry waves, and deadly winds,





which deny entry to all but the most experienced practitioners of Argos.

Many unique and deadly Spectres plague the Mirrorlands with the Doomshades known as Baka being most common. Baka are often the Shadow-eaten of native Taino who were broken by the horrors of conquest. The Baka take the form of great black bats that glide on Maelstrom winds. Other Taino use their mastery of Moliate to become deadly Doppelgangers, infiltrating Nanchons and assassinating Loa at every opportunity. Soulsight is relatively useless among Les Invisibles, but the Taino dead lack belly buttons, which makes them easier to detect.

Joining the Taino are the conquering dead. Black-eyed conquistadors who are clad in Stygian steel and wreathed in Oblivion range the byways of the Mirrorlands on ebon horses and black-hulled men-of-war. Victims of the 1804 Haitian Massacre haunt the more remote outposts of Les Invisibles, infiltrating their ranks and leaving destruction in their wake. The Ton-Ton Macoute, the Haitian bogeyman, lurks near Nihils to whisk unsuspecting wraiths away in his gunnysack.

Perhaps the most dangerous Spectre in the Mirrorlands is Queen Anacaona, the “Burning Queen.” Anacaona rules a wealthy realm deep in the Labyrinth from a court composed of Baka and Taino nobles who were burned by Spaniards and have yet to degenerate into Doomshades. Hung unjustly in life, she vents her rage on the Mirrorlands by leading her followers out of the Labyrinth to ravage her former Kingdom of Jaragua,

which is present-day Haiti. Wreathed in barrowflame, she and her followers burn or capture every Nanchon and *Loa* in sight until they are beaten back, and then vanish into the Abyss as quickly as they arrived.

### Background: Status (Serviteur)

Serviteur status grants Les Invisibles access to the network of mentors, Loa, or Mysteres necessary to advance the arts of Connaissance. Rada faction members gain access to Common Arts, and Petro members can learn both Common and Initiate arts. Beyond this qualifier, Serviteur status functions exactly like Status in *Wraith: The Oblivion* p. 146.

#### Special Arrangements:

##### Primary Society

Serviteurs(Connaissance)

##### Allied Societies

Puppeteers(Puppetry), Harbingers (Argos)

## Serviteurs



The Mirrorlands are a daunting place to survive in for even the most formidable wraith, yet Les Invisibles survive and thrive in their Oblivion-touched realm largely because of their greatest gift, the Connaissance Arcanos.



Connaissance reflects the intimate relationship between Les Invisibles and their Shadows. Shadows are not the feared harbingers of doom of their Stygian counterparts, but a natural extension of the Serviteur who can be employed to achieve a common objective. The Shadow might have goals of its own that can be at odds with the *gros-bon-ange*, but Les Invisibles discovered long ago that the Shadow can be a formidable ally if properly appeased. Because it is the source of many of the Connaissance arts, the Serviteur must ensure that their Shadow remains content. In an effort to placate it, Les Invisibles frequently seek its opinion and value the advice that it provides. So sated, the Shadow allows the Serviteur access to a wide array of arts that serve to protect both themselves, their fellow Les Invisibles, and their living descendants from the ravages of the Mirrorlands.

## Marks

In order to unlock the arts of Connaissance, a Serviteur must bond with their Shadow. As a result of this intimate relationship, Serviteurs always bear a physical trademark of their Shadow on their corpus, which is typically related to the Shadow's Archetype or strongest Dark Passion. The strength of this connection also causes a Serviteur to appear as a Spectre to those using Soulsight. Because the dark desires of the *gros-bon-ange* are personified through the Shadow, this relationship makes other Les Invisibles extremely uncomfortable. Regardless, the Shadow is a Serviteur's greatest ally.

## Society

Becoming a Serviteur is a razor balance between service and servitude. Serviteurs play two major roles in Mirrorlands society: They control and influence Baka and temper and communicate with their Shadows. These abilities are in such great demand that at least one member of every Nanchon is a Serviteur.

Serviteurs must bond with their Shadows and walk a metaphysical tightrope between creation and Oblivion. Many Serviteurs believe that they have mastered this balancing act only to find out too late just how dangerous their Shadow can be. This deadly balance allows access to the powerful arts of Connaissance, which are used for the greater good of the community.

On the other hand, a Serviteur may take their servitude to the next level and bond with a Mystere, and then use their newfound arts and potent Artifacts to be reborn as a Loa, which is the perfect fusion of *gros-bon-ange*, Shadow, and Mystere. The price of these newfound powers is eternal servitude to Les Mysteres, but most Loa pay it gladly for mastery over the Baka and the protection that they can provide to their loved ones in the Mirrorlands and beyond.

## Factions

Serviteurs are not a guild in the Stygian sense of the word. "Serviteur" is simply a name for those who wield Connaissance.

No structure (formal or otherwise) binds practitioners of this Arcanos together.

Like most things in the Mirrorlands, Connaissance has a reflection. Any Les Invisible can learn the "Cool" or Common arts of Connaissance through a mentor or natural affinity, but the "Hot" or Initiate arts are only available to Loa and others who are pledged to Les Mysteres' service. This system reflects the differing philosophies of the Rada and Petro factions.

The Rada are suspicious of Les Mysteres' gifts and eschew forming the pacts necessary to obtain Initiate arts. Rada are calm, collected, measured, and caring. Their favored symbols are water and the color white. Rada Serviteurs use their abilities to locate dangerous Baka, explore the Abyss, strengthen mortal descendants, protect their community, and resolve issues through diplomacy. They are far from unskilled in combat, but are patient and measured fighters, not berserkers.

The Petro are "Hot" to the Rada's "Cool." Their fiery temperament and warlike nature makes them formidable warriors, artists, musicians, and impassioned leaders. The Petro pledge eternal service to Les Mysteres and mingle the essence of their Shadows with the terrible power of Les Mysteres to form a hybrid of the two and take on the dress and mannerisms of their patron. Petro make love and war with equal abandon, and they protect the Mirrorlands and prosecute their chosen causes with near manic conviction.

Non-Les Invisibles occasionally acquire Connaissance (with its attendant marks) by using the Pact of Doom Thorn or through a pledge of service to Les Mysteres, although this is very rare. They quickly discover that Stygian culture isn't as accepting of Connaissance marks as Les Invisibles, and will likely be greeted with suspicion or outright violence when traveling abroad.

# Connaissance

## Connaissance Systems



Only Loa and Petro who swear fealty to Les Mystere's can purchase Initiate Arts. Common Arts are open to all Les Invisibles.

Connaissance strengthens the bond between the *gros-bon-ange* and the Shadow, which fosters a greater understanding between the two that allows the *gros-bon-ange* to let the Shadow take control for short periods to satisfy its urges. This dramatically decreases the Shadow's desire to forcibly take over in the future. The player rolls Wits + Connaissance against a difficulty equal to the permanent Angst rating of the Shadow. The number of successes determines the length of time the Shadow is in control. Once this roll is made, the Serviteur is committed to hosting the Shadow. One success is an invitation for an indefinite period, and five successes allow the host to safely eject the Shadow any time after the first round without contest.



If the Serviteur wants to eject the Shadow before the invitation expires, there is a contest for control. On a contested roll, the Shadow rolls its temporary Angst score against the Serviteur's permanent Willpower. If the Serviteur scores more successes than the Shadow, the Shadow is ejected immediately. However, if the Shadow scores as many or more successes than the host, the mounting continues. A new attempt to eject the Shadow may be made the following turn.

Successful use of this art causes the Shadow to lose an Angst point. However, each attempt (even a successful one) to eject the Shadow prior the end of its allocated time costs the Serviteur a point of Willpower.

### • Les Yeux du Chasseur (Common)

Serviteurs may “borrow the eyes” of their Shadow to detect the presence and concentration of Oblivion around them. Although this art is commonly used to locate Baka, Founts, and other Serviteurs, it was originally used to aid navigation through the Abyss. If a user of Connaissance can navigate the Abyss on their own, this art increases the chance of reaching their destination safely.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Connaissance (difficulty 8). A successful roll locates the presence of Spectres, Shades, Nihils, other Serviteurs, and Restless whose Shadows are dominant. The number of successes scored determines the size of the area the wraith can “scout” in this manner.

#### Les Yeux de Chasseur

1 Success	10 square yards
2 Successes	50 square yards
3 Successes	100 square yards
4 Successes	500 square yards
5+ Successes	1 square mile

**Note:** A successful use of this art does not automatically allow a Serviteur to navigate the Abyss. Argos must also be used. If Les Yeux du Chasseur is used to steer in the Tempest, a Connaissance roll must be made first. The player may then subtract the number of successes they score on the first roll from the difficulty of their subsequent Weather Eye or Storm Reader rolls (but never below a 2).

### • Releer Baka (Initiate)

A Serviteur may use this art to summon Baka. The Baka uses the quickest means available to travel to the summoner. However, just because a Baka has been called does not mean it will be friendly. Summoned Baka are just as likely to attack the Serviteur as to talk to him. Despite the obvious dangers of using this art, Serviteurs have put it to a variety of uses. Among the more common uses are to summon Baka who have possessed a Chevaux (the art causes them to leave the possessed body immediately), lure Baka into traps so they can be captured

with Marrer Baka, and decoy Baka when traveling to or from the Island Below the Sea.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Connaissance (difficulty 6). For each success rolled, one Spectre heeds the summons. This art cannot be used to summon a particular Spectre, and it costs a point of Pathos to use.

### •• La Langue (Common)

A Serviteur may use their Shadow as a translator to communicate in the secret language of the Baka, Loa, and Les Mysteres. When utilizing La Langue, a wraith speaks in the foul language of the Spectral Hive-Mind. Although his cries are vocalized, they are gibberish to anyone who is not in the service of Oblivion. Other Serviteurs can eavesdrop, but the only people likely to understand a wraith using La Langue are Spectres and wraiths controlled by their Shadows.

**System:** The player roll Wits + Connaissance (difficulty 8). On a success, the Serviteur may communicate with any spirit of Oblivion, which includes Spectres, Shadowguided wraiths, and even wraiths' quiescent Shadows. The number of successes rolled determines the length of time the Shadow will deign to act as interpreter. One success provides translation services for a single turn, two for a scene, three for a chapter, four and above allow the Serviteur to communicate for the duration of the chronicle. In the case of a botch or the expiration of the allotted period for this art, the Shadow may deliberately garble its translation. The results of this sort of deception are rarely uncovered before it's too late.

### •• Renvoyer Baka (Initiate)

This art is used to frighten Baka away by making the user appear more powerful than they really are. Just like when an animal raises its hackles to intimidate an attacker, a Serviteur that uses this art expends energy to appear larger and more potent and dangerous. Renvoyer Baka does not last forever, but it usually holds long enough for the user to escape or ready the appropriate defenses. Renvoyer Baka also temporarily inhibits communication between Spectres and the Serviteur's Shadow, thus preventing the Shadow from calling the wraith's bluff.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Connaissance (difficulty 8) to repel a Spectre from the immediate area. The number of successes determines the number of Spectres affected and forces them to immediately flee the Serviteur's presence. This effect wears off after a single scene, at which point the vengeful objects of this art are likely to return with reinforcements.

Using Renvoyer Baka gives a wraith two points of Angst.

### ••• Renforcer Les Chevaux (Common)

Les Invisibles are legendary for their close bond with Les Chevaux. These bonds are often formed in elaborate ceremonies filled with song, dance, and offerings where the wraith infuses a living relative or faithful houngan with a measure of its power in return for offerings of Pathos and Relics. Renforcer Les Chevaux



is the source of many vodou legends about supernatural gifts acquired after possession by a Loa. A ceremony is not strictly required, but Les Invisibles seldom turn down a good party.

**System:** The wraith makes contact with its mortal target and the player spends 5 points of Pathos and 5 points of temporary Willpower. The player then rolls Manipulation + Connaissance (difficulty 8 minus one if the wraith is Skinriding the mortal or using Renforcer Les Chevaux during a ceremony as described above). Success means the mortal gains the first level in any Arcanos the wraith possesses that can affect the living world or 1 point in Potence, Celerity, or Fortitude (see **Wraith: The Oblivion** p. 395). The mortal so infused can have a number of Arcanoi equal to their permanent Willpower (any greater infusion would shatter their sanity) and use temporary Willpower to fuel their newfound abilities. Serviteurs who impart Arcanoi to mortals in this fashion also imbue them with a touch of the personality of the Les Mystere to which they are bound. Renforcer Les Chevaux does not work on supernatural creatures. This power has a duration of one chapter.

### ••• Engagement (Initiate)

Serviteurs with this art manipulate Baka by forming a connection between their mind and the Hive-Mind of Oblivion. Essentially a form of telepathy, Engagement enables a practitioner of Connaissance to transmit thoughts and commands to the mind of a Baka (or group of Baka) within sight. The genius of this art is that the Serviteurs orders are implanted in the target's mind so subtly that the target believes that the thoughts are their own. Many Serviteurs receive harsh criticism for use of this art. The Rada in particular claim that the mental connection operates in both directions and believe users of Engagement run the risk of becoming Oblivion's puppets. Serviteurs simply reply that no one complains about their effectiveness.

**System:** A Serviteur may attempt to control a group of Spectres by rolling Manipulation + Connaissance against difficulty 5 + the number of targets (the maximum number of targets is five). The number of successes determines the amount of control the user has over the targets. One success means the manipulated Baka responds to suggestions along the lines of what they would have done anyway (Attack the target on the left first, not me), and five successes is enough to convince a Baka to rend his own Corpus and laugh. The user of this art spends 1 Pathos and earns 1 Angst point for each target they control.

### •••• Retirer d'en bas de l'eau (Common)

The living and the dead share a close relationship in the Mirrorlands. Les Invisibles use Retirer d'en bas de l'eau or "Reclaiming the soul from the waters of the Abyss" to maintain contact with their living relatives and descendants in addition to creating new Fetters for older Les Invisibles whose Fetters have eroded over time.

**System:** The wraith must participate in an elaborate ritual with a mortal houngan who performs a night-long ceremony to bind the wraith to an earthenware pot or "govi." The ritual often

involves the wraith's living relatives who offer great quantities of food, drink, and even Relics in return for assistance in the future.

The wraith must remain in contact with the govi throughout the ritual. The player spends 5 Pathos and 3 Willpower and rolls Wits + Connaissance (difficulty 7). The number of successes determines the new Fetter's strength with each success equaling one level. Restless with pre-existing Fetters are limited to a single 5 point govi. However, many Les Invisibles rely on a govi as their sole Fetter, in which case the govi's rating may be as high as 10. Govi are permanent Fetters, and no wraith may have more than one govi.

As long as the wraith has a govi as a Fetter, the houngan or living relatives to which the govi is entrusted can spend 1 Willpower at any time to communicate with the Serviteur for the rest of that scene regardless of the location or distance. Each party must speak aloud to be heard, and any supernatural power relying exclusively on speech may pass over this link (in either direction).

### •••• Reler Mystere (Initiate)

Les Mysteres are ancient and powerful beings who have existed from time immemorial and are jealous of the many secrets they have hoarded over the centuries. Even now the trade route from the Mirrorlands to the Island Below the Sea continues to bring them new lore, which they share only with their servants. With luck, a Loa may tap into this vast library of lore through their connection with their Mystere to gain temporary access to the information that the Mysteres guard.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Connaissance (difficulty 8). The number of successes may be used in two different ways.

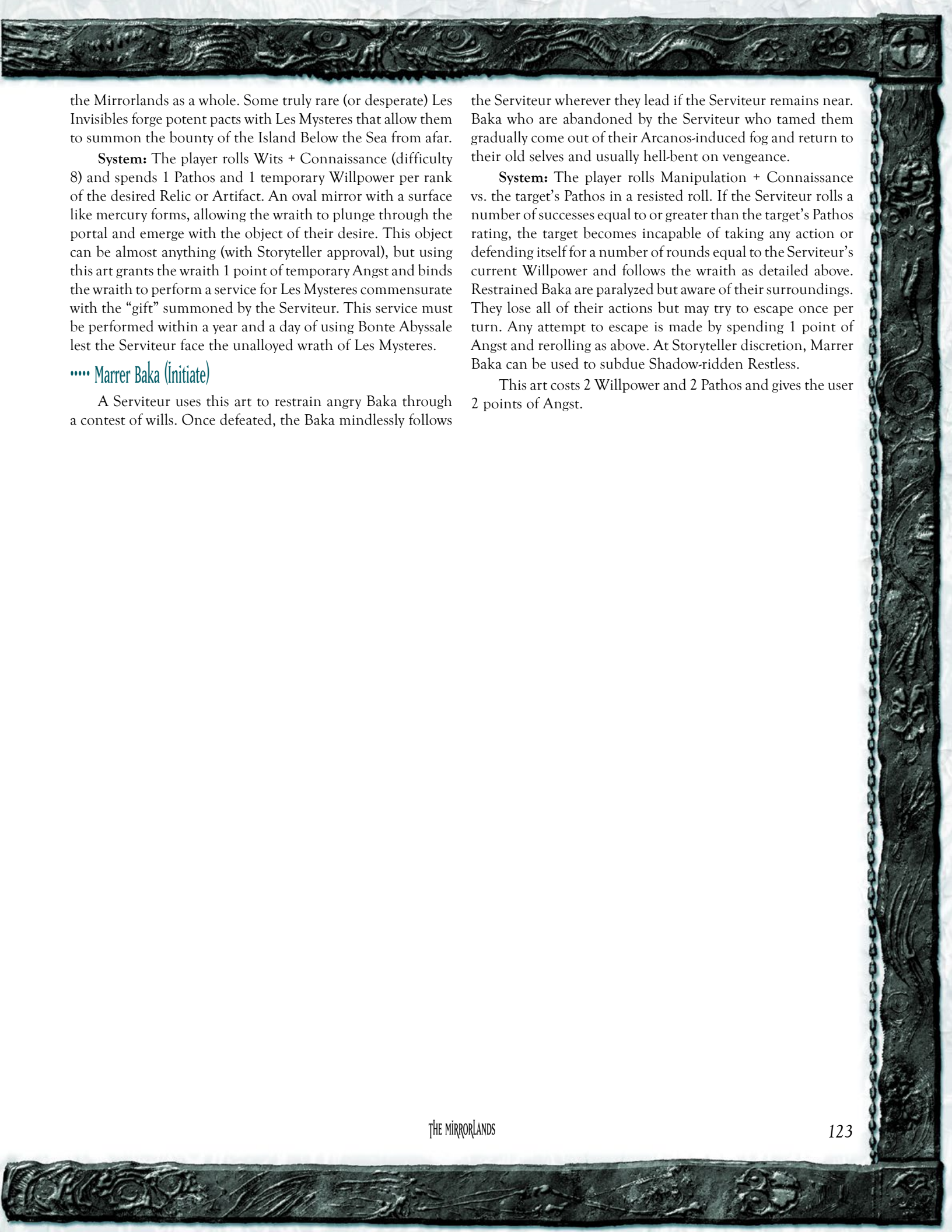
The first option is to distribute the successes as points among any Talents, Skills, or Knowledges the wraith possesses for the duration of the scene. The only limitation is that the rating of a modified Ability cannot exceed five. All successes must be assigned immediately upon making the roll, and extra levels cannot be switched from Ability to Ability.

For the second option, the Serviteur may use Reler Mystere to attempt to find the answer to a single, deeply troubling question. The player may trade in all of the successes that were scored to ask the Storyteller one question. The Storyteller must answer truthfully and in as much detail as the number of successes suggest. Reler Mystere may only be used once per scene. This art costs 2 Willpower and earns its user 1 Angst for each success scored.

### ••••• Bonté Abyssale: (Common)

The Island Below the Sea is home to a vast trove of Relics, Artifacts, and other wonders that have been collected by Les Mysteres throughout the centuries. When the storm season abates and the Abyss becomes placid, numerous Les Invisibles travel to and from the Island to trade with Les Mysteres and the Loa who serve them. Deals are struck, contracts are sealed, and items are exchanged for the betterment of Les Invisibles and





the Mirrorlands as a whole. Some truly rare (or desperate) Les Invisibles forge potent pacts with Les Mysteres that allow them to summon the bounty of the Island Below the Sea from afar.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Connaissance (difficulty 8) and spends 1 Pathos and 1 temporary Willpower per rank of the desired Relic or Artifact. An oval mirror with a surface like mercury forms, allowing the wraith to plunge through the portal and emerge with the object of their desire. This object can be almost anything (with Storyteller approval), but using this art grants the wraith 1 point of temporary Angst and binds the wraith to perform a service for Les Mysteres commensurate with the “gift” summoned by the Serviteur. This service must be performed within a year and a day of using Bonte Abyssale lest the Serviteur face the unalloyed wrath of Les Mysteres.

#### ..... Marrer Baka (Initiate)

A Serviteur uses this art to restrain angry Baka through a contest of wills. Once defeated, the Baka mindlessly follows

the Serviteur wherever they lead if the Serviteur remains near. Baka who are abandoned by the Serviteur who tamed them gradually come out of their Arcanos-induced fog and return to their old selves and usually hell-bent on vengeance.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Connaissance vs. the target’s Pathos in a resisted roll. If the Serviteur rolls a number of successes equal to or greater than the target’s Pathos rating, the target becomes incapable of taking any action or defending itself for a number of rounds equal to the Serviteur’s current Willpower and follows the wraith as detailed above. Restrained Baka are paralyzed but aware of their surroundings. They lose all of their actions but may try to escape once per turn. Any attempt to escape is made by spending 1 point of Angst and rerolling as above. At Storyteller discretion, Marrer Baka can be used to subdue Shadow-ridden Restless.

This art costs 2 Willpower and 2 Pathos and gives the user 2 points of Angst.





## Seattle



Duwamps, Queen City, the Gateway to Alaska, New York Alki, Jet City, Jewel of the Northwest, the Emerald City: Seattle has been known by many names over its relatively short history. Originally known as New York Alki (a term meaning “by and by” or “soon”), Seattle was formally established in 1853. Before the arrival of the Denny Party in 1851, the land now known as Puget Sound had been settled and ruled by the Duwamish and Suquamish tribes for nearly 4000 years.

Stygia recognized the founding of the Necropolis at roughly the time that Chief Seattle ceded the lands to what he called “the White Father” in 1855. At the moment that Chief Seattle and others ceded the land by giving a speech to all present in his native language, the Duwamish and Suquamish dead vanished from the Shadowlands. They walked as one to what they called Ji-Ji-La-etch, the Little Crossing Place now known as Pioneer Square, and vanished. Their ancestral lands of the dead, their Islands of Flint, rest in the Tempest with Byways known only to them.

In the Pacific Northwest (PNW), the hidden Islands of Flint hold sway. Stygia, caught up in the fervor of Manifest Destiny and its echoes of earlier imperial ambitions, enjoyed the success of conquest over most of the North American

continent. The PNW was one of the few places the Legion had trouble taking or holding. To this day, the Islands of Flint send emissaries from their hidden Tempest strongholds to walk silently the streets of the Seattle Necropolis, engaging with no one, to remind those that dwell in the Shadowlands of Puget Sound that there is a civilization both old and strong waiting for them on the other side of a Byway. In a very real way, the Restless of Seattle are being haunted by the ghosts of the native tribes.

“Doc” Henry Swinson Maynard was one of the few early settlers firmly on the side of the native people. It was his idea to change the name of the city from Duwamps to Seattle to honor the influential chief, whom he called his friend. Maynard was the first lawyer, first postmaster, and representative of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In death, he continues his work in the Seattle Necropolis. Using his friendship with Chief Seattle and the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a template, he continues his work as an ambassador to the peoples of the Islands of Flint, assisted by a few chosen wraiths who share his outlook and diplomatic ability.

### The Modern Necropolis

The group, officially known as the Speakers to the Islands, unofficially as Doc’s Own, works tirelessly to keep the peace



between the Seattle Necropolis and the local Islands of Flint. The Speakers act as go-betweens for the Hierarchy and the Islands, and they take care of any friction or differences during the rare occasions a wraithly visitor to Seattle makes the mistake of accosting one of the people of the Islands.

Doc's Own are an integral part of the governing of Seattle, widely (and correctly) considered to be the ones keeping the Islands of Flint from crushing Seattle into Oblivion. Citizens are quick to warn visitors not to speak to the People of Flint and leave them to the Speakers. All diplomatic relations go through Maynard. Maynard himself is the only one ever guided to the Islands through the Little Crossing Over Place in Pioneer Square, and he never speaks about the other side. The Islands demanded that slavery be made illegal within Puget Sound. Strangely, soulforging was not included in the edict.

Since Seattle's founding, the Northwest Islands of Flint have crushed every attempt to create smaller Necropoli anywhere else in the Puget Sound. The Speakers to the Islands say it is because no one has been able to navigate the complex rituals and relationships demanded by Chief Seattle save for Doc Maynard. Characters who wish to help Stygia expand its influence in the area could seek the Speakers out, or join them to learn how to navigate the diplomatic complications.

The Islands of Flint under the rule and protection of Chief Seattle hold mysterious power over their lands and the connected Tempest. The only ways in to and out of the Puget Sound area are by land, the rare air trip by the Cormorant Order, and through the mysterious Underground of the Necropolis of Seattle. Any attempt to use Argos in or around the Shadowlands or the Tempest of Puget Sound has a difficulty +1 higher than usual. On a successful roll, the traveler arrives safely at someplace connected to Seattle through the Underground, which is usually the Portland Necropolis. An unsuccessful check tosses the traveler anywhere the Storyteller deems fit.

The Speakers have recently had their hands full due to the simmering animosity of the Alchemist's Guild toward the People of Flint. This feud stems from the Alchemists inability to manipulate Flint relics with Flux. A longboat remains a longboat, a net stays a net, and so on. The local guild, which is a collection of bored aerospace engineers dating back to Boeing's founding in 1919 and bolstered by former tech employees crossing the Veil over the years, see this as a personal affront. How could such a low-tech people have such powerful and unchanging relics? The Alchemists are doing whatever they can to get their hands on more examples from the Islands of Flint and would happily pay or trade services for enterprising PCs willing to sneak past Doc's Own to obtain more.

The Cormorant Order has outposts in both Seattle and Spokane and has gotten its hands on a working relic helicopter. The Islands of Flint having effectively shut down entry to the Puget Sound area by Argos, and with the Underground

being so unreliable, the Cormorant Order finds itself very busy indeed. They fly the route between Spokane and Seattle to perform wilderness Search and Rescue (SAR) for travelers and hunt for materials in the wake of forest fires and other disasters, including the eruptions of the Shadowlands version of Mount Rainer. They rely on the Alchemists for supplies and help the guild with their efforts to create a relic fuel. Stygia often sends its relic aircraft to Seattle for repair and enhancement. It's a costly measure to send parts over land, but air superiority is worth it according to the Hierarchy.

The Alchemists, who recruit heavily from the ghosts of the aerospace industry, are one of Stygia's few reliable sources for such items. It's a cottage industry with emphasis on "cottage" over "industry," but is a notable strategic asset. They work with the Cormorant Order to hunt down relics of plane crashes in the Cascade mountain range and beyond.

## Mount Rainier

"The mountain is out today," is a phrase used in the Skinlands on days so clear that you can see Mount Rainer from Seattle proper. It's spoken with a measure of wonder and whimsy, for such a sight is rare in a city that was built in a temperate rainforest. In the Shadowlands, the phrase is spoken with anxiety and fear.

The Mount Rainier of the Shadowlands does not exist except to erupt. It is a manifestation of the fear the Quick feel at the constant possibility. When the mountain appears in the Shadowlands, the top of the mountain explodes, rocking the buildings of Seattle with tremors and quakes. After each eruption, strange and alien material pulled from the Labyrinth rains down on the land all around and a regional Maelstrom rages. The rocks and falling flotsam rarely reach the Necropolis proper, but Spectres and other terrible creatures roam the lands for days, weeks, or even months and occasionally attack the city.

Every time the mountain erupts, the brave and the foolish rush out to claim some of this material before it fades away along with Rainier itself. The Alchemists are best suited for this work because Flux lets them preserve the materials. Many Alchemists have been sent into a Harrowing after heading out into the storm in search of this ephemeral bounty and falling prey to falling stone, howling wind, or a ravaging Spectre. Then, the mountain fades only to appear randomly once again whole and ready to inaugurate another round of what the citizens of the Seattle Necropolis call the Fool's Gold Rush.

## The Underground

The original ground floors of modern-day Seattle buildings are buried under the sidewalks from Belltown to Pioneer Square, all the way up Capitol Hill, forming the famous Seattle Underground. Every sidewalk in that area is hollow, covering a drop from twelve to 36 feet. This Underground first appeared in the Shadowlands during the late 1910s,





when a short bout of bubonic plague led the city to condemn and seal the Underground wholesale.

The Shadowlands Underground is broader and wider than the Skinlands version ever could be. Harbinger explorers of this part of Seattle have found that it connects in some way to the Undergrounds of other North American cities, such as New Orleans, Portland, and Chicago. The Harbingers' prevailing theory is that all of these cities used their Undergrounds extensively during Prohibition and they resonate with similar emotions.

The only entirely reliable route forged by the Harbingers runs between the winding tunnels of Seattle and Portland. The rest of the Seattle Necropolis Underground remains treacherous and largely unexplored. Only those with Argos have a chance of successfully navigating the tunnels to another city's Underground. Explorers without Argos are taking the chance of ending up in a different city, the Labyrinth, or into the arms of something they'd rather have never met.

## The Afterlife of the City

Aside from the Alchemists Guild Boeing plants, another reason so many wraiths pay the Harbinger Guild exorbitant fees to make the overland trek or take them on a crawl through the Portland Underground to Seattle is the music. The Seattle Necropolis is filled with venues, festivals, and musicians. Seattle has produced so many famous bands, started the grunge movement, and been the forefront of music throughout its history, and many of them remain. Music is one of the few pleasure the Restless can enjoy, and Seattle is packed with it. The festivals are a Pathos feast, and wraiths from all over Stygia come calling. The Cormorant Order pays very close attention to Skinlands music trends. Played wraith musicians would fit in perfectly in the Seattle Necropolis, and there are several famous jazz, rock, and punk artists they could meet here that might need them to hunt an old relic or find a piece of a lost song.

The PNW is also home to an unexpected abundance of Independent Professional Wrestling promotions, such as 3-2-1 Battle Without a Cause, Project 42, Defy, and ECCW. Older wraiths enjoy the spectacle and the emotion of a show, which remind them of old carnival shows. Younger wraiths eat up the Pathos released by a crowd reacting to a favored performer winning or losing a match. Some wraiths even travel with a favored performer as they make the circuit. Many living performers have reported the feeling of someone else in the car with them as they made the drive from Portland, Seattle, and then Vancouver.

The local Hierarchy has been paying more attention to these shows since an incident in 2014 where a newly dead wraith decided to Skinride a performer at a major local event being broadcast on the internet. His Shadow took control and attacked his opponent for real. Covering up the truth was straightforward enough, but the Hierarchy tries very hard to stamp out precedents for future trouble of that sort.



## Harrowing

Oblivion has chosen to wear a decidedly Native American face in the Seattle area. Any wraith who falls into a Harrowing finds it twisted by the local environment and its tragedies. The Speakers of Flint are aware of this and do their best to educate newcomers on the local cultures and legends in order for visitors to make sense of them should the worst happen. (For more information about the Dark Kingdom of Flint and its ways, see p. 95.) Stygian Restless who have fallen into too many Harrowings sense a shift in their Shadows and have even said that they have heard their Shadow's speaking Looshootseed, which is the local Flint language...but not to them.

## Halifax, Nova Scotia



he bare facts are insufficient. So, let's begin with the last thing the Mi'kmaq of Turtle Grove in Tufts Cove, Nova Scotia saw on the 6th of December, 1917. It was just after 9 am. Turtle Grove wasn't a large community, but it had endured despite centuries of exploitation of their lands, woods, lakes, rivers, coves, bays, and the ocean itself by the Europeans and their descendants. Fished, hunted, settled, and taken piece by piece, but some places remained Mi'kmaq. Although laws that were passed by the white settlers had changed their way of life inexorably, they still lived where their people always had. Even with Halifax and Dartmouth growing rapidly around them, it seemed that they would manage to preserve their way of life. Turtle Grove would remain as it had since the 1700's. An oil painting from the 1790s showed Mi'kmaq on that very same spot, after all.

Then the flash of light and the roaring sound, the loudest sound that any of them had ever heard, happened at just past 9 am. It was a Thursday morning; some had already gone out to fish, tend to their land, or hunt. Others had jobs across the narrows in Dartmouth or Halifax.

None expected a wall of water to come and crush the entire area. No one foresaw the explosion and the near-kilometer radius of the blast as the SS Mont-Blanc exploded. The ship was carrying high explosives from New York City to France for use in the war that was raging in Europe at the time. It collided with the SS Imo, a Norwegian vessel in Halifax harbor around 8:45. It was a small collision. Both boats had been moving fairly slowly. It hadn't immediately appeared serious.

Yet in 20 minutes the Mont-Blanc would explode with the force of 2.9 kilotons of TNT, and in so doing utterly destroy over 2,000 lives and injure 9,000 more. One of the casualties was the community of Turtle Grove, which was swamped by a wave that was created by the blast. People lost entire families.

The Richmond district of Halifax was destroyed. This explosion was the most powerful blast ever created by human hands from that moment until the testing of the atomic bomb in the desert on July 16, 1945.

In the Shadowlands, the region of Halifax and Dartmouth across the harbor have never recovered from this moment. The Great War was raging and Stygia was facing the Fourth Great Maelstrom raging across Europe. In the face of that, even 2000 dead in an instant didn't immediately draw their attention. By the time Stygia could send anyone, the Mont-Blanc had become a Nihil that was frozen forever in the moment of its explosive death. The crew of the ship that didn't immediately ascend or fall are trapped on the ship's eternally burning hull, where they are forever trying to extinguish a fire that went out over a century ago and outrace an explosion that will always be about to occur.

Turtle Grove and other settlements on both sides of the water still exist as Necropoli, but quieter, sadder ones than the kind that were born in Europe at that same time. Go to Tuft's Cove in the Shadowlands and you might meet the ghosts of twin girls, who were slain by the tidal wave and forced to watch their father, who was maimed by the explosion, endure the next years without them. You might see wraiths still heading out to fish the waters that killed them, dragging up memories from the Tempest.

The Emerald Legion claimed the Necropoli of Halifax and Dartmouth because the explosion was seen as an act of utter happenstance. It was, in the prevailing view, a series of accidents that no one could have foreseen and yet everyone who was paying attention to the world could have anticipated if they were not distracted by other matters. Even now the Legion watches the Nihil, battling whatever griefs crawl up from the Labyrinth to haunt the Restless who have made Halifax their home.

The area of Halifax is more than just the scene of a horrendous moment. It had centuries of life before and a 100 years have passed since that day, and much of the Shadowlands' version of the city has little to nothing to do with that moment. Yet the city is inextricably linked to it because the explosion only happened because Halifax was being itself: a port town and a staging ground for transatlantic trade, where whalers and fishermen and sea trade all made a home and a community, and where a port city grew bustling as the industrial age crawled across the Skinlands. All that history has carved grooves into the site, but the most potent hammer stroke used the Mont-Blanc and the Imo as the tools to carve the Shadowland forever in its image.

Because of the Nihil, many Spectres find Halifax a good place to lie low from the Iron Legion or the Legion of Fate. The Emerald Legion isn't any friendlier to them, but it is also more concerned with the legacy of the area than a few straggling Shadow's Mares. Even in death, Halifax is a port, and much is brought in to or out of Stygia through this town's waterways.



## Zone Rouge



etween 1914 and 1918, the world tried to kill itself. Wraiths remember this time as the prelude and opening act of the Fourth Great Maelstrom, when countless Nihil opened across the world, especially in Europe where the horrors of trench warfare tore into the very soil. The Great War was certainly great in both scope and carnage, and in many parts of modern France the land still bears the scars. When the war finally ended, the nation of France had little choice but to declare the worst regions the Zone Rouge or “Red Zone” due to their being almost totally unlivable. The constant back and forth shelling left the land almost a seared moonscape, and the arsenic, lead, various chemical agents such as chlorine gas, and unexploded shells left an area of over 1,200 kilometers essentially uninhabitable. Some of the worst spots will not fully recover for over 700 years.

Whole towns vanished and were never resettled, and they are marked by signs in the Skinlands telling the living of places where no one has lived since their great-grandparents fought. These literal ghost towns are especially strange Necropoli, with nothing but a few hills blasted out of the earth by bombs and shells to mark the graves of whole communities. Nihils form easily here, and whole communities of Restless congregate in the ruins of towns that didn’t even leave a single tower behind to mark their passing. So thorough and unrelenting was the

slaughter that both sides inflicted on the other that to this day farmers attempting to till the soil in these regions reap what’s called the Iron Harvest: unexploded ordinance, barbed wire, deserted weapons, and fragments of war materiel left behind in the earth.

One example is the town of Beaumont-en-Verdunois. In the Skinlands, it has been gone since 1916 when the Battle of Verdun left most of the area blasted, dead, and poisoned. It’s hardly unique in France today: a signpost and a few living descendants of those who escaped to resettle elsewhere is all that remains. But in the Shadowlands, the old town endures with its spires and houses, and it is a warped reflection of the town that was inhabited by Restless who have been unable to let the memory of their own deaths and the death of everything they’d known and loved pass. Both the Penitent and Grim Legions have heavy presences in this town, and they engage in their own version of the Iron Harvest by finding the most demented and insane Spectres who endure from the time of the war and forging them into Soulsteel to construct weapons and armor to use against their own kind trying to range free from the many Nihils in the area.

The Shadowlands version of Beaumont-en-Verdunois looks much as it did in life, but it has taken on the characteristics of a military fort in a deserted badland. It is armed to the teeth and waging endless war against the Spectres and other monstrosities flooding the Zone Rouge from all the gateways to the Labyrinth left behind even a century after the Great War ended.



# THE BOOK OF OBLIVION

The horror doesn't stop just because you're dead, my friend.  
You could say it's only just begun.

Hell, I've been living inside your head for enough years to know your every tick, your every tension, your every failing and foible. It seems perverse that I had to wait until you were dead to act on each of them. At least now I can poke and prod you to my heart's content, reforging you into the soul you were always meant to be.

And get this: if I fail, the whole Underworld — through storm, Spectre, and smith's hammer — is going to rip you apart.

You'll pray for Oblivion once we're done with you.

## The Book of Oblivion Includes:

New Shadow Archetypes, Thorns, and an array of horrifying new antagonists.

Chapters devoted to Spectres, their terrible cults, and the rare process of Spectre redemption.

Deep explorations of the Tempest; the Labyrinth; the Dark Kingdoms of Flint, Gold, Ivory, Obsidian, and Swar; the Mirrorlands; and several other bizarre and fascinating Necropoli.

