

ENDS OF EMPIRE



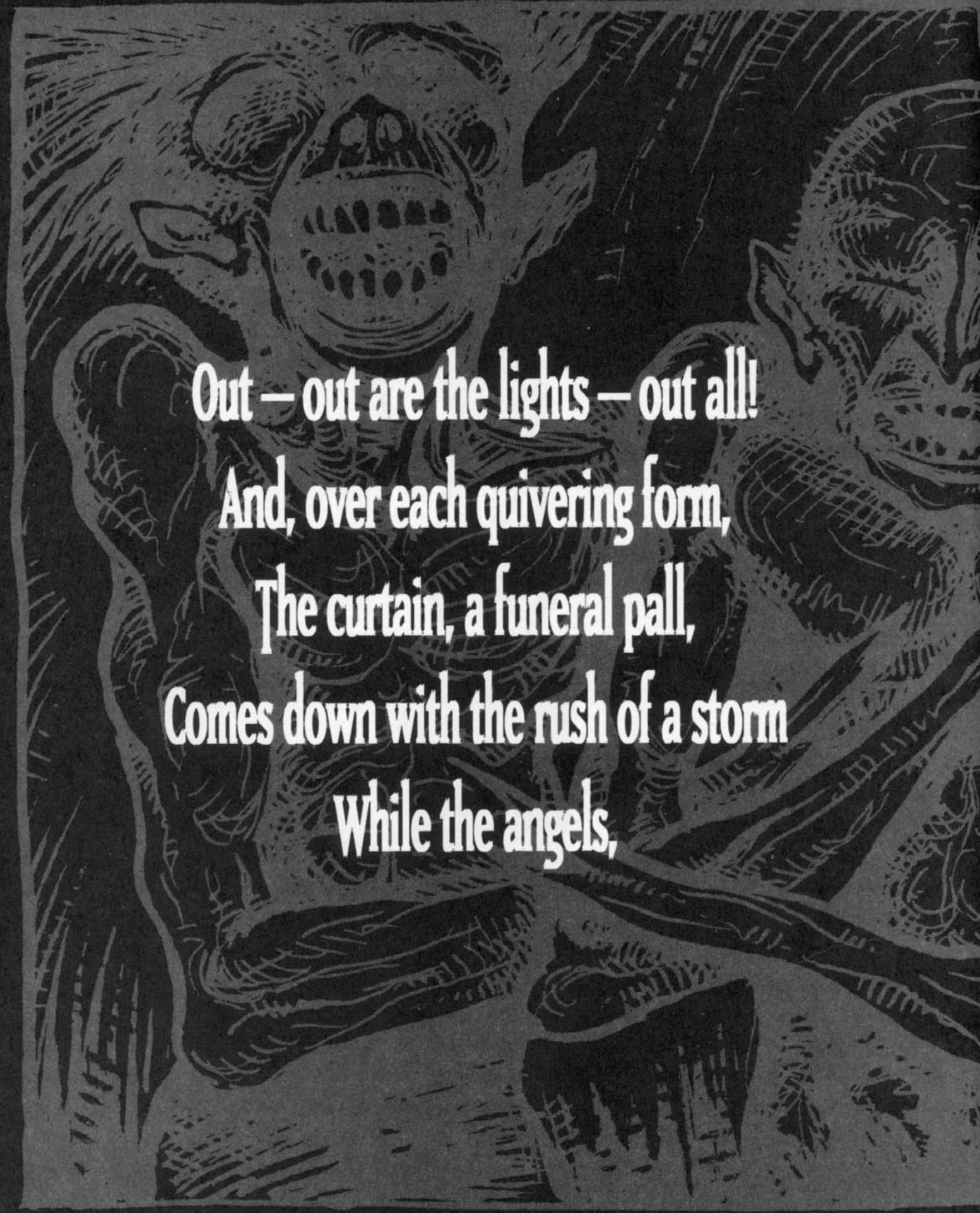
**Year
of the
Reckoning**

The Ultimate Sourcebook for Unlife
in Ranks for Wraith: The Oblivion™


ENDS OF EMPIRE



By Bruce Baugh, Richard E. Dansky, Geoffrey C. Grabowski and Ed Huang



Out — out are the lights — out all!
And, over each quivering form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm
While the angels,



all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"
And its hero, the Conqueror Worm
—Edgar Allan Poe, "The Conqueror Worm"

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The waves that wash over me aren't quite water, but they'll do until something wetter comes along. I'm clinging to something that appears to be a ship's beam in the midst of a stretch of ocean that can't be godforsaken because I honestly don't believe God's ever laid eyes on it. I'm that thoroughly lost, and the waves are getting bigger by the minute. I can't drown, but I have a feeling that in a few minutes, that's going to be small consolation.

To be honest, I'm afraid in a way I haven't been afraid in years. I'd swim, but there's nowhere to go. If I stay here, I'm doomed. If I try to go elsewhere, it doesn't get much better.

It's not a good thing to be dead and all alone.

The *Gran Grin* did not die well. I didn't get to see much of it, having been "escorted" belowdecks before we even got into cannon range, but I did manage to see (and hear enough). Albert, my jailer-*cum*-babysitter on the trip out, had told me that our mission was simply to perform recon; we were to locate the black city and chart a course there, then turn around and head back to Stygia. Unfortunately, the captain of the *Gran Grin* had apparently not heard those orders. He'd ordered the gunners to their posts and gone in to tap at the city's defenses. The ship must have been a majestic sight, the rigging full of gunners and archers, the cannon ports open, the crew taut and ready as a pack of leashed hounds—

—and then it all went to hell. One of the sentries on the wall spotted us and set off the alarms, and the ship was crushed. And I mean *crushed*. I have no idea what hit us, but I saw the timbers of the hull splintering under repeated blows from something unseen only seconds after the alarm was raised. Then something else literally ripped the deck off—I didn't get a good glimpse at whatever it was because at that point I was moving my skinny dead ass out of there as quickly as I could. I hit the waves, and the last sound I heard was a horrible crackling, as if someone were making a fist around a handful of dried twigs. I found myself thinking that perhaps a wooden sailing vessel might not have been the best choice for this mission, and then the waters closed over my head and everything got dark.

Behind me, the *Gran Grin* died, this time forever.

I don't think what came next was a Harrowing. Rather, it was a series of visions as I sank. I saw a chamber in the Onyx Tower, with the Deathlords arguing amongst themselves. The Laughing Lady saw me and pointed, and they all turned to look at me. I tried to protest that I didn't know what I was doing there, but the scene shifted. I found myself in the Labyrinth, watching Coldheart's legions march by with an air of terrible anticipation. In the tunnel behind them, flitting winged Spectres darted like honeybees, occasionally picking off one of the soldiers and taking him off deeper into the maze. The next image was of a catacomb, its walls lined with millions of pieces of paper. A lone wraith, clad in filthy rags, held up a scrap that had apparently fallen. He sat there in his rags and laughed in a way that made me afraid. After that I saw a man—just a man, a slightly overweight, unhappy-looking, *living* man with a bottle on the table to his left and an empty glass in his hand. He was waiting for something, of that much I was sure, before he, too, vanished. The last thing I saw was a face. It was a woman's face, ancient and sad and caring, and I could tell that she could see me. "Don't forget her," she said to me. "Don't forget why your journey began." I tried to call out to her, to ask her all the questions I hadn't thought of in years, but her face wavered and became transparent before I could speak a single word.

Then it all went black again, and I found myself breaking the surface near a floating piece of, well, for lack of a better term, driftwood. I think it's a piece of the *Gran Grin*, but I won't swear to it. The water's cold, in the same sort of way that hearing that a loved one has cancer makes you feel cold. Off in the distance I can see storm clouds bubbling up out of the water, presumably in the direction of that frowning city.

I have no idea how long I've been out here. It could be days, weeks, months—perhaps years. I suspect it's been at least a few days; from the distance I can hear vague noises of battle, and that tells me that Stygia's returned to the city in force. As much as I loathe the pricks who run the empire, I find myself hoping for a quick victory—for the sake of all the soldiers in the Legions, if no one else. Those souls are too important, each and every one of them, to get sacrificed on the altar of the Deathlords' ambition.

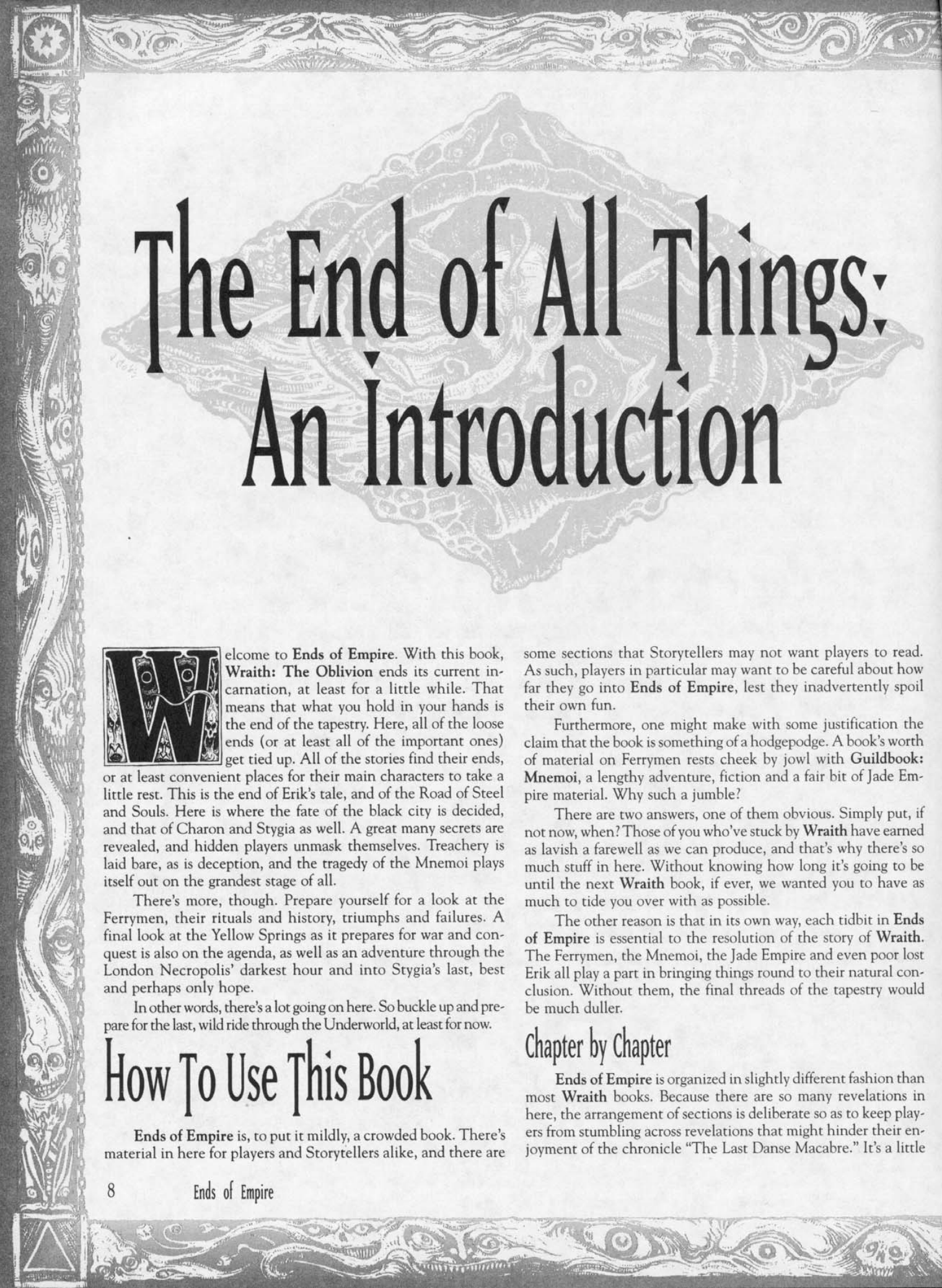
Heh. I wonder what would happen if the Smiling Lord commanded an offensive, and no one came? It might be worth finding out.

From a long way off, I can hear a high, whining buzz. It's annoying as all hell, to be honest, and I wish the sound would cut out, but instead it gets louder. I look up and there she is, the harbinger of doom.

It's a plane, a simple prop-job plane. She's got wing-mounted engines and a body as squat and ugly as death. She's painted black, and her bomb bay doors are open. There's a rising buzz from her target, where the Deathlords have sent in the rest of their air force as cover for this one lone straggler. She flies smooth and steady into the fray, the same way I'd always imagined an angel would fly. The Tempest winds don't seem to touch her, silhouetted against the sky. She's headed straight as an arrow and true as a promise for that black city, and when she gets there, she's going to do something horrible.

As soon as I see her, my gut clenches like a heart beating for the last time. The Deathlords are actually doing it. They've taken the final step, God help us all.

Then I do something I haven't done since I died: I pray. From somewhere deep inside, my Shadow joins me. And if that isn't a sign of the end of the world, I don't know what is.



The End of All Things: An Introduction

Welcome to *Ends of Empire*. With this book, *Wraith: The Oblivion* ends its current incarnation, at least for a little while. That means that what you hold in your hands is the end of the tapestry. Here, all of the loose ends (or at least all of the important ones) get tied up. All of the stories find their ends, or at least convenient places for their main characters to take a little rest. This is the end of Erik's tale, and of the Road of Steel and Souls. Here is where the fate of the black city is decided, and that of Charon and Stygia as well. A great many secrets are revealed, and hidden players unmask themselves. Treachery is laid bare, as is deception, and the tragedy of the Mnemioi plays itself out on the grandest stage of all.

There's more, though. Prepare yourself for a look at the Ferrymen, their rituals and history, triumphs and failures. A final look at the Yellow Springs as it prepares for war and conquest is also on the agenda, as well as an adventure through the London Necropolis' darkest hour and into Stygia's last, best and perhaps only hope.

In other words, there's a lot going on here. So buckle up and prepare for the last, wild ride through the Underworld, at least for now.

How To Use This Book

Ends of Empire is, to put it mildly, a crowded book. There's material in here for players and Storytellers alike, and there are

some sections that Storytellers may not want players to read. As such, players in particular may want to be careful about how far they go into *Ends of Empire*, lest they inadvertently spoil their own fun.

Furthermore, one might make with some justification the claim that the book is something of a hodgepodge. A book's worth of material on Ferrymen rests cheek by jowl with *Guildbook: Mnemioi*, a lengthy adventure, fiction and a fair bit of Jade Empire material. Why such a jumble?

There are two answers, one of them obvious. Simply put, if not now, when? Those of you who've stuck by *Wraith* have earned as lavish a farewell as we can produce, and that's why there's so much stuff in here. Without knowing how long it's going to be until the next *Wraith* book, if ever, we wanted you to have as much to tide you over with as possible.

The other reason is that in its own way, each tidbit in *Ends of Empire* is essential to the resolution of the story of *Wraith*. The Ferrymen, the Mnemioi, the Jade Empire and even poor lost Erik all play a part in bringing things round to their natural conclusion. Without them, the final threads of the tapestry would be much duller.

Chapter by Chapter

Ends of Empire is organized in slightly different fashion than most *Wraith* books. Because there are so many revelations in here, the arrangement of sections is deliberate so as to keep players from stumbling across revelations that might hinder their enjoyment of the chronicle "The Last Danse Macabre." It's a little

awkward, admittedly, but there's no other way to keep all of the balls in the air until the time comes to let them drop.

The first chapter of the book is a final look at the Yellow Springs on the eve of war. The chapter examines the Jade military, as well as the political mood of the empire on the eve of war. The final fate of Herr Holbein is revealed, as are the depths to which Stygia's most famous traitor has sunk, and there is a final look at the denizens of the Imperial Palace.

Second is "The Last Danse Macabre," a four-part adventure that takes players through the most shattering events in Stygia's long history. This section is for Storyteller eyes only, needless to say. Players who read through it may get a few surprises, but they'll spoil a lot of their own fun. The adventure moves from the London Necropolis to Stygia and beyond, resolves many of the long-running questions about Charon, and sets the stage for **Wraith** chronicles that go beyond Stygia. The characters play pivotal roles in fulfilling plans set in motion millennia ago — or in preventing them — and the fate of the Dark Kingdom of Iron hangs in the balance.

Next comes a section on the mysterious Ferryman: their history, powers and motivations. Included are rules for Ferryman character creation, should your chronicle call for such, and a detailed list of the initiations that a new Ferryman must endure. The Ferryman are a great deal more than just a travelers' aid society, with roots in unexpected places and a mandate older than Stygia itself.

Finally, there is **Guildbook: Mnemioi**. Mnemioi closes out the story of the Guilds, bringing the Road of Steel and Souls full circle. The section goes into much of the hidden history of the Dark Kingdom of Iron, revealing why Charon banished the memory-workers from Stygia all those centuries ago. Also included are new Mnemosynis powers, Artifacts and other ways to make Mnemos characters unique.

The book ends with an Appendix, which gives a brief run-down of the final fates of many of the major characters from **Wraith's** history, and also explains what the heck actually happened. Thumbnail sketches of the various Dark Kingdoms are also included. Furthermore, there's material on running post-**Ends of Empire** chronicles. Just because this is the end of the publishing line doesn't mean it has to be the end for your story, after all.

Interspersed throughout the various chapters are the final segments of the story of Erik, the wraith initially introduced in the **Wraith Players Guide**. His story is now inextricably bound up with greater matters, and he must play the role of Everywraith even as the storms of history rage around him.

How Not To Use This Book

Ends of Empire contains a lot of surprises. A lot. Some of them are mentioned in this chapter, some aren't. Some have the potential, if passed around too early or maliciously, to ruin other players' fun. Some make no sense out of context, and some can be used as fodder for continuity wars.

Needless to say, ruining people's fun and ranting and raving about how dreadfully unfair this is to the Nagaraja (who undoubtedly would have done A, B and C differently in order to sink the entire Stygian fleet, defuse the relic nuke and steal the Smiling Lord's tiddlywinks collection) is most assuredly not what this book is about. Take it for what it is — a bushel of information wrapped in adventure, all for the sake of tying off a veri-

table viper's nest of loose ends. There are no pro- or anti-agendas here, no attempts to make one Guild or faction or supernatural species look better than another, and reading the book that way will probably cause you to miss the point of all of this.

A Note on Plotting

Yes, all of this has been planned from the very beginning. The timing of the revelations isn't what was originally planned, but that's neither here nor there. Hopefully, after reading **Ends of Empire**, you'll go back to other books you might have read and have fun seeing where the clues and seeds were planted. (A hint: The whole thing is actually tucked into the fiction in **Guildbook: Artificers**, if you know where to look.) Happy hunting.

A Note on Timing

Much of the material contained in **Ends of Empire** concerns itself, of necessity, with the way groups like the Mnemioi are organized before the events of "The Last Danse Macabre." This is for one very good reason: You can run an infinite number of games before you go through "The Last Danse", but once you run it, you can't go back. Pre-adventure material simply has more utility. Much of what is contained in the non-adventure sections of this book can be extrapolated forward through the Reckoning-related events of the chronicle, and are perfectly suitable for post-"Last Danse Macabre" play.

A Note on Placement

Normally, it makes little sense to have player content interrupted by Storyteller content, particularly something as explosive as "The Last Danse Macabre." However, there's no other way to do it without ruining everyone's fun. The information contained in the chapter entitled "The Last Hour of Jade" adds to the enjoyment of the chronicle that follows; it elucidates without spoiling. On the other hand, the information contained in the chapters on Ferryman and Mnemioi blows the doors off many of the plot hooks in the chronicle section, so the placement of those chapters after the adventure is natural. Players who know they're going to be running through "The Last Danse Macabre" may wish to hold off on reading those chapters as well, but hey, it's your book, and we're not going to tell you what to do with it.

For the last time, just enjoy.

A Note on Research

Ends of Empire opens with the Stygian fleet, described in **Book of Legions**, sitting at bombardment distance off the coast of Enoch. There have been some rumblings that this is a mismatch. That's correct. Even the most casual dabbling into the nature of military hardware can only produce one conclusion: Hundred-foot high walls of black stone are no match for really, really big guns.

The Stygian fleet has a lot of really, really big guns — and some big people to use them, and some rather potent allies moving behind the scenes. Don't say you weren't warned.



Any port in a storm, they say. Well, there's no port within a couple of lifetimes of my position, and this storm doesn't seem likely to give me a chance to find one. I'm clinging to a piece of driftwood as the winds howl and the Spectres scream by. Wall after wall of cloud sweeps over me and pounds past, each battering me incidentally as it moves on toward a date with the Shadowlands. The Mortwights ignore me as they go by, no doubt figuring that they can pick me up later at their leisure. Rains that hit as hard as a blizzard of needles pelt me for a few seconds of agony, then they too move on.

And I'm all alone in the middle of this hell, waiting for the Maelstrom to notice me long enough to swat me once and for all.

Something smacks me in the back of the head, and I lose my grip on the driftwood as I go under. Inside, the other Erik is screaming in blind panic. Screaming strikes me as a good idea, and I try to follow his example but get a mouthful of water for my trouble, then sink. Above me is a looming, square shadow. *Severus?* asks my other half and I let myself hope. The Ferryman had always shown up to save me before, even at times when I frankly didn't deserve the help. Now I truly needed him, more than I ever had before. Surely he'd found a way to locate me in my hour of need.

With a kick powered by pure desperation, I launch myself upward, angling for a point just past the edge of the raft above. Hopefully I can come up where Severus could reach out and grab me, and haul me up to safety. I don't have the strength, even with my other side's help, to do more than break the waves at this point.

I burst through the surface of the water with a shout. My Shadow lends me the strength to do so. I know there'll be hell to pay for that later, but that's later. Right now, it's all about survival. I don't think Severus could have heard me above the storm, but I shout anyway. Then a wave crashes in and turns me around, and hope dies.

The raft is empty. There's no one on it. The rain pounds down on the logs that comprise it, hissing into steam as it does so. In the center of the raft is a little pile, of what, I can't tell from here.

But there's no Ferryman. There's no one to rescue me.

Well, then, my other half says. Fuck it. If there's no one here to rescue us, you'd better do it yourself for a change.

"What the hell? We—I can't make that! It's too far."

Bullshit. You can make it; you just don't want to. You're scared of trying, that's all. It's just that this is the first time your babysitter hasn't come to get you off the jungle gym, and you're too much of a fucking weenie to do anything for yourself. You're just going to give up now, aren't you?

"No," I say around a mouthful of water. The raft drifts further away. "It's just that I can't. I've already tried so hard."

The hell you have. You've been handed from keeper to keeper like a fucking UPS bundle since Severus picked you up. You haven't done a damn thing except yell and scream and let other people do the work.

"That's not true!"

Oh, so sorry, you're right — you ripped the face off that kid who idolized you. How could I have forgotten that?

"Dammit, you're twisting things again! It was necessary!"

Necessary? Nice justification. How the hell could that have been necessary?

I spat out water, took a few tentative strokes in the direction of the raft. "Because I needed to go on. I needed to do something for someone other than myself."

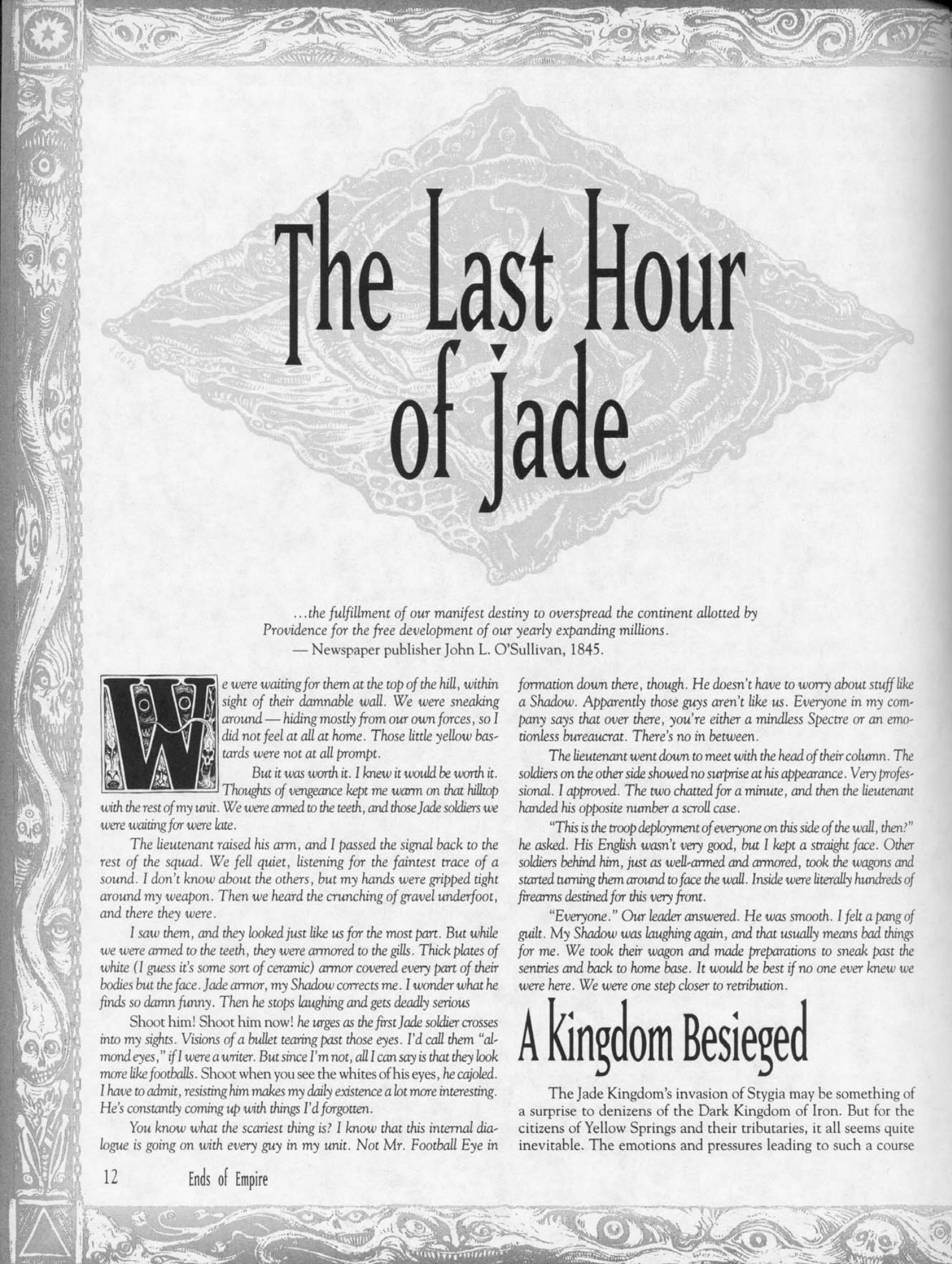
And that was a good enough reason for you to shred Ollie's face, but not good enough for you to get your lazy ass in gear? Like that logic. Gimme some more of that.

"No!" And with that I summon whatever strength I've got left and start swimming like a bastard after that raft. I can hear my Shadow taunting me, telling me that I'm right, I'll never make it. I ignore him. Stroke after agonizing stroke, and the raft crawls closer by inches. The other Erik is howling triumph, and I do my best to tune him out, shut him up, focus all of my strength on just reaching that goddamned raft.

Somehow, I do it. Somehow, I haul myself up on the raft, and crawl to the center. The effort makes me cry.

In the center of the raft is a pile of odds and ends. I sort through it, looking for anything that can shelter me from the terrible storm. There's some sort of pole there, and I put it aside. There's a lantern, but the fire is out, so I put that behind me. Hopefully, it won't fall off into the waves.

There's another thing there: a hooded robe. By some miracle, it's dry. I put it on and pull up the hood to keep the rain off, then curl up on the deck. My right hand reaches out instinctively and finds the pole. My left hand encounters the lantern. It's warm. I open my eyes and see that it's now lit. Dimly, I know that this is important, but right now all that matters is the warmth. I hold the lantern to me and curl up around it. For the first time in an eternity, I sleep. All around, the winds of the Sixth Great Maelstrom sing me a lullaby.



The Last Hour of Jade

...the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly expanding millions.

— Newspaper publisher John L. O'Sullivan, 1845.

W

e were waiting for them at the top of the hill, within sight of their damnable wall. We were sneaking around — hiding mostly from our own forces, so I did not feel at all at home. Those little yellow bastards were not at all prompt.

But it was worth it. I knew it would be worth it. Thoughts of vengeance kept me warm on that hilltop with the rest of my unit. We were armed to the teeth, and those Jade soldiers we were waiting for were late.

The lieutenant raised his arm, and I passed the signal back to the rest of the squad. We fell quiet, listening for the faintest trace of a sound. I don't know about the others, but my hands were gripped tight around my weapon. Then we heard the crunching of gravel underfoot, and there they were.

I saw them, and they looked just like us for the most part. But while we were armed to the teeth, they were armored to the gills. Thick plates of white (I guess it's some sort of ceramic) armor covered every part of their bodies but the face. Jade armor, my Shadow corrects me. I wonder what he finds so damn funny. Then he stops laughing and gets deadly serious

Shoot him! Shoot him now! he urges as the first Jade soldier crosses into my sights. Visions of a bullet tearing past those eyes. I'd call them "almond eyes," if I were a writer. But since I'm not, all I can say is that they look more like footballs. Shoot when you see the whites of his eyes, he cajoled. I have to admit, resisting him makes my daily existence a lot more interesting. He's constantly coming up with things I'd forgotten.

You know what the scariest thing is? I know that this internal dialogue is going on with every guy in my unit. Not Mr. Football Eye in

formation down there, though. He doesn't have to worry about stuff like a Shadow. Apparently those guys aren't like us. Everyone in my company says that over there, you're either a mindless Spectre or an emotionless bureaucrat. There's no in between.

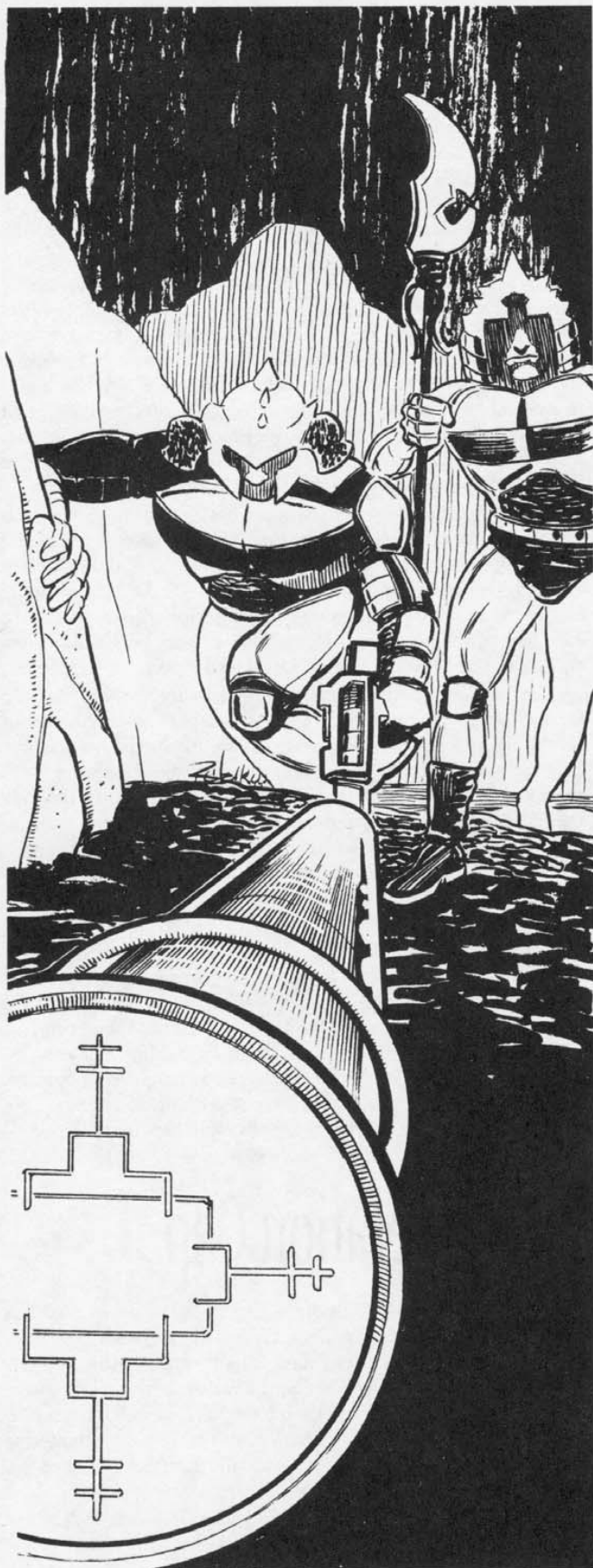
The lieutenant went down to meet with the head of their column. The soldiers on the other side showed no surprise at his appearance. Very professional. I approved. The two chatted for a minute, and then the lieutenant handed his opposite number a scroll case.

"This is the troop deployment of everyone on this side of the wall, then?" he asked. His English wasn't very good, but I kept a straight face. Other soldiers behind him, just as well-armed and armored, took the wagons and started turning them around to face the wall. Inside were literally hundreds of firearms destined for this very front.

"Everyone." Our leader answered. He was smooth. I felt a pang of guilt. My Shadow was laughing again, and that usually means bad things for me. We took their wagon and made preparations to sneak past the sentries and back to home base. It would be best if no one ever knew we were here. We were one step closer to retribution.

A Kingdom Besieged

The Jade Kingdom's invasion of Stygia may be something of a surprise to denizens of the Dark Kingdom of Iron. But for the citizens of Yellow Springs and their tributaries, it all seems quite inevitable. The emotions and pressures leading to such a course



May it please the Imperial Court to know that despite the most difficult and sensitive task set before me, I, Wei Xiao Jing, a mere assistant adjutant of the Ministry of Information, have achieved the goals set before me.

My task was a most difficult one as it was up to me to both encourage nationalistic fervor within the families and inhabitants of Yellow Springs and foster a sense of outrage as regarding the Stygian and Western threat. At the same time it was important to not allow the sense of outrage to demoralize the populace or to alert the barbaric dogs.

Much of this was achieved through new doctrinal programming that was adapted to our use after careful studying of several Shanghainese Communist families. As you know, many of the new souls harvested at this time have been raised Communist. As education and information are the most important weapon of keeping peace in the kingdom, I was saddened to find that our new family members are dismally lax in knowledge of the classic texts. We also have found it difficult to indoctrinate them with the new texts, as the Middle Kingdom has changed writing styles within the last few decades. Fortunately, these obstacles, tremendous as they are, have been overcome through supreme effort and dedication.

Required texts now include more accounts of Western invasion and occupation of our traditional lands. We're also experimenting with a new Western concept called "manifest destiny," of course making it uniquely and completely our own.

Preliminary reports seem to indicate that most of the populace will support a war against the Stygian barbarians. Many of the holdouts seem to be pacifists who will not offer an organized resistance. We believe at least 12 percent of the populace will volunteer once war is declared, possibly up to 20 percent were His Imperial Majesty to make a call to arms himself.

May His Heavenly Majesty shine on us all,

Vice-assistant Adjutant to the Minister of Education for the Protection of the Prosperous Realm

Wei Xiao Jing

of action have been building for quite some time. There is no question that Stygia must be invaded, occupied and brought under the control of the Emperor. When the Chinese first had contact with Europeans, they were viewed as barbarians. That perception has not changed in Yellow Springs.

Catalogue of Grievances

There is a saying that history is written by the victors. But it is also said that the dead never forget. So it stands that many of the souls of Yellow Springs have a list of grievances against both the white devils and the very idea of Stygia. Whether or not a particular ghost of that age has been personally wronged, it is certain that either someone from his family or someone he knew had been. Such offenses have not, indeed cannot, be forgotten.

No part of Zhongguo has remained free from European or American invasion and imperialism. While history books can gloss over the atrocities of the white man's burden, those who suffered or had their families suffer through it have long memories indeed. (It is also true that much of this sustained hatred is, of course, born of racism and prejudice, and in lands not their own white faces are easy scapegoats and a convenient focus for hatred.)

Take, for example, the Boxer Rebellion (1898-1900). Historically the only noteworthy portion of the event in most Western history texts is that fact that the Chinese were “silly” enough to attack foreign citizens, believing themselves to be invulnerable to bullets. Those selfsame texts fail to mention the slaughter and exploitation of many of the souls who had to live through Western occupation by what the Chinese call “The Big Eight.” China in the late 1800s and early 1900s was full of various imperialistic settlements — so-called “spheres of influence” — maintained by foreign powers. Most notably affected were the island of Hong Kong and the cities of Shanghai and Beijing, where international ghettos sprang up. Within these zones, foreign citizens were immune from local law, and many establishments and public parks had signs that proclaimed, “No dogs or Chinese allowed.”

Many insults of this sort are easily blamed on Stygian influences; the fault transfers gracefully across the Shroud. The incident at Port Arthur and the connection between Stygia and the Japanese revolt, which Jade Kingdom propaganda now lays at the feet of Charon, provide sterling examples of this sort of thing. Plus there are still tensions in Hong Kong, where the Western influence lingers even in the Underworld.

The lack of a telling victory against the oppressors has only made the ambient antagonism in the Yellow Springs that much greater. The Jade Empire has not yet reached a level of closure for itself, especially since it is common knowledge that the Jade Kingdom’s forces easily outnumber and are better equipped than their Stygian counterparts. Under such circumstances, what was wrong in Zhongguo should be made right easily in the afterlife. After all, isn’t that what the afterlife is all about?

The Big Eight

The Big Eight were the nations of Japan, Britain, France, Russia, the United States, Austria, Italy and Germany. There were many official reasons why their various armies were stationed in China, whether to protect foreign citizens, to protect national business interests or to promote stability and free trade within China. However, the Chinese remember them as claiming vast parts of China as their own sovereign lands through the use of arms and threat of military action against both the civilian and military population.

Spiritual Economics

Resentment against Stygia has not been limited to grouching about present or past military occupation within the homeland, but to other factors as well. The newly dead of the Empire bring with them Western value systems and religious beliefs that are so utterly alien as to be described only as a form of corruption.

This corruption is tangible and hits close to home for the Restless Dead. More and more *kuei* besiege Yellow Springs these days. Proper burial rites are almost completely forgotten. Expediency is more important than piety amidst the rigors of modern-day existence, and Yellow Springs suffers for it.

For example, there is a major deficiency in the number of relics coming across the Shroud. As a result, the Jade Censors levy taxes ever more harshly as the possibilities of keeping their quotas and their lifestyles grow less and less probable. It has even been suggested, none too subtly, to most families whose businesses or influence does

not allow them to afford tax debt that a few lives in service to the Emperor can wipe out many debts and back taxes. As a result more and more families disintegrate as they enter service to pay off what would have been unimaginable debts only a few decades ago.

With the sudden increase in ranks of Yu Huang’s forces, many of the new recruits are absorbed into the Imperial army. Most new recruits get their ears wet as domestic guards charged with subduing and capturing rampant *kuei* or rebels for later processing in Hell. Those units who are particularly talented are sent on to the frontiers for further training.

While Yellow Springs might be suffering from this economic crisis, Yu Huang himself certainly is not. At the cost of his supply of relics drying up to a trickle, Yu Huang has gained a huge increase in the amount of White Jade going directly into his coffers, bypassing the corruption of his own bureaucracy. (Note: White Jade made from *kuei* is only good for a few months, but that’s long enough for what he intends.) Furthermore, the Emperor also gains an awe-inspiring and well-equipped army with live combat experience, at little or no perceived cost to the morale of his citizenship.

Among more conservative elements of Yellow Springs society, there is much public support for Yu Huang for effectively and decisively doing something about the *kuei* problem that has been affecting Yellow Springs in the past years. To be honest, some families even welcome the taxation conscription, seeing it as an easy way of relieving their households of members whom they consider to be soiled by foreign ideals to the point of uselessness.

In the Conquered Territories, things are a lot harsher. The need for souls to fuel the machinery of empire has put considerable strain on the resources of the subjugated lands. The suddenly insatiable Yellow Springs appetite for souls worries many collaborators (who see themselves as potentially filling any shortfalls in quota), while infuriating and stirring up those rebel elements still around. Furthermore, as the harvests of new souls in the Conquered Territories grow ever more stringent, local administrators face the very real possibility of not being able to make quota, and facing Imperial wrath as a result. But if there are no souls to harvest, what can be done?

Fortunately for those harried officials, effective and overt rebellion in the territories has been pretty much stamped out as military governors look for any excuse to crack down on obvious subversion. The Jade Kingdom has not been stingy in providing soldiers for such exercises in maintaining hegemony. The constant rotation of both experienced and green troops into the troubled areas serves both to suppress whatever embers of resistance remain and give new troops live-fire experience that will undoubtedly be invaluable in more extensive combat.

The Generation Gap

The family model of the Jade Kingdom has worked well in the past. But in the Jade Kingdom, as everywhere, times are changing. Many of the newly dead have a hard time relating to their Restless families, and have not had the benefit of the careful ritual observances that have served their forefathers so well. As a result, those ghosts who are lucky enough not to be so *p’o*-consumed as to become *kuei* or Spectres right off the bat are usually pretty close to becoming *kuei* or Spectres within a few short years.

The elders of the traditional family do not always understand the difficulties of dying in the modern age. Unsympathetic elders find themselves battling with great-grandchildren who were re-

Str.

Research has been completed on Project: Dragon's Back. The prototype has been a complete success, and we are beginning plans for starting mass production. Factories in the Taipei Necropolis are already online. I'm not sure this production pace is a good idea, however, as the sheer number of Artifacts you want produced simply cannot be done in the time and under the budget allotted. I respectfully submit to you that we cut back on production until more testing of the finished product can be done.

*Shen Ping Chin, Production Supervisor, Ti Yu
Via Eunuch 4578-992-Imperial*

spected and powerful patriarchs and matriarchs in their own right, and who have seemingly no respect for their ancient predecessors. While some of this tension is relieved through either rigid etiquette and careful avoidance, many families have found a need to expand and separate. Such maneuvers, however, are almost entirely a function of the modern age.

This is due to the fact that there are so many more wraiths coming into Yellow Springs now than ever did before. In fact, an estimated nine million people a year die in China alone, and while only a tiny fraction of those become wraiths, a tiny fraction of a huge number is still fairly impressive. The population explosion has made the Necropoli and countryside more crowded than any time in Jade Kingdom history. While the Fifth Great Maelstrom, rebellions and the depredations of *kuei* packs have done a good job of depopulating Yellow Springs, more and more souls find themselves in an increasingly crowded afterlife.

In contrast to the congestion of the Yellow Springs, Stygia has been promoted as a wild frontier of barbaric *kuei* without any *shen* or contact with the Yang World. There are relics lying on the floor ready to be taken, while souls drift aimlessly under the iron grasp of Stygian brutality. If you're brave enough and strong enough, there are empires waiting to be carved and Chinese souls begging to be free.

There are two stories commonly told about Stygia within the Empire's bounds. One is for people with power, the other for people without. For the ones with power, Stygia is represented as a strategic obstacle that must be removed for the Jade Empire to have any chance against the unfilial tides of so-called modern thought. There are rewards for those families who forsake the comforts of home, and a rich land of opportunity awaits the hand of the ambitious soldier or bureaucrat.

For those without power, the tales of oppressed Chinese are first tendered. Small bastions of resistance, Chinatowns, are witnessed to offer weak but valiant pockets of resistance against a racist invader hungry for Chinese souls. Promises of riches and power for the taking tempered with tales of exploitation by the Stygians against those of Asian descent bring home the idea "Let's do to them before they do to us."

The Gender Gap

A woman's role in the Jade Kingdom is an odd one, as much of traditional Chinese society appears to have been male-oriented in the extreme. While superficially it seems that Chinese society is almost completely misogynist, women have more power than

an outside observer might think. What is more accurate to say is that there have been certain set gender roles for men and women that have been followed until the past century.

Traditionally a woman has almost no individual rights beyond those that she possesses as a representative of her family. As a daughter, she is useful for housework and as a way of bringing families together through marriage. Once she is married, she becomes the responsibility of her new family and has duties elsewhere, often serving the matriarch of her new household in whatever capacity she seems to be of use. Sons, however, stay with the family forever. They continue the family name, bring wives into the clan and strengthen the clan in its business and interests.

With this philosophy in mind, it is no wonder that the Chinese prefer sons over daughters, though matters were not always so extreme as they are now. Historically, female babies were known to abandoned or killed only in times of severe hardship. The children's mortality rate being what it was, parents were glad to have any children to help maintain the household. Only in the modern era of population control and reproductive quotas has there been a crisis of unwanted and abandoned females in Zhongguo.

According to the Jade Kingdom censor statistics, there is currently one female coming across the Shroud for every 25 males. None of the abandoned or aborted female children make it to the Jade Kingdom. Instead, they go straight to Oblivion if they are lucky, or become rampaging *kuei* if they are not. Those females fortunate to get into Yellow Springs are fought after by birth families and marriage families alike.

It is Jade Kingdom policy to have all ties of marriage respected from Zhongguo. The ghost of a married woman is given to her husband's family whether or not the husband has accompanied the wife to the afterlife. If there is no husband's family to go to, she goes to her birth family. If there is no birth family, things get interesting.

Powerful Chinese wraiths are desperate for wives. Some seek them for companionship, some for love and some for status, but the chase is hard and relentless. Ever since Yu Huang started his harem, the possession of concubines has denoted status within Yellow Springs. Female wraiths are wooed, tricked and intimidated into marriage. As a result, for many women, Communism exists as a safe haven of equality and fair treatment. Communist families have successfully recruited many women under a banner of freedom and equal rights. To them, pragmatism, not archaic gender stereotypes, are important. Besides, the Communist families are not above using their new female recruits to bend the wills of supposedly important and powerful men to their agendas. Rumors abound that this is how they keep Yu Huang and his bureaucrats from cracking down on them.

It is important to note that women are far from powerless even within the boundaries of a traditional family. After everything they remain mothers, daughters and sisters of a network of wraiths who must respect their generation and station. In fact it is much easier for females to leap from station to station within the Jade Empire while a male is pigeonholed into a rank that only Oblivion can relieve.

As a result, most of the new volunteers are young male wraiths. Many of them are looking forward to new wives, even Western ones, as they conquer territory in Stygia. How this influx might affect the society of the Jade Kingdom should the invasion be successful has yet to be determined. Women might be no longer as cherished. Perhaps they will achieve a more equal status. Perhaps Stygian brides and concubines might become a fad, or worse, a commodity. All things are possible; the only inevitability is change.



A Brief Military History of Actions Between The Yellow Springs and the West

Taiping Rebellion (1850 - 1864)

Hong Xichaun, a recent convert to Christianity, claimed to receive religious visions and, as a result, vowed to overthrow the reigning Manchu dynasty. He gathered followers, some who were also recent converts to Christianity. Others who weren't joined anyway and attempted to help him create what he called "A Kingdom of Heaven on Earth," which would be the start of the Great Peace, or Taiping.

Hong Xichuan gathered up almost a million people at the prime of his rebellion and stormed through China. With this army, he took over Nanjing, which his followers made their capital. The government they set up had any number of radical ideas, such as puritanical morals, splitting all land throughout China equally, full equality for women, economic modernization and other such odd notions.

Yu Huang and the Jade Kingdom were, for the most part, oblivious to the conflict. At least, they were until the wraiths of the over 20 million casualties of the revolt slowly brought the battle to Yellow Springs. Fearing another religious riot like that of the Second Great Revolt, the governor of Nanjing asked for help. Many of the Christian souls became *p'o*-consumed and were lost. Others tried to create a Kingdom of Heaven in Heaven.

The Jade Empire acted quickly. This was the Empire's first attempt at actively intervening in affairs of Zhongguo. First, all the troublemaking wraiths whose families did not intervene at their behest were torced and taken to Feng-tu immediately by any Censors who found them. There was a major effort on the wraiths of Yellow Springs to turn back their descendants from this path of madness. Intelligence about the Taiping government was given to Manchu loyalists. Talented wraiths Skinrode leaders of the Taiping government, and dissension was sown among the people and leaders in Nanjing.

The Taiping Rebellion finally collapsed after 15 years. Internal strife and distrust amongst its leaders made the region weak enough for Manchu regimental forces and a small Western-led unit to recapture Nanjing. In the Skinlands, many Western powers used this as evidence to show that China could not handle its own domestic problems. The Kingdom of Jade, however, had gotten its first real inkling that Western ideas and ideals were going to cause trouble in its backyard.

Many ministers, both living and not, were suspicious about how Hong Xichaun could possibly have amassed so much power with ideas so odd. They suspected more than a Western cultural influence, but rather a supernatural one. Especially nettlesome was the question of how the Western troops arrived in time to "liberate" Nanjing. However, no conclusive evidence of outside dabbling of any sort was ever found.

The Boxer Rebellion (1898-1900)

Buoyed by the success of the Empire in the matter of the Taiping Rebellion, numerous wraiths affiliated with the Protec-



tors of the Prosperous Realm decided once again to involve themselves in affairs of Zhongguo. They were inspired by the formation of the Heaven and Earth Society, a cult of martial artists who believed that by praying and sacrificing to the gods and ancestors that they would achieve the power to drive out all Western influences as well as the weakened and besieged Manchus, who had negotiated and lost so much to the Western powers.

As a first step, these wraiths carefully used their influence to blunt the Society's animosity against the Manchu government. As the conspirators were fearful of a potentially messy succession, it was determined that the monarchy must continue at all costs. Manchu leaders and Heaven and Earth Society leaders soon collaborated, and the Protectors saw a chance to go on the offensive against the West.

The Heaven and Earth Society thus entered a symbiotic relationship with the Jade Empire. The Society provided Memoriam and Pathos for the ghosts, and the wraiths provided supernatural support for the society. This was a very effective combination, except for the fact the collaboration had not been sanctioned by the Emperor.

It was at this time that Stygia first sent ambassadors to the Jade Empire. It was also at this time that the Stygian ambassadors were taken by the Emperor and processed into earrings for the Emperor's favorite concubine. A punitive series of lightning-fast raids made by the Skeletal Legion jolted the Empire into disarray. Many areas of the Yellow Springs were hit during this program, both along the Great Wall and in the interior. As Yu Huang finally organized a response to the Legions, the Society project fell

by the wayside. The Heaven and Earth Society wasn't immune to bullets anymore, while at the same time a new batch of Western troops landed in China.


All was not lost, however. Zhongguo's loss was the Empire's gain. The newly arrived wraiths proved to be excellent warriors, eager to serve when Peng Xin raided and sacked Boston Harbor. Ever since, members of the Heaven and Earth Society have held an honorable and high standing within the Jade Kingdom's military machine.

Port Arthur (1904)

Port Arthur, called Lushun by the Chinese, has been a military post since the second century C.E. The British conquered the site during the first Opium War but later vacated it during the Boxer Rebellion in order to protect their interests in Shanghai and other, more profitable colonies to the south.

The Japanese invaded in 1894 and took the strategic port during the Sino-Japanese War. A year later they returned it to China when the Russians moved their fleet to Lushun in order to protect their interests in Beijing and points north. It is also during this period that Russia took over Mongolia and moved its border with China south.

It was only when Russia and Japan's interests in Manchuria and Korea conflicted that Port Arthur became a battleground for both mortals and wraiths alike. On February 8, 1904, the Japanese fleet launched a surprise attack, crippling the fleet at Port Arthur. Many Russians were killed, but numerous Japanese lives were also lost.



Yellow Spring and Stygian Reaper boats were deployed immediately. Stygian Reapers had been getting more and daring in poaching the Jade Empire's territory of late, mirroring the Western advancement on China's own sovereignty. Many Russian wraiths were properly Reaped, and the Japanese wraiths were not left behind either. The insult of the Boston raid was still quite fresh, and the Japanese casualties were seen as partial reparation. Quickly, the transports moved the souls to Vladivostok from whence they would be taken back to Stygia by Midnight Express.

The Jade ships arrived too late but quickly gave chase. As Bleak Legionnaires moved the bounty into the waiting railway cars, the Jade warships quickly blockaded the port and systematically destroyed the Stygian Reaper fleet. It would be the only decisive naval victory that the Jade Kingdom would have this century against Stygia.

Jade infantry assaulted the Midnight Express stop just as the train pulled out, but too late.

All of the Enfants, Russian and Japanese alike, were catalogued and sent to holding stations in the Moscow Necropoli. It has since been pieced together by various agents of the Deathlords' intelligence networks that this was the largest covert operation that the Kingdom of Jade ever pulled on Stygia.

Many of the Japanese wraiths taken from the sea were, in fact, Chinese infiltrators and spies. They had cleverly Moliated Cauls onto their bodies so they appeared to be Japanese Enfants. When they were moved into the railway car, the infiltrators further Moliated themselves to appear to be Russian Enfants. Once processed and reassigned, the spies lost themselves in the Stygian bureaucracy. The Jade spies quickly climbed the ranks of the Stygian elite, as their knowledge of Arcanoi and quiet efficiency made them a power to be reckoned with.

The Nanjing Massacre (1937-1945)

While Japan was conquered by Yu Huang in the Shadowlands, quite the opposite was true in the Skinlands. The Japanese captured and installed a puppet government in Manchuria in the 1930s, claiming almost all of eastern China as their own.

An Unlikely Hero

It was estimated that thousands more would have died if not for the brave exploits of a Westerner and a Nazi party member, John Rabe. A German businessman, Rabe personally intervened whenever he saw Japanese soldiers. Using the Axis alliance as a shield, John Rabe flashed the Nazi insignia to stunned Japanese soldiers as he ushered Chinese civilians to safety. On his initiative, other Germans and Europeans in Nanjing created a safety zone within the city which harbored perhaps 100,000 people from the massacre all around them.

When Rabe returned to Germany to complain to Adolph Hitler himself about the deplorable slaughter in Nanjing, he was summarily fired from his job and questioned thoroughly by the Gestapo. Ironically, the Western hero of Nanjing was himself homeless and penniless a few short months after he left the city. Later, survivors of the occupation in Nanjing found out about his plight. They organized and collected money and food to send over to him in Germany, helping him survive much of the war and its aftermath.

It is estimated that almost 350,000 men, women and children were systematically slaughtered by the Japanese in Nanjing. Almost 20,000 were Chinese national POWs on whom the Japanese had soldiers practice for live fire and melee exercises. The rest were civilians, simply cut down.

At the time of the slaughter, the Nanjing Necropolis was besieged by Spectres and *kuei* alike, so much so that almost a half-regiment of Imperial Guardsmen was needed to keep the peace. Threatened by such adversity, Nanjing became the scene of heart-warming unity. Politics weren't important, family rivalries weren't important, power was not important. New souls were becoming *kuei*, and those *kuei* were attacking other souls within the city, and as a result everyone had to stick together for survival's sake.

What was important was that some answer had to be given to the crisis happening in Zhongguo. Rather than vengeance, the wraiths of Nanjing chose humanity. Aid was given freely without any demand for favors. Jade Censors gave the Emperor his due from their own pockets. Souls were nurtured and protected during this time of crisis. Nanjing at this time is often referred to as a shining example of the benevolence of the Jade Empire.

Which is not to say that vengeance was not sought. However, the ideas were not entertained by much of the populace. The city crafted an environment where the Nanjing province was a respite from the horrors taking place. This image has been reinforced heavily in the minds of the citizens as many of the vengeance-driven wraiths were lost in the Jade Empire's defeat in Hiroshima.

The governor of the province, Zu Taowu, was mostly responsible for the organizational effort of the community. In order to get many wraiths a good start and a decent chance at keeping their relics, he sponsored many "orphans" personally, almost bankrupting his family in the process. For his generosity, however, he was repaid a thousandfold. Even in these dark times, the Zu family is a dominant force in all aspects of Nanjing life.

The Nanjing families have been made stronger by overcoming this destructive conflict, and their successes have only strengthened their conviction that active philanthropy and kindness will only bring the best for yourself and those around you. While this has given them a reputation for being soft, their solidarity make them a force to be reckoned with wherever they go.

Presently, many citizens of Nanjing have joined the Imperial army. While Nanjing is a beautiful city, the jewel of the north, there are just too many souls in it for existence to be terribly comfortable. Many of the families who donated their vast fortunes for the relief efforts are still recovering from the expense and thus cannot support new arrivals. Service in the military seems the only way out.

If anything, Nanjing citizens have made it their duty to come to Stygia and prevent any wholesale slaughter of barbarians. They understand the horror of war and the inhumanity that conquerors inflict on their victims. While they must support their Empire and their Emperor, the wraiths of Nanjing will be careful to not allow their countrymen to be carried away and commit the same crimes that were committed on them.

Today Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Necropolis is up in arms. Both Jade Empire military and Stygian military units have been mobilized following a de-

structive Maelstrom unleashed upon the city (see **World of Darkness: Hong Kong**). No two wraiths agree to what exactly happened, but everyone is quite willing to blame everyone else for the state of affairs.

Representatives of Yellow Springs state that the typhoon and accompanying Maelstrom was completely the work of Stygian *shen* — a signal that the Westerners do not leave Hong Kong willingly. As such actions do not go unanswered, the army has been gathering Stygian wraiths and putting them under the torc.

So far most of those taken are new wraiths still in their Cauls. Stygian citizens have sent word back home, and many Legionnaires have been arriving by Midnight Express. Reapers try to “save” what they can, but the Stygians are hopelessly outnumbered. On the other hand, there are many reports of Chinese souls being Reaped and taken back to Stygia when Western troops can’t get to the ones they’re supposed to save.

There has not been any fighting in the Necropolis yet. Isolated incidents have produced a tremendous amount of saber-rattling, but the first shot has not yet been fired, and no one on either side has disappeared. (Well, no one important, that is.) Hong Kong is a powder keg waiting to explode. Both sides are committing a growing number of forces. Regular reports from Hong Kong to the rest of Yellow Springs, routinely phrased in such a way to raise the alarm, escalate the level of tension hourly and increase the public awareness of the Western menace.

Chinatowns

It's pretty safe around here, but we Asians need to stick together. Some of my best friends in our gang are Chinese. It's strange to have Chinese friends when my family has been treated so badly by the Chinese, but this is America — I gotta live here with my own karma. Some skinhead doesn't care whether I'm Tibetan or Chinese. He just wants to stomp my head.

— Pema Jones, 13-year-old Tibetan lama

This is a dismal place. The dark gloomy haze of the Shadowlands is lit with the unearthly glow of neon. Broad strokes of calligraphy with English subtitles advertise restaurants, antique stores and a variety of other establishments calling themselves trading companies. The differences between a street and an alley seem to solely be determined by foot traffic, and there is a lot of foot traffic.

The streets are filled with people of all nationalities, but Asian faces dominate the crowds. Stalls of vendors selling relic furniture and knickknacks, White Jade and soulsteel crowd the street even further. The noise of chatter and haggling is constant. It is impossible not to be jostled, and oddest of all, there are no uniformed Legionnaires in sight. Compared to here, the rest of the Necropolis seems positively empty.

Signs in other languages can be seen, though they are few. All have Asian denizens staffing their counters and chattering in a language noticeably different than the chattering of the marketplace. Strange smells fill the air in an existence where food is often just a half-remembered dream. Suddenly a loud noise like thunder fills the air. The smell of food replaced by that of gunpowder. Wraiths scream and scatter, leaving an empty and dirty street behind them. More explosions fill the air, and shelter suddenly becomes a precious commodity. In seconds, even the ghost town has become deserted.

Welcome to Chinatown.

Most major cities, and thus Necropoli, have Chinatowns. Chinatowns are those ghettos where the Asian people live and die, trying to achieve the prosperity promised them in the lands of the West. They exist as a Necropolis within a Necropolis. They are

islands where different rules, Yellow Springs rules, are applied, but without the authority of Hierarchy or the Jade Kingdom in effect.

While Stygian interests have always been somewhat protected in Hong Kong, the Philippines and various other Western strongholds in the East, so too were the Jade interests in the West in the various Chinatowns. And while there were Midnight Express stops in some cities of the East, most noticeably Hong Kong, there was no convenient way for those Chinese wraiths to return to Yellow Springs. They instead settled into the ghostly buildings that reminded them, however vaguely, of home.

The Chinese ghettos are strongholds that exist only because of the treaty the Jade Emperor signed with Stygia after their first war in the beginning of the century. Officially, those of Asian descent are to be brought to these holding areas until they are ready to be shipped back to the Yellow Springs. Lucky Korean, Japanese, Vietnam and South Asian wraiths find themselves in these settlements. Many stay, while a scattered few leave to pursue their own fortunes in Stygia proper. The unlucky ones find themselves as easy Thralls for Stygian forges.

While there is usually a heavy Legion presence outside of the ghettos, those inside are normally left alone. Any attempt at peacekeeping has always resulted in saber-rattling from Jade diplomats, and Stygia long ago decided that it wasn't worth the hassle. However, all attempts at setting up a local Jade government have been met with a Legion crackdown that threatened to destroy any semblance of a day-to-day life. In fact, the Chinatowns are targeted for sweeps whenever tensions are high between Yu Huang and Stygia.

Thus Chinatowns exist without any local authority, yet mostly free from Hierarchy control. Yu Huang definitely uses the various Chinatowns as a staging ground for espionage and terrorism in Stygia. At the same time, many Japanese, Korean and other nationals use Chinatowns as a safe haven where they might plot against Yu Huang while still having access to news and information of Yellow Springs and the Conquered Territories.

The unique situation of the Chinatowns draws conspirators who have other concerns besides Yu Huang. Other wraiths from all over Stygia descend on Chinatowns for their own agendas. The combination of lawlessness, access to black markets and the ability to contact other Renegade figures for varying ends make Chinatowns the place to be for the discerning conspirator in the West.

Hierarchy authorities are not blind to this development. In fact, they welcome it. A lot of manpower is dedicated to cataloging and observing the movements of various wraiths in and out of various Chinatowns. If there are going to subversions afoot, then better that they be concentrated in easily contained sections of large Necropoli than left unsupervised throughout the Shadowlands. After all, the Chinatowns aren't that big or hard to cut off from the outside.

Chinatowns do have some advantages. The buildings are old and well-worn, and are thoroughly imbued with Pathos. They are sometimes restored but never torn down, which makes them superb Haunts and Fetters. The lawlessness and isolation of the average Chinatown allows for the institution of community Reapers, who gather souls that die in the ghetto without any heed to Stygian quotas or Legion systems. The average wraiths not involved in conspiracies to overthrow governments, (and there are more than one might think), stick together to face any external threats. The numerous sweeps and threat of sweeps have never endeared Stygian authorities to the inhabitants.

Chinatown wraiths use firecrackers to warn of Stygian sweeps. The loud booming noises serve as warnings to clear the streets and to hole up in your haunt until the coast is clear.

Tales of the Jade Empire

The Asian inhabitants of Chinatowns are true orphans of their heritage. None, with the exception of a spy or two, has ever known the reign of Yu Huang or his minions. The land of Yellow Springs is held up on a pedestal because anything has to be better than daily existence in Stygia. The traditions and stories of their childhood and a few wild stories of wraiths who claim to have crossed the Tempest are the only hints the wraiths of the Chinatowns have of what it is like to live in Yellow Springs.

Many Buddhists believe that only by going back to their homeland, or the homeland of the Dead, will they be able to be reincarnated into a new life. None know that the escape from Oblivion is no more common in Yellow Springs than it is where they stand. One of the ironic things is that Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese wraiths also look at Yellow Springs as a placebo for all their ills. While nationalistic fervor exists, few know of the plundering of souls that happens every day in their homelands. The legend is burnished more brightly every day that the truth remains unknown.

To be sure, Chinatowns are a pivotal point for the looming invasion. For Yu Huang, the Chinatowns exist as a source of collaborators and as a headquarters for his invasion of Stygia. For Stygia, Chinatowns exist as a source of hostages that can be turned into raw materials in case Yu Huang ever crosses the line.

Time will tell.

Yellow Springs

At home, the worries are great for the welfare of the brave sons and daughters of Yellow Springs as they embark on a military mission abroad. Most think that the soldiers are being sent off to Hong Kong to teach Stygia a lesson once and for all.

The Marketplace

If you are not entering Chinatown to pursue an agenda, can we interest you in the marketplace? The marketplace is brimming with anything and everything a wraith might want: weapons, information, Artifacts, furniture or Thralls. Anything can be found for a price. But know that shopping here entails its own risks, and the policies of "no returns" and "you break it, you bought it" are as good as law. All prices are negotiable, and serious buyers should have a healthy grasp of haggling.

Best of all are the restaurants. No one knows where the relic food or ghostly meals come from, and the proprietors snidely mutter, "Ancient Chinese secret," when asked. But courses and courses of meals can be had for a relic, or perhaps a Thrall or two. There are rumors that the food is the result of an amazingly talented Masquer, usually a chef or a supplier. Whatever the case, the meals do taste incredible and smell even better.

Kuei-jin can occasionally be found wandering through these haunts. Some will perform favors in the Skinlands for a price. Others are busy with their own business and interests. In fact, many of the goods found in the market stalls are the wares of such enterprising Asian vampires, who see in the Restless an untapped market.



It is important to note that the society of Yellow Springs revolves around the family unit, and that family unit is much larger than a traditionally Western nuclear structure, as several generations live under one roof. The amount of support for the success of the war is so great because there are so many generations of ancestors and relatives pulling for the success of each individual soldier. On a certain level, each soldier's success is the family's success, and the war offers a tremendous opportunity for honor or disgrace.

Oddly, the chances of rebellion have gone down since the large-scale recruitment for the armed forces began, but the perceived chances for subversion have increased dramatically. Suspicion of subversion lands on those without families or friends, and every household has at least one enforcement official to keep things clean under his own roof.

As the war starts, families continue their day-to-day existence. The prospect of war is terrifying, but it is for their security that those brave souls have gone to resist the Stygian threat. The dread and horror eventually increase, as tales of lost souls and the hunger of the Jade military machine strips their loved ones away from them one by one.

But this is the way things are, the way things have been for thousands of years. You must be loyal to your house and your elders. You must be responsible for your siblings and your children. You must serve your emperor. After all, what other choice do you have?

Sergeant Uranic was with me at the wall when they came through. We were designated to be on watch, but to be honest, every man in the platoon was already out and watching. We all knew what we were doing. We all knew what was going on.

"Do you think it's worth it?" I asked.

He shrugged. "278 Kensington Road, Chicago, Illinois," he muttered.

"That's..." I already knew what it was. Everyone knew that we were going home in two weeks.

He smiled at me. It was the first time I ever saw him smile since I'd known him. He was the kind of person who dwelled over every mistake. He rarely even stopped frowning, obsessed as he was with the details and faults of every action. "It's where he lives. I got the copy from the ledger yesterday." He giggled. "He has three children."

Need I describe how disturbing the giggle was? He proceeded to lay out to me an entirely too graphic and sadistic blueprint of vengeance. I nodded as I watched the column go past our base camp.

"You?" I turned back to focus on him. The column was eight abreast and extended as far as the eye can see. Thousands of them. I doubt we could have lasted very long even if we were to fight. I had an urge to ring the alarm bell just to see what would happen. Ha! That's how I had gotten killed in the first place.

"Um, we're shipping out today. Reassigned to bodyguarding duty. I'm supposed to know soon. They never told me who," I replied. I looked down at the exit wounds in my chest.

It is not my place to question my commanders. I appreciate the chance they have given me in knowing the events of my death. Unlike Uranic, I didn't know what I would do if I ever really knew. I just want to know. I'm a good soldier.

But as I see the columns of foreign soldiers beneath me — yellow bastards, I believe I called them — I can't help but feel that I've betrayed millions for a single piece of knowledge. That I've betrayed millions because I learned to follow orders....

The Imperial Army

The people are like water and the army is like fish... with the common people of the whole country mobilized, we shall create a vast sea of humanity and drown the enemy in it.

— Mao Zedong

The Imperial army of the Jade Kingdom is the strongest it's ever been in a millennia. With advantages of modern Arcanoi use and technologically advanced relics, the military has learned from many of the mistakes of the past defeats in the lands of the living.

For one thing, armaments are much more common in the East. Young soldiers with highly efficient weaponry have been streaming into the Jade Kingdom in the past few decades as a result of brushfire wars and police actions. While this also meant that p'o-controlled wraiths and Spectre packs have access to these new weapons, the Jade Kingdom has been very successful at gathering a large supply of guns to arm its military.

It has helped that many of the recent military engagements in the world have taken place in Yu Huang's domain. The Conquered Territories and client states have been rich with tributes and Artifacts from countless engagements of the Cold War, primarily small arms and artillery.

Military strength is not only measured in firepower but in souls. Yu Huang has actively searched for and recruited cold, hard, ruthless men. These veterans not only have the experience of fighting with these modern weapons but of modern military tactics as well.

As a result, the Jade Empire has the largest and best-trained army in the afterlife. A steady stream of souls from various protectorates to Feng-tu has also made them the best-equipped. Many of the wraiths of Yu Huang's army are neonates in terms of Arcanoi, however. The learned ghosts of Yellow Springs have long since ensconced themselves into the bureaucracy, far removed from the fighting and the concurrent danger. Many of the Empire's true professional warriors were lost during the Japanese revolt 50 years ago. The current army is primarily composed of eager but relatively young souls, who have the will and the tools but perhaps not the talents to surpass their predecessors' achievements.

It has been demonstrated again and again that the greatest weakness of the Jade Empire remains its navy. Much of the success of the Japanese revolt during the Fourth Great Maelstrom was due in no small part to the relic warships of Nippon. Great behemoths from the battles of Truk Bay and Midway helped the Japanese greatly in their revolt, and Yu Huang took careful note of this. He has bolstered his weakness in the Tempest in part by having the Bugis as allies, but history has proven that the Bugis will take any opportunity to play all sides against the middle.

However, since World War II, there have been very few naval battles to produce warships for the Empire. While some Japanese ships have been captured and recovered, the Jade Empire still relies on the Bugis fleet too much. That doesn't mean that there isn't a Jade fleet, however.

It is in the navy that one finds the most devoted and powerful wraiths in the Jade Empire. There is much profit to be had in the transportation of spoils and tribute. This is by far the most sought-after and fought-over assignment possible within the Jade military. Naval officers can only screw up once, however. With so many wraiths after an assignment in the Jade navy, failure means a trip to Feng-tu and a squabble over the right to replace you.

Almost all of the ships in the Imperial Navy are heavily armed. The piracy of the *Prince Alexsei* (see **Dark Kingdom of Jade Adventures**) has sunk a variety of Reaper ships costing the Emperor an untold fortune in souls and ships, and the Emperor doesn't intend to lose any more of his valuable resources.

The pride of the Jade fleet is, of course, Yu Huang's ship, *Heavenly Mandate*. *Heavenly Mandate* is a ship comprised entirely of True Jade crowded entirely by Imperial Guardsmen. The ship is by, all accounts,

Sir,

Project: Dragon's Back has hit a production stoppage. We've completely run out of inventory. We desperately need more supplies of White Jade in order to meet quota. I've gone through the numbers over and over again. I've even turned in my third cousin for embezzlement to the Judges. While this has the added effect of producing more jade, there is no way we are going to make deadline at this rate.

*Shen Ping Ching, Production Supervisor, Feng-Tu
Via Eunuch 4579-304-Imperial*

invulnerable, invincible and a hell of a ride to boot. The *Heavenly Mandate* is not risked lightly, if at all, but it remains a shudderingly powerful reminder of what forces Yu Huang has at his disposal.

Organization

Generally, Imperial army companies are comprised of either soldiers or Censors. The typical size for a squad of Jade Kingdom infantry is eight men. There are three squads per platoon, and four platoons per company. Each platoon is assigned a Protector of the Prosperous Realm to ensure that all actions by the squads under him are within the best interest of the Empire. Each company also has a Judge of the Dead to settle disputes within the military.

While on the surface it seems as if Protectors are more important than individual soldiers and a Judge more important than a Protector, this is not the case. It's all part of a series of checks and balances instituted to keep any one institution from running entirely amuck.

Soldiers solve difficulties within their rank and file. In military situations the commanding officer always overrules the Protector. However, in situations where politics are involved, the Protector is called on to make a decision. He is also held responsible for that decision and the consequences thereof.

The Judges are responsible for making sure the Emperor's rules are followed and obeyed and for all rulings on law and discipline. There is no such thing as a military court or tribunal. Formal charges have to be filed for a Judge to be brought in on a matter, but once the process begins, it cannot be halted. So whether or not incidents and crimes are brought to the Judge for a decision is based on the discretion of the officer. On one hand, an officer can win the unswerving devotion of his men by shielding them from their Judge; on the other, Judges are naturally a suspicious lot and may come sniffing around if they hear rumors of unreported improprieties. In that case, it's the officer who stands in the dock.

The bulk of Yu Huang's forces are soldiers. There is usually one archer or gunman for every three heavy infantrymen, because

A Note on History

Historically, ancient Chinese troop designations were:

Corps:	12500 men or 25 regiments
Regiment:	500 men
Detachment:	100 men
Company:	Five men

Yu Huang has done his best to hew to this model while still incorporating the need to integrate the Judges and Protectors into the ranks.

even with the influx of guns into the Underworld, there still aren't enough bullets to go around. Heavy infantrymen are armed with spears, while their officers armed with swords and sidearms. Both armor and weapons are White Jade. Any javelins, arrows and bullets are most likely made of *kuei-jade*.

Those wraiths entrusted with firearms or artillery generally have some supply of Pathos currency in their possession. The supply is very limited as the coins last a week at most and require constant replenishment by the logistical units. The limitation is deliberate; this keeps wraiths thus armed from succumbing to temptation and running off with their prizes.

Censors represent the bulk of the logistical units. As armies of wraiths do not need food or clothing, only armaments, Censors are responsible for analytical tallies of numbers, locations, positioning and bounty. They are also responsible for treating those wraiths wounded in action and determining who'd do more good as a hunk of White Jade than as a convalescing soldier. Once a beachhead has been established, Censors are also responsible for separating and "processing" prisoners of war, relics and captured weapons.

Because the Imperial army has much of its ranks from local militias, there is a real sense of regional-affiliated battalions. (The best parallel for Westerners is, perhaps, the state units of the American Civil War.) Beijing units do not freely mix with Nanjing units. Nanjing units do not mix with Singapore or Canton units. While Mandarin is spoken between battalions, the regional dialect is spoken between units from the same province. Veteran units may have their own sub-dialect. Enemies have found this to be an infuriating practice, as it is almost impossible to gain intelligence on the Jade forces who deliberately isolate themselves linguistically.

A Rumor...

... currently making the rounds of Stygian intelligence is that Yu Huang has an air force that is both extensive and functional, and that there are entire flight wings of Zeroes, MiGs and other aircraft at his disposal. There is no evidence to support this rumor other than hearsay, but it is consistent enough to worry logistical planners all across Stygia.

The infantry units are further separated by specialties. Some specialties are based on Arcanoi. For example, practitioners of the Way of the Merchant are generally assigned logistical duty to ensure that those units responsible for artillery and firearms have enough Pathos to fire their guns, much like Artisans ensure there is a steady supply of shells and bullets. Other, more sinister units include the engineers, the *kuei-go* handlers and Masquer equivalents. There are even rumors that there are squads of Korean Moliated dragons.

Infiltrators

Jade infiltrators are the eyes and ears of the coming invasion. They have labored long and hard for many years, paving the road to Stygia for the conquest to come. Almost all are masters of the art of deception and of Molation, allowing them to do their work in secret and well.

The initial seeding of infiltrators began at the beginning of the 20th century. Stygia was considered a barbaric land with few amenities. In fact, most Jade officials didn't even really believe that there was any sort of organized government, much less a place to infiltrate, until the time of the Boxer Rebellion.



The infiltrators' original mission was simple:

- To learn the ways of and assimilate into the society of the Kingdom of Iron undetected.
- To find, create and support enemies of any established government in the West.
- To detect any hostile action that would endanger the Jade Kingdom.
- To find and destroy any intelligence the Kingdom of Iron had on the Jade Empire.

The first directive was by far the hardest. Most loyal servants of the Emperor felt that adopting the lifestyle of the barbarians was a deeper betrayal than that of political espionage. The customs were foreign and reprehensible, and without understanding the customs of the Stygians it was impossible for the spies to avoid telegraphing their own heritage in a myriad of mundane ways.

Stories of infiltrators discovered because they spit too much, clasped their hands before them as they bowed, stared dumbfounded at a curtsy or even improperly saddled a horse served as warnings for future agents of Qin Shihuang. Conversely, they also illustrated how one might detect Stygian agents in the Emperor's own lands.

Predictably, many of the first spies entrenched themselves and made themselves invaluable to the Stygian bureaucracy. There, they felt most at home in a foreign land. Many even introduced innovative uses of red tape that the Westerners never considered. While many agents were ordered away from their posts to infiltrate other aspects and lifestyles in Stygia, the majority of the older spies still occupy the bureaucratic corridors of the Legions.

Others were amazed at the relative freedom to be found in the Kingdom of Iron. The expanses were empty, the Necropoli not at all crowded with teeming masses of wraiths. There were elements of home to be found here and there: in Chinatowns, in Asian homes and in the rare, wild howl of a ravaging, solitary *kuei*.

Some agents became great wise men in the West. Common phrases and common sense back home were regarded as enlightened wisdom in this barbarian land. Many of those "wise men" don't even bother with Moliating themselves, as many Renegade and Heretical elements accept them more readily as bearers of ancient wisdom of the East. Taoist, Buddhist and New Age cults have risen in the wake of such talented rabble-rousers.

Furthermore, those same "wise men" have done wonders in fostering a strong loyalist and collaborative following in the Chinatowns of the various Necropoli. The agents spin tales of golden enlightened rule and hope for all wraiths of Asian descent as well as fostering a sense of paranoia and mistrust about Stygian rule. "Things will change when the Jade Empire arrives. Once you are under Yu Huang's reign, you'll never worry about anything else again," they promise.

Scholars of the future may point to the wildly successful alliance with the Smiling Lord as the ultimate fulfillment of the second directive. In fact, officially, the Jade Emperor has recalled the agents responsible for the alliance back to the Jade Palace to take a revered post near his right hand. No doubt they will whisper sage and informed wisdom into his ears as the invasion proceeds.

Insiders at the palace tell a different story. Apparently the great ledger containing the death stories of all the Grim Legion-

naires also includes those cover stories by those Jade agents trying to infiltrate the Grim Legion. Many of the infiltrators are still securely hidden within the ranks to be an effective espionage force, but enough agents were caught to compromise most of Yu Huang's cells near the Smiling Lord. It was the Sardonicai of the Grim Legion who brought Yu Huang a warship of Stygian steel to compliment his own Jade fleet. Inside were the whimpering and half-mad remains of many of his agents in the Grim Legion. The infiltrators have since been added to Yu Huang's menagerie, after their most glorious decoration ceremonies.

Since the "alliance" with the Smiling Lord, Jade infiltrators have poured into the Iron Kingdom. While the Grim Legion knows for the most part how they enter Stygia, precautions have been taken to prevent them from knowing any more. Many of the wraiths have either substituted themselves for other wraiths or otherwise re-invented themselves in order to blend into the busy life of the Hierarchy.

Of the Legions, the Skeletal Legion has been the most thoroughly infiltrated. Yu Huang is very concerned with his own borders despite his ambition for conquest. This assignment is also easier to sell because of the proximity of the agents to their homeland, at least those who will be stationed with the troops north of the Great Wall. The Iron Legion technically has the next largest number of spies. Many idiosyncrasies of these infiltrators are explained away as the eccentricities of aging minds, though these wraiths are not easy pickings. Despite the apparent ease of infiltration into the Pauper Legion, few enter because of pride and an unwillingness to look behind the facade

Signs and Countersigns

There is no way easy way for Jade agents to identify each other, except by the use of their native tongues and knowledge of the Jade Empire. Agents from differing cells generally contact each other with pass phrases and literary references mumbled in Mandarin, as problems of dialect make the use of any more specific linguistic key only occasionally effective. Not all of these literary references are found within mortal libraries; many great writers continue their works from beyond the grave, and while a Stygian scholar might know the works of the living, there is no way for her to learn all the writings of the dead.

Typically, infiltrators find each other in passing through a very timid and paranoid technique similar to flirting. A random phrase or superstition is casually mentioned or intoned under the breath. If the other person asks for details or repetition, a denial or lie is offered. If a comment that plays on the reference is given, then a city in the Jade Kingdom is brought up in succeeding conversation. This is the agent's hometown. The other infiltrator is supposed to offer his own hometown veiled within the conversation as well. To confirm the identity as an infiltrator, the participant is to later mention either a Haunt or a Minister of the Dead working in the other agent's hometown. Once both sides are satisfied with the answers, true dialogue can begin.

This system has its flaws. For one thing, it is extremely difficult for agents to make initial contact. For another, if one agent is unfamiliar with the other's native province, the system of signs and countersigns breaks down immediately. Still, Yu Huang has decreed that it is better for his agents to have too little contact than to have too much.

Third Uncle.

Thank you for your hun bao present for New Year's. I appreciate the gift, but you really shouldn't have. Things here in the bureaucracy of Hell are busy as always, perhaps busier than usual. All of the family here is proud of your promotion as one of the top Judges in the Yellow Springs.

Please make sure that those of our family who get jade amulets that isn't White Jade don't lose them until they get adequate ones.

Your nephew.

Zu Xing Jing

Via Eunuch 4579-386-Imperial

that the Beggar Lord gives. However, a few find their way, purposefully or accidentally, into their ranks.

The Emerald Legion has experienced the opposite effect. The concepts and the recruiting style has many Jade wraiths very willing to join and rise through the ranks. The concepts of the Emerald Legion are very non-Legalist and the idea of recruiting against the saboteur job description, but the merit system of advancement is very familiar indeed.

The Legion of Fate and the Penitent Legion have the least amount of infiltrators. Infiltrators have bought into the mystique of the Legion of Fate hook, line and sinker, and give that Legion a wide berth. However, by chance (or by Fate) a few agents have been reaped by the Lady and taken under her wing. Whether or not they can still be trusted, no one knows or even tries to find out. For the most part they are written off. As for the Penitent Legion, their reputation is so twisted and their order so grotesque that infiltrators are shanghaied into the Legion. While no one questions the agents identities, no sane agent stays and makes this Legion her home. Which is sort of the point, in a twisted and bizarre way.

Jade infiltrators have tentacles in all the Legions and a marginal element of the Renegades and Heretics. Some have been undercover for so long that they have truly become what they pretend to be. Those infiltrators may have forgotten their past lives and loyalties, but have a surprising knowledge of the nature and tactics of the invading troops.

Palace Politics

The Jade Palace is alive with activity. There is an air of tension as no one knows exactly what is happening, only that it is something big. What is evident is that there is going to be a tremendous shakeup in the way the Yellow Springs are currently governed and constituted, one that will change the power structure of the entire land.

Many families and political groups are flocking to the palace in order to be at the right place at the right time. There are rumors that there will be a war with Stygia, but no factual reports of any kind drift back from the barbarian lands. There are reports that there are revolts in the Conquered Territories once again, but again, no one has any proof. Stories of the punishment for revealing confidential information to anyone, including one's own family, are as wild and frightening as the actual rumors themselves.

What's worse is that Yu Huang is nowhere to be found. Palace functionaries make flowery excuses for Qin Shihuang — he is busy;

Herr Holbein,

It is most urgent that you read this message and investigate the charges I lay before you. Even if you don't believe me, you must check to see if what I write is true. The survival of our two empires is at stake.

I suspect that a most grievous wrong has been committed. And if this plot is not uncovered, we will be at the mercy of the machinations of cold, merciless men. You must warn your homeland to prepare for war.

Even now the armies of the Yellow Springs march on Stygia in their numberless ranks. You have been betrayed by one of your war leaders. Even now they unleash a curse on all of us. The Yellow Springs and the Dark Kingdom of Iron will both be beset by a storm of untold strength.

Even now I am close to getting the proof I need to show the world what Yu Huang is up to. With the help of others from my family, we are close to breaking into Eunuch Central. But I fear that it will be too late by the time we do so, too late for all of us.

Listen carefully and destroy this eunuch when you are finished. I can definitely get you the evidence to support these assertions, if you can get me one of the Minister's codes in Eunuch Central. This missive is vital, and I do not send this to you lightly. The fate of my family and my homeland are in your hands.

Signed,

No One

Judge Zu Fai Wan

A judge from the Zu family of Nanjing, Fai Wan has become a well-respected and much-honored Judge by the least likely of methods: being an extremely competent and insightful Judge. However, due to an altercation with Li Gao, he has been transferred from his position in Nanjing to the capital where it is thought he might do less political damage.

What Li Gao had not counted on was the amount of renown Fai Wan has generated. People trust Fai Wan implicitly, and the Zu family name carries a lot of weight, even in certain sectors of the palace. Without an assignment, Fai Wan has been investigating a letter he received from a nephew in Ti-Yu. It has been insinuated in the correspondence that there is something wrong concerning a project called Dragon's Back, and Fai Wan is relentless in investigating those mysteries that are brought to his attention.

Honorable Judge Zu,

In reference to your inquiries about certain Eunuchs – notably 4579-386-Imperial, 4579-304-Imperial, 4578-992-Imperial – we are afraid we are unable to comply with your orders or to be any help with your investigation. The 457X-series Eunuchs were found defective and shredded in order to help the war effort. If you have any other Eunuchs that you need in your investigation, please feel free to inquire. Worry not, those responsible for creating these unworthy Eunuchs have themselves been chosen to replace them.

– Eunuch Central

Peng Xin, Warlord of the Imperial Army

So many men, so little time. Peng Xin has been driven to the limits of his endurance planning this invasion. Nowhere in the history of the Underworld has an invasion of such scope, such magnitude ever been attempted. Never has there been so much pressure on an invading general, because Peng Xin is all too aware of what happened to his predecessor.

It doesn't help that half of his staff generals are already carving Stygia up as if it's been won already. Peng Xin has faced Stygia before, and knows that he faces a savvy and cunning enemy not to be underestimated. Even though the Smiling Lord seems to have betrayed his fellows, how long can the Warlord possibly trust him? Luckily, Stygia has fewer men than Peng Xin does, less discipline and no leadership.

Peng Xin also feels he must speak to Yu Huang about Imperial Guard disbursement. As it stands, the plans call for a squad of Guard per Necropolis. Something about this smells wrong to his soldier's instinct. As things stand, each of those squads might conceivably be battered and the Guard wrecked in detail. The situation is puzzling and not to his liking.

This operation has gotten so large that Peng Xin has been forced to delegate authority to subordinates more politically savvy than he. Needless to say, he is not pleased. While the Warlord has been able to keep most of the authority in the hands of subordinates he trusts, inevitably rivals have seized some power. Wong Tse-Tong of the Heaven and Earth Society in particular has been a thorn in his side, but the fanatic is now an inextricable part of the operation. Indeed, Tse-Tong has gone so far as to allow the Communists their own rep-

he is meditating; he is touring the territories; he is with his concubines. But the fact is that no one has seen the Emperor in months.

The ministries are all busy. Many bureaucrats are away on mysterious errands, but those who do not have assignments have come eager to know why they are idle. At times like these, being idle means being expendable. It is never good to be expendable, particularly not when the mills of war are eager for raw materials.

The Principal Actors Judge Li Gao, judge of the Dead

The Ministry of the Dead is doing a healthy business. Li Gao's office has suddenly gotten very stringent when it comes to crimes throughout the Empire. Some sentences are still lenient when favors are called in and bribes paid, but it has been made clear that "hanging judges" get promoted much more quickly than do more understanding ones.

So many guilty souls have been sent to Feng-tu that many citizens are beginning to suspect that any trial is a mere formality, an inevitable prelude to a sentencing to Hell. Those who espouse this view point to the fact that even civil suits now have what amount to be capital penalties. Li Gao, while self-serving and corruptible, knows the limits of human tolerance, and the Judge's office is quickly reaching it. He is aware that he needs to slow down the sentencing machinery, but it may have become a beast beyond his control.

With Yu Huang's absence, Li Gao is very afraid that he is losing control and influence. In the last few years the Emperor has been keeping his own counsels and not Li Gao's. Without the favor of the emperor as protection, the Judge of the Dead is vulnerable to ambitious courtiers. And if a revolt is incited by his overzealous underlings, Li Gao is sure to fall. Of course, no one within the palace would work to produce just such a revolt, least of all Li Gao's underlings....

representative in the general staff. Such compromises must be lived with if Peng Xin is to carry out the wishes of the Emperor. However, once the invasion is finished, the Warlord intends to clean house and consolidate his authority once and for all.

Wong Tse-Tong, Arch-Governor of the Conquered Territories

Wong Tse-Tong is a strong supporter of the notion that the Jade army should destroy all of the foreign devils and let the gods sort out what the White Jade mills don't. A veteran and casualty of the Boxer Rebellion, Tse-Tong has a lot to offer the foreign devils should they cross his path. With his mortal descendants and family wiped out in the Nanjing Massacre, the Heaven and Earth Society has become his only home. As such, he has devoted himself to it utterly, and as a result, Wong Tse-Tong has found himself in command of the armies of the Conquered Territories.

Tse-Tong has noticed recently the large number of Nanjing citizens to be found at the palace — most of them as wall decoration. He's also noticed that Zu Fai Wu seems to be heading that way if the Judge doesn't learn to keep his nose out of other people's business.

Tse-Tong fully believes that this invasion is the inevitable movement of the people. This isn't a war where quarter can be given. The Westerners have made that clear from the start. In fact, Tse-Tong feels that he should be in charge of the invasion, not Peng Xin. Peng Xin is an idiot, in spite of his poorly earned reputation as a war hero. It's as if he doesn't want to invade Stygia. And when the time comes, Peng Xin will allow those curs to surrender, never mind what history demands.

In the meantime, Tse-Tong is responsible for the Conquered Territories. If he does a good job there, it's only a matter of time before Peng Xin falls on his face in the Iron Kingdom. Then Yu Huang will ask Tse-tong to replace him. Until then, it is time for the Society man to remake the Conquered Territories in his own image.

The last thing on Wong Tse-Tong's agenda is that he must also ask his contacts at the palace to watch Hu Ji. Rumor has it she is a Stygian spy. People note her strange mannerisms and Artifacts that reek of Western cultural pollution, and whisper. It seems ordained that she will fall, and Tse-Tong wants to profit when she does. Given a chance, Wong Tse-Tong will soon cleanse all of this Western stench from the Yellow Springs.

Shih Hua-Nui, General Protector of Yellow Springs

*Proud and alert, they carry five-foot guns,
First rays of the morning sun illuminate the drill-field
The daughters of China are filled with high resolve,
To red garments they prefer the uniform.*
— Mao Zedong

Shih Hua-Nui is the first female general of Yellow Springs. She had an illustrious career when she was alive, although she was never a soldier. Instead, she was a Communist postergirl, one of Mao's favorites. In the afterlife she rode on her fame and took the offer of a Communist family to give her real military responsibility, then excelled at every task put before her. Her charismatic leadership abilities, her attention to detail and her knowledge of modern military techniques has made her a real up-and-comer in the Empire's military.

Hua-Nui finds herself given the dubious honor of holding the borders of Yellow Springs itself from Stygian counterattacks. Her forces are sadly under strength, as most of the militia forces

have been conscripted for the invasion. However, a Grim Legion officer has provided her with the entire troop displacement and supply system of the Skeletal Legion troops arrayed opposite her lines, which will help immensely.

Because she has the fewest troops and the advantage of home territory, Hua-Nui has been given some of the best-armed (though not best-trained) troops in the army. However, she has the added responsibility of having to police the realm against insurgents so the conquering armies have a place to return. Imperial Guardsmen were supposed to be made available to her as support and a source of reinforcements but that hasn't seemed to pan out. What's really going on she doesn't know, and so instead she plans with what she knows she has at hand.

Hua-Nui knows that she achieved this rank not because of merit, but because she was Communist and a female to boot. Politics may have gotten her this position, but with the Skeletal Legion amassed at the Great Wall, only competence will allow her to keep it. However, the way that people from the party talk, Peng is the one setting himself up for a big fall, and if Hua-Nui knows that if Peng falls, someone else must rise.

Hu Ji, Jade Censor

Hu Ji has been in a good mood recently. Perhaps the smile she wears is the smile of a job well done, or more likely it is the smile of spoils yet to come. For Hu Ji knows that the treasures of Stygia will be soon at her disposal. She has grand plans for Stygia — grand plans indeed.

Hu Ji knows that relics are one thing. But with the advent of a Stygian invasion, relics are no longer her only concern. She feels a desire — no, a calling, to collect the souls of the thinkers, the experts, the great men of Stygia. With those souls she'll build her own harem. She has given orders for the Censors to bring her interesting and unique people who cross their inventories while in Stygia. In fact, she has commissioned a ship so that she might supervise the culling in person.

That is, of course, assuming that she can get away from the office. The Censor's Bureau has been hit with inquiries from both Li Gao and Zu Fai Wan about a project called Dragon's Back.

She expected such from Zu Fai Wan. From all reports the Judge is a meddler. But can Li Gao actually be beginning to do his job? In any case, both Judges will have to be distracted from their inquiries if she is to leave the palace to visit Stygia.

Lei-Zu, "Favored" Courtesan

Lei-Zu is worried, very worried indeed. Yu Huang is gone, and he is keeping something secret — something he finds amusing and is taking much pleasure from. He has not been around, and *Heavenly Mandate* is gone from the dock. Something is happening, something no one else knows about, and the Emperor isn't sharing. During their moments alone, he has shown signs of weakening. He seemed ready to boast of his cunning, but this is a changed Yu Huang. The changed Yu Huang keeps his own counsel.

Chan, the court jester, shares her worries. She listens to tales of the horrors of Feng-tu. She listens to tales of the cruelties of the Judges. Now that Yu Huang is away, it is time to bring down Li Gao. Zu Fai Wan seems to be the perfect replacement. In fact, Lei-Zu was responsible for getting him transferred away from Nanjing to the palace. She can't risk contacting him because people already watch her too closely as it is. All her conspiring must be done with veiled gestures and hurried whispers.

Herr Holbein, Stygian Ambassador to the Jade Kingdom

"...This is vital, and I do not send this to you lightly. The fate of my family and my homeland are in your hands. Signed, No One."

"No one?" I asked.

"Please rephrase, humble servant does not have the ability to understand," came the monotone.

I looked over to my fellow guardsman. "Herr Holbein will still be indisposed. I will give him your message." He blinked back at me. I wonder what would happen if I sent the Eunuch to Fan Wushang, the Head of the Secret Police around here. It might do wonders in the area of diplomacy. You-know-who cackled along, filling my head of images of what-if.

The other guardsman joined in with my Shadow's laughter. I knew then that my "what-if" had become a "what-is" when I wasn't looking. I frowned and wished I could find a Pardoner in this place. But then again, I didn't want my Shadow speaking to anyone at all. My betrayals were stacking up like cordwood, but respite was coming soon.

The next visitors to the embassy spelled trouble. But not for me, I reminded myself. Fan Wushang headed a parade of Imperial Guardsmen, four of them. They looked more alive than I did, yet they seem so unalive as well. I knew they were coming, but I didn't know if the Eunuch had ever made its way to him. Then again, suspicion was as good as evidence these days, at least within the walls of the palace.

We opened the door to Herr Holbein's chambers without any resistance. My Shadow taunted me about my betrayals. I wondered what Holbein's shadow was saying to him as Fan Wushang confronted him.

"Yes?" Herr Holbein looked surprised but unperturbed at the group before him. He must have been curious about the presence of the guards as well as Wushang in full regalia. Holbein himself was dressed as a dandy. Lace ruffles framed his skeletal face.

Fan Wushang bowed. He was dressed in robes of ebon silk. His long beard fell as he bowed, almost touching the floor. "Ambassador Holbein, it is my duty to inform you that his Imperial Majesty the Emperor has in his infinite wisdom decided to no longer entertain the insults that the barbaric lands of Iron offer to him and his people. He asks that you surrender now and await his judgment."

They moved in to subdue him. Uranic and I just stared. I wanted to do something, I was supposed to do something. The impact of what was happening — of what was going to happen — struck me fully. I was going to betray the only semblance of civilization that I had. My people, my homeland was going to war, and I would have nothing but a name and an address to show for it.

Now was the time for me to intercede. Holbein had the Argos to open a Nihil back to Stygia and warn the others if I could delay the Guardsmen. Now. I should move now. Move.

I said nothing and I did nothing as they put a torc on him and took him away.

Holbein looked at Uranic and I motionless, and whispered, "The Smiling Lord?" Uranic nodded guiltily. The he brightened and laughed, surrounded by Guardsmen. I feared him more than I did them at that moment.

Holbein was probably taken to the dungeons of the palace, though there are rumors that he was taken to the menagerie. I found out later that my killer was already dead, taken to Oblivion. He stood for nothing in the end. The last connection I had with the Skinlands was a dead end. But it wasn't the identity and the circumstances of my death that made me stand silently that day, but the macabre curiosity of just seeing what would happen.

Herr Holbein knew that Yu Huang was about to make his move on Stygia. The winds of change were in the air. He knew

war was imminent once he ran out of friends at court. However, he thought that the tension throughout the palace had to do with Hong Kong, which, frankly, he had already written off. It was important that even should Stygia lose Hong Kong that there be enough of a fight that Yu Huang would have a healthy respect for Stygian Legions. That was all Holbein was looking at, though.

It had been worrisome that no one would talk to him, but his response was a blunder. For support, he called in some Sardonicai to help him with the negotiations once trouble started and to bodyguard him. That done, he rested secure, sure that if more than Hong Kong were at stake he would receive adequate warning from his Bugis spies or from the Gaunt Lord whose troops were stationed at the Great Wall. Unfortunately, he did not count on the Smiling Lord's perfidy, and so never received the message that might have saved him.

Getting There

Much of the viability of Yu Huang's plans for the invasion of Stygia hinges on the ability of his minions to be able to enter the Stygian Shadowlands without having to navigate endlessly through the Tempest. Many of his most talented scholars have been working on this puzzle for hundreds of years. Only during the last century of globalization and the ability for one to have many Fetters throughout Zhongguo has the basics for their breakthrough been available.

In the past few months, each member of the Imperial army has been issued an amulet as a talisman against the dangers of the Tempest. The amulet is made of White Jade and denotes the bearer's rank and unit. Some of the higher-ranking officers have amulets commissioned in True Jade.

In reality, the jade talisman is a bit more complicated than that. Each amulet has a tie to a real-world object that serves as a sort of Fetter for a True Jade activator. The effect is similar to some Lifeweb powers, in truth, though the researchers who produced it swear their work is totally original.

When it's time to move, the activator is used to snap the wraith holding it along an artificial Byway to the Fetter. All the other wraiths of that activator's unit get immediately sent to the Fetter as well. Should the amulet fail, the Byway shatters and the unit tumbles into the Labyrinth for a Destruction Harrowing.

System: Using the amulet requires a Stamina + Argos roll (difficulty 7). No Pathos is needed to activate an amulet, but an entire unit must jump at once.

A botch results in a Destruction Harrowing. A True Jade amulet produces one automatic success on the roll.

Peng Xin,

You must stop this madness. I have broken into Eunuch Central. Someone within the palace has ordered that the amulets given to our soldiers be made with knei jade! This has a failure rate of one-third! Feng-tu was operating on full capacity, but couldn't keep up with demand. Many trails of where the White Jade went turned up cold, but we did find Li Gao building a boat of jade to rival Heavenly Mandate. This is going to turn out in disaster. You must stop the invasion!

Signed,

No One.



It's been three days since I got a Ferryman's raft upside the head, three days since I put on the robe and took up the scythe. All around me the storm rages impotently, but the raft — my raft — is an island of relative peace. I don't know if it's the raft that's responsible or some innate power I've just learned to tap, but either way it's making for smoother sailing than I'd gotten from the wreckage of the *Gran Grin*.

I've been steadily poling in a direction that my internal compass tells me will take me to Stygia, though there aren't any landmarks out here to guide me. I've seen some amazing things, mind you — ships with rows of eyes along the waterline foundering in the storm, Plasmics the likes of which I've never seen surfacing to bellow defiance at the wind, and more — but no land, and no evidence of Stygia.

I look down at the raft. It's indubitably wood, probably made from the trees that grow along the River or on Eurydice. Relic wood has a disturbing softness to it, but this feels like the real stuff. That means this raft is an expensive piece of equipment, and not something you'd just let drift loose on a whim. I mean, it could have just been carried off by the storm surge from wherever the Ferrymen do their drydocks, but that explanation doesn't cover the pile of goodies I found waiting for me. A robe, a sickle, a lantern that lights itself up — this was not an accident. Someone (*Severus? Maybe it's a deathday present!* my Shadow chimes in, not very helpfully) deliberately set all of this up and sent it on its way with a precise push.

I mean, it could have been intended for someone else, but I didn't see anybody else flailing around out there, and it's a big Tempest. The odds of the raft finding me are infinitesimal. The odds of it smacking me in the back of my head when it was intended for someone else are nonexistent.

So someone sent me the Official Ferryman Starter Kit. Why?

Because someone wants you to be a Ferryman, dipshit, comes the inevitable answer. *Either that, or someone's going to a lot of expense and effort to set you up for something. What do you think the real ferrymen do with impersonators, anyway? Quarters? Eighths? Julianne fries?*

"Damned if I know," I say out loud. "Still, they're efficient, so I expect it would be over quickly."

Exactly. They're efficient. Competent. Precise. Not at all like you.

"Oh, bite me."

Har-de-har har har, get a better line, kiddo. Seriously, there's no way you're Ferryman material. You can barely cover your own ass, let alone anyone else's. You're Spectre bait, not a mysterious defender of lost travelers. What are you going to do the first time some Shades decide to play water polo with your raft? Scream for Severus? Ask me for help? No, this whole gig is some kind of cruel joke. Good thing you've got me around to set you straight, or you'd let your PR go straight to your head.

I think about what my other half is saying for a few minutes while I pole the raft along. He stays quiet while I do so, which is odd for him. He usually is impossible to shut up, yammering away at all hours of the day or night. Constant chattering was a habit I hated in myself when I was alive, and he's taken it to a new extreme.

Not now, though. There's something to ponder in that.

"So, Erik," I say to him. He perks up. It's the first time I've actually called him that. He's always been "my other half" or "the other Erik" or "my Shadow" or a few other things that frankly aren't printable. Never "Erik." I've never admitted he was part of me, or that we were in any way the same. Not until now, in any case.

I think I may be onto something here.

"Erik. Let's say, for the sake of argument, that you're right."

You bet I'm right, baby.

"Heh. I'm not conceding that yet. (*Whatever, I can hear him mutter to himself.*) In any case, if you're right, and this is all some sort of accident, I'm doomed no matter what, yes?"

Yep.

"And that means doomed whether I stay on here or dive off into the waves or try to steer this thing straight into the mouth of the Void, right?"

You're getting brighter every day, I swear.

"Thanks. So if that's the case, my demise is likely to be more painful if I stay on here and let this thing take me to the Ferrymen, who will promptly fricassee me than if I just hop overboard and go down for the third time. You should be doing everything in your power to keep me here. What's up?"

He's broodingly silent for a long time. Normally, this is a bad sign — it means he's plotting some devilry or other to land my unliving butt in hot water — but I get a different sense from him now. It feels like he's pondering whether or not to tell me something, and not necessarily in a bad way. Freaky.

You want the truth?

I continue to pole the raft. There's a sense of familiarity to the waters I'm moving over now, and I can see vague shapes on the horizon. They're low to the water, which is pretty much what I was expecting.

"Of course I want the truth. The question is, are you going to share it?"

Depends. I'm not sure.

"We're running out of time. I think I know where we are, and this trip isn't going to take much longer." Off in the storm, the shapes on the horizon are coming into focus. They're moving, headed toward the same place that I am.

Good point. Hurm. How the hell do I say this?

I say nothing, and wait for him to continue.

Look, we've been over here for a few years now, and all things considered, we have a pretty good working relationship, right? I mean, you don't have Pardoners stomp me excessively often, and I haven't used the opportunities I've had to jump down a Nihil or anything. Right?

"Right. Your point?"

Well, you may or may not know this, but I occasionally... chat... with some of the guys on the other side, and they talk to one another, and they talk to other... people like me, and, well, I've learned some things.

"Some things? Come on, shyness is not one of my bad habits you're supposed to embody."

Yeah, yeah, whatever. The point is, I know what happens to people who pick up the robe and the lantern and the sickle. I know what happens to all of them, if you know what I mean. I know what... what's going to happen to us. And I'm scared to death of it.

That surprises, nay, floors me. Even when he's admitted to being scared in the past, it's been in a bravura sort of way, with a "Give me the reins now!" urgency to his actions. Now he sounds like he wants to curl up into a ball and cry. Weird. "You know, you might yet convince me to get off this thing if you give me some hard data instead of being wishy-washy and ominous."

Stop stealing my shtick, Erik. This is serious. Think about Severus for a minute. He's powerful, right? Completely together, right? Never bothered by anything, not even his other half. Right? Right? Now start thinking about what's going to happen to you – to us – if you stay on board. Think about the price we're both going to have to pay.

And then he drops the real bombshell.

I don't want to be alone, Erik.

Then he falls silent, and I'm left to ponder his words as all around me, the Ferryman silently converge on the barely visible towers of Stygia.



The Last Danse Macabre

When a man has suffered much and accomplished much, he afterwards takes pleasure even in his sorrows when he recalls them.

— Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1370

Overview

The Story

This is the last story of the Dark Kingdom of Iron. Charon's Empire is under assault from all directions, beset by foes without and traitors within. In desperation, the most powerful defenders of the Empire set in motion plans laid down in prophecy and developed centuries ago, to recover the soul and mind of Charon. (See page 112 for the full story of those plans.) The characters become part of the plans, marked by Fate for a crucial role as smoothly running operations stumble and fall. They move from Necropolis battlefield to the heart of Stygia itself, and have a voice in the last council of the Stygian Empire.

Warning!

The material in this book that is labeled as being part of "The Last Danse Macabre" is for Storyteller eyes only! This chapter and the ones following it present an epic adventure, in which the characters play an important role in the fate of the Stygian Empire. If you're going to play this chronicle and decide to read past this point anyway, don't say we didn't warn you when the surprises — and there are plenty — get ruined.

"The Last Danse Macabre" is a story of hope in the midst of tragedy. The institutions built up over millennia to unite and govern the Restless Dead fail. As things fall apart, however, the characters move into position to pick up the pieces, or perhaps to build something new. The Underworld does not come to an end in this adventure, and its future form depends greatly on what the characters do now. One era may be coming to an end, but the next one is just beginning, with the characters at its epicenter.

How To Use This Chronicle

The first chapter begins with war. Yu Huang's long-planned invasion of the Dark Kingdom of Iron erupts, exploiting two advantages: the extent to which Stygian military forces are committed to the destruction of the recently discovered black city of vampires, and the Smiling Lord's subtle treachery. The finest soldiers of the Dark Kingdom of Jade pour through artificial Byways, bypassing all the usual Stygian defenses. The characters take part in the desperate battle for control of Necropolis London: the surprise of the attack, rallying for defense, engagements along the beachhead perimeter and chases and clashes throughout the city.

The characters first face the basic challenges of mere survival, primarily those involved in getting away from shock troops (and complications like exploding Artifact vehicles). Then they join the ranks of Iron wraiths taking the battle back to the invaders — some through combat, some through stealth or trickery. The chapter concludes with the characters helping to repulse the invasion and securing the liberty of at least part of London.

The second chapter begins with an unexpected interruption of plans to push the invaders further back from their perimeters. A high-ranking Oracle arrives from Stygia with a fresh mission for the characters. He explains Charon's plan for rebirth (or at least part of the plan) and guides the characters to Charon's mortal self. There the characters or the Oracle must fulfill Fate's decrees by killing Charon, Reaping him and escorting him to Stygia to be reunited with his memories, which have been kept safe for him by a most unlikely agent. Once Charon's died a second time, the characters and their Oracle guide set out for Stygia, dealing with complications along the way. The battlefields across the Necropolis present risks from ambush to accidents amid the rubble, and once the characters descend into the Tempest, they face the turbulence and local storms created by the Jade invasion. Through all of this they also have to deal with Charon, ignorant of his role or indeed of anything else about the Underworld.

Within the upper reaches of the Tempest, the characters rescue a lone wraith from Shadow-eaten assassins only to find themselves the recipients of an unexpected gift. The wraith they rescue is one of the Mnemoi, and transfers her share of Charon's memories to the characters before succumbing to her wounds. The characters then have the option of spending a long subjective moment exploring some of Charon's past before proceeding; flashbacks intermittently intrude throughout the rest of the adventure.

The Midnight Express arrives to provide the characters with some assistance. The characters get some much-needed rest and recuperation, and get to spend a little time visiting with the train's denizens (as well as trying to make sense of their unwanted gift of memory). Elsewhere in the Tempest, the battle against Enoch comes

to its climax with the use of one of the Smiling Lord's relic nuclear weapons. The characters know only that the Sixth Great Maelstrom erupts with the Midnight Express in sight of Stygia but not yet there.

The third chapter begins with the characters and their companions making the very dangerous passage from the Midnight Express, derailed in the Great Maelstrom's first moments, to Stygia. The Skeletal Lord and his forces meet them halfway, and together the Stygian wraiths and the characters from above fight their way to safety. Once within the multiple layers of Stygian defense, the characters take part in the final council of the Deathlords. They're present as the Smiling Lord's treachery is exposed, and help decide the traitor's fate. Then they join the Mnemoi in rebuilding Charon's memories... a task which ends in only partial success. The episode ends with Charon announcing that he can no longer be the leader he was.

The fourth episode opens with Stygia coming under attack from inside as well as outside. The thousands of Spectres captured by Martyr Knights and stored in the city's catacombs burst loose, as does the Pardoners' vast store of Angst. While the Spectral assault from the Tempest escalates, the city's wraiths fight against unexpected enemies and their own comrades fallen to Oblivion. Charon and the Deathlords ride into a battle that ebbs and flows across the breadth of the city.

The battle brings in all the forces opposed to Oblivion, including the Ferryman, returning to the city for the first time since they turned their backs on Charon. Victory does not come easily: some of the Empire's most powerful wraiths sacrifice themselves to buy time for others. When the Spectral hordes at last retreat, the Isle of Sorrows has been so badly battered that it cannot be



restored. Charon's final acts as Emperor include opening the way for his heirs to make a new home for themselves.

The adventure ends with the prospect of rebuilding. The characters and the other wraiths to leave Stygia now face a future in which the old powers are gone forever. Now it's time to rebuild and prepare for the immediate challenges — the Sixth Great Maelstrom foremost among them — and for the long-term futures.

The Powers Behind the Scenes

The events of **Ends of Empire** began with plots set in motion centuries ago. This section reviews the plans laid by some of the Dark Kingdom's most powerful individuals and groups, and also the complications that fouled up their various agendas.

The Ferrymen

The Ferrymen brought news of Enoch to the Deathlords in part to fulfill an ancient bargain, though their actions were also motivated by a sincere horror of the intrusion in their realm. The Ferrymen are perhaps the best-informed group in the Underworld, and their movements throughout the events of this story were determined by centuries of planning. Nothing the Ferrymen do is without reason, not even precipitating the greatest crisis Stygia has ever known.

See page 82 for a detailed discussion of the Ferrymen's background and mission.

The Mnemoi

The Mnemoi were long ago entrusted with the most precious burden in all of Stygia: Charon's complete memories. The Guild was to hold those memories in safekeeping against the day Charon would leave the Underworld, be reborn and eventually return. To cement the illusion, Charon had the Mnemoi "banished" — as much to prevent his memories from being taken advantage of by Stygian society as to keep them safe in the hinterlands of the Underworld.

Alas, the best-laid plans of mice, men and the Restless Dead all go astray. The myth of the Mnemoi's corruption grew beyond all imagining, leading to a full-scale purge of the Guild's membership. Over the centuries the Mnemoi were hunted down before they could pass on their precious burdens, or succumbed to the pressures of persecution and went Spectre. The current leaders of the Guild know that they have not fulfilled their mission; they only hope they've been able to save enough of Charon so that he might in turn be able to save them. As a result, the Mnemoi act with desperate purpose; they are among the very few wraiths extant who know what precisely is at stake.

See page 112 for the full story of the Mnemoi and their arrangement with Charon.

The Lady of Fate

The Lady of Fate, the first wraith, is the only one to know the full outline of the events unfolding in **Ends of Empire**. She cannot prevent the tragedy, and instead focuses on seeing how much can be rescued from the ruins. She appears only at the end of the adventure, to answer lingering questions and pass on what hope she can for the future. Going through the adventure itself, the characters should not know that someone with her power watches and hopes for them. The Lady of Fate provides succor and, sometimes, emergency assistance, but she does not do other wraiths' work for them.

Yu Huang

The Emperor of the Yellow Springs spent decades preparing for the invasion he launches now. His advisors recognized an opportunity in the era of the Great War, and infiltrated highly trained agents among the prisoners harvested by Stygian Reapers working in eastern Russia. They've sent in more from time to time ever since. Yu Huang also enjoys the advantage of covert assistance from the Smiling Lord. Each believes he can use the other. Yu Huang expects to let the Smiling Lord weaken Stygian defenses enough that Jade troops can sweep away all resistance, then remove the Smiling Lord himself at his leisure. The Smiling Lord believes that he can use Jade forces to crush all competition and then drive back the invaders through superior strategy and firepower (to wit, the relic nuclear devices he's been harvesting for decades).

While information about the Yellow Springs never comes easily, Stygian authorities have gradually realized that preparations for an invasion are underway. The Smiling Lord seizes the opportunity to call for ever-larger border garrisons, both along the Shadowlands frontier between Dark Kingdoms and along major Byways near the edges of the Stygian Empire. Of course, such troop positionings leave Yu Huang's real routes of attack completely unguarded.

London

Players creating new characters at the outset of this adventure should create them as natives of Necropolis London. Every faction of wraithly society has its representatives in London, along with many wraiths who owe no allegiance to anyone but themselves.

The Hierarchy

The Anacreons of London compete vigorously to prove their respective districts of the Necropolis the best-ruled and most desirable. Civil corruption is very rare in London, since exposing the misdeeds of one's superiors is a common path to promotion; over time, all the wraiths incapable of either efficient honesty or smart abuses go to either Thralldom or the forges. Intellectual fads afflict the Restless Dead just as thoroughly as the living, however. The Necropolis' day-to-day operations often depend on quiet, hard-working subordinates who trudge along while senior officials pursue harebrained schemes for reorganizing, improving morale or simply renaming everything. Visionaries crowd into London seeking opportunity just as often as pragmatic, power-hungry wraiths do, and the Anacreons' staffs search endlessly for wraiths with "interesting new ideas."

The Experience of Treachery

Characters who belong to internal security organizations within one of the Legions, the Martyr Knights or other groups concerned with detecting spies may well discover Jade infiltrators and collaborators in the period leading up to the invasion. However, it's difficult to effectively guard a regime betrayed by one of its senior leaders. Important information gets "lost", while people who ask too many questions get assigned to remote, menial chores or simply disappear. Whatever discoveries the Smiling Lord cannot hide altogether are downplayed, usually under cover of being assigned to better-prepared, even more secret units equipped to deal with such things.

Any wraith who lasts for very long in the London Hierarchy must have a way of coping with pressures from below, a knack for preserving equilibrium in the face of constant change and enough ruthlessness to exploit the weaknesses of superiors. The Citadel holds few wraiths who can plausibly be described as very nice, but many (even most) do in fact share a genuine desire to secure as much good as possible for as many wraiths as possible, within the framework the Empire provides. In other Necropoli the local authorities may or may not care about Charon's mandate to protect the wraiths of the Dark Kingdom of Iron; in London that mandate matters.

The Anacreons need both military and civilian staffs. The routine of Necropolis afterlife seldom calls for large-scale military response, but the sheer size of the city means that many wraiths must take part to provide anything like effective patrols. Likewise, it takes a great many administrators to keep records in order. High turnover at all ranks creates constant opportunities, with wraiths seeking transfers from other Citadels as well as ambitious locals seeing London as a path to power.

Others

Few relationships in the Underworld are as tidy as "firm friends or allies with no complicating factors" or "implacable enemies." Whatever official declarations may say, wraiths of varying allegiances must learn to cooperate with the wraiths they come into regular contact with. Hierarchy, Heretic and Renegade may all share a favored leisure spot, or have Fetters attached to the same general location or have a mutual interest in some constructive task. Wraiths on opposite sides of a political fence may share an enemy or a Passion.

When mixing characters of diverse allegiances, be sure to provide points of contact that are strong enough to keep the characters together in the depths of the crisis. Troupes that split off to go in separate directions are far more likely to perish separately. Characters need not be profound confidants, but neither should they carry serious hostility toward each other. There are enough wraiths out there who want to tear the Circle asunder already without giving them more help from the inside.

Existing characters may have any of several sorts of ties to London, including:

- The Byway from London to Stygia is one of the largest and best-maintained anywhere in the Empire. Characters who do regular business with Stygia almost inevitably end up passing through

Cautionary Notes

A few character types don't fit the demands of this adventure well. As a result, players may want to reconsider playing:

- Risen, who cannot cross into the Tempest, and therefore cannot take part in the second through fourth chapters.

- Characters native to the Dark Kingdom of Jade, who face pressure from both Stygia and their homeland to take sides in the escalating conflict, and who may well become targets of assassination if they refuse. Yu Huang wants all of "his" wraiths in the Iron Shadowlands working in accordance with his plans or removed once and for all.

- Characters native to other Dark Kingdoms, to whom Charon's fate may well not seem important, and who would face much greater suspicion and hostility than Stygian wraiths as the adventure approaches its climax.

Moving Into Position

If the characters in a chronicle don't already reside in London, the Storyteller can lead up to the events of this adventure with the process of relocation. Over the course of several sessions, present the characters with reasons to move: promotion within their respective organizations, greater opportunities in business or personal pursuits, social connections and the like. Draw the characters into Necropolis London society, so that when the crisis erupts, the characters have a personal stake in the outcome. The adventure can work perfectly well with characters in the Necropolis as outsiders, driven by more general and abstract concerns, but personal commitments generate some of the most interesting conflict and tension in a story.

London. Couriers, Thrall dealers and commercial escorts all become acquainted with the Necropolis. They get to know officials, find available Haunts and establish friendships or at least acquaintances among London's permanent residents.

- The sheer size of Necropolis London means that individuals who ply marginal trades or cater to exotic tastes may have more success finding customers in dead London than elsewhere.

- Characters who serve in an organization like one of the Legions or Guilds may earn a posting to London as a promotion. It's a move to a place where there are many opportunities and concomitant responsibilities.

- Finally, wraiths may have purely personal connections with London and its environs. A Fetter might move or be moved to London; a friend (living or dead) may move there. A wraith might enjoy vacationing in London, enjoying the bustle in a city where the *Dictum Mortuum* is spoken more softly than in many Necropoli. (Since the time of the Insurrection [see *Wraith: Great War*, page 36], the city's Anacreons have maintained a policy of not fretting too strenuously about minor violations, freeing their resources to concentrate on major problems.)

It's best if characters have at least a modicum of prior experience with London as this adventure begins. If none of them do, the Storyteller may wish to consider adding an expendable companion to the Circle, to act as guide and deliverer of necessary exposition.

Fetters

A number of the wraiths the characters will encounter in the course of this adventure, including the Oracle John Davis and Fetter-management specialists within the various Legions, know Lifeweb. Creating temporary Fetters should be something the elder wraiths take for granted as part of preparing for the trip across the Tempest and for the great battles within Stygian walls. None of the temporary Fetters will be very strong, but they at least provide points to return to if the characters are so unfortunate as to fall into a Harrowing during the course of events.

Harrowings

Use the normal rules for Harrowings until the end of the second chapter, when the Sixth Great Maelstrom breaks out. If the characters have Fetters in London, use them: characters who begin the adventure should have a fair chance to finish it. If characters created specifically for this adventure don't have Fetters in London, encourage the players to change one or more Fetters before things get roll-

ing. (This is technically known as “having God sit in your lap,” but the needs of the story — and of keeping all of the characters involved in the story — take priority.) Characters who fight the invasion in the company of other wraiths should get a chance to benefit from Splice Strand and the creation of a temporary Fetter, if necessary.

After the Great Maelstrom begins, Harrowings take longer to resolve. Wraiths wait in a state of suspended consciousness for hours or even days before the Harrowing takes place. The Harrowing itself takes no more time than usual. The delays come from the confused state of the lower Tempest and Labyrinth, with Spectres displaced far from their usual domains and the Labyrinth itself rejecting its mobile occupants. You have discretion in deciding how long to keep a character who gets Harrowed in the final chapters out of action, though the wait shouldn't be too long. A few scenes' delay suffices to establish the altered nature of the environment. If necessary, the player of the trapped character can help out with Shadowguiding other characters in the meanwhile.

Part I: Envious Gazes, Grasping Hands

Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs, make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.

— William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, Act III, Scene II

The Scene: Necropolis London

Living London forces constant change upon dead London. Grand schemes for redevelopment of slums and run-down areas slam new walls through old Haunts, and when the walls enclose new spaces for commerce and living, Skinlands traffic follows to take advantage of them. In the World of Darkness the resulting extremes are even more pronounced: The darkest slums fester and breed miseries to compare with any Third World famine or war zone, while shining new towers gleam with a dark, inhuman edge.

The Thames runs approximately west to east through London. Haunts cluster most thickly along its banks in the central and east-central districts, from Blackfriars Bridge and the Tower of London to the Thames Barrier. The north bank holds more and larger Haunts than the south bank, since the north bank includes more large commercial facilities and official buildings of various kinds, with more large empty spaces the living leave alone. The gradual decline of the London docks — exacerbated in the World of Darkness by supernatural manipulation — created opportunities for wraiths, since it proved cheaper for Skinlands businesses to develop new docks than to rehabilitate the old ones.

While the docks host many of the city's wraiths, every district of the city (and the metropolitan sprawl beyond city limits) hosts some Haunts. The crush of population and demand for space mean that few large tracts of land remain undeveloped for very long, but wherever there's a run-down wing of a big building or a neglected neighborhood, wraiths find shelter.

The London Citadel marks the western end of the Necropolis' area of densest wraith population. An Arizona entrepreneur bought London Bridge and moved it out of the country in the 1960s. London's Monitors struck a quick deal with the Citadel: in ex-

change for the Anacreons pardoning some captured Guildwraiths, the Monitors took advantage of the bridge's disassembly to covert it into a relic. The physical structure of the bridge now stands in Arizona, but the essence of the bridge, the care invested in it over the centuries, stayed behind.

Citadel engineers erected relic and Artifact structures all around the ghost of the bridge, leaving room for the replacement bridge and Skinlands shipping. Soaring towers stand at each end of the bridge, holding watch rooms, offices for the Citadel's most senior wraiths and mustering points for elite military units. Smaller outbuildings stretch along the banks and even below water level. (It took very careful timing and careful Argos use to pull the trick off, and the current Anacreons frown on the practice as wasteful stunt-pulling. They approve no new maritime construction, though ambitious administrators keep proposing extensions to the existing underwater structures.) Work space in the Citadel is one of the great tokens of personal prestige, and Hierarchy wraiths compete vigorously for the prize.

Some wraiths also manage to make do in the midst of some of London's busiest districts. Churches, museums and other public buildings offer many chambers with ceilings that soar far above the level of pedestrian or vehicular traffic. Enterprising wraiths cobble together scaffolds and platforms, connected by elaborate systems of cables carrying handcars and gondolas of various sizes. They risk disincorporation only when living people come up to clean a ceiling or perform some maintenance chore. The rest of the time, the space overhead belongs to the Restless Dead. London's “roof wraiths” can observe the ceremonies in St. Paul's Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament, attend the shows in West End theaters and delve into the stacks at the British Library with very little risk of interference from mortals. Occasionally a particularly sensitive human might sense the presence of dead things overhead, but that's just part of the ambiance of life in an old, busy city.

Even further removed from ground level, whole communities flourish underground. Wraiths gather in abandoned subway tunnels, bomb shelters and other underground fixtures. Throughout the centuries, it's often been cheaper to simply seal up an old tunnel and dig a new one than keep re-fitting existing tunnels to accommodate changing technology and uses. The pace of obsolescence sped up with the Industrial Revolution. Behind Skinlands locks and barricades, countless miles of prime Haunt space wait for wraiths: old subway tunnels, two complete sets of back-up government offices constructed during eras of international tension and wartime quarters for tens of thousands of refugees.

Many of these spaces have never been entered since they were closed up, and the only visitors to most of the rest are surveyors, historians and the occasional thrill-seeker. Wraiths get virtually all of the abandoned realm for their own exclusive use. Most of the construction took place in highly emotionally charged circumstances, so the warrens' ghostly inhabitants get a steady diet of residual Pathos as well as sanctuary.

The Tower of London

The Hierarchy would dearly love to have the Tower of London for its own. Hierarchy agents do manage to keep it closed for repairs for years on end, but inevitably Skinlands popular pressure leads to its being reopened. While most mortals cannot consciously sense the accumulated Pathos in the place, they can recognize a certain “something.” Wraiths understand that something far better, and want to draw on it for sustenance and power.

Wraiths and living human beings aren't the only ones interested in the Tower. It also serves as home to the largest European gathering of Corax. The wereravens use the Tower as home base for forays into the hostile environment of Europe and into the Underworld. The Tower is the only place in the material world some Corax, almost altogether Sun-Lost, care to visit. The Corax deal on good terms with the local Hierarchy, trading information and providing mutual assistance. The Citadel would much prefer that the Corax not also deal with Renegades and Heretics, but cannot manage to prevent the Corax from doing so. Most London wraiths are familiar with the sight of the large black birds winging beneath gray Shadowlands skies, and many can tell stories of getting help, or at least interesting conversation, from Corax.

See *Corax* for more information about the wereravens.

London By the Numbers

Seven million human beings live in Skinlands London. The vast majority don't become wraiths when they die — less than one soul in 20 emerges across the Shroud in an environment as relatively calm and peaceful as the Great Britain of the 1990s. Far more people become wraiths upon death in times of great calamity and suffering, and wraiths can last (with care and luck) a very long time. In the modern day, about a million active wraiths inhabit the London Necropolis, including those who work directly for the Hierarchy, independent wraiths, Guildwraiths and wraiths

in Thralldom for specific periods of time. (Wraiths sentenced to perpetual servitude may sometimes escape or win a pardon, but in practical terms they're doomed.)

About 50,000 wraiths occupy the Necropolis as short-term residents at any given moment. Thousands of messengers move through the Necropolis, or rest and recuperate before embarking on the next leg of their journeys, acting on behalf of Citadels, Legion garrisons, Byway inspectors and all the countless other branches of the Hierarchy. Hundreds of messengers also move on behalf of the Guilds, Heretic cults, Renegade bands and other groups not officially sanctioned. On most days, like the day of the invasion, tens of thousands of mercantile wraiths carry their goods, licit and otherwise. Individual wraiths pass through for all the reasons discussed in "Moving Into Position," above, and for many more. The Hierarchy attempts to track the movements of independent wraiths, but inevitably loses track of many and never detects others at all.

The Pace of Adventure

"The Last Danse Macabre" does not provide a very rigorous timetable, and as Storyteller, you can compress or expand events to suit the needs of your chronicle. The key events of each episode can unfold in a single session, or span several sessions each. The single day described for the first episode, for instance, can readily become several days of complex maneuver and counter-maneuver. This is the climax of the secret story of the Underworld's fate, now made visible. It should be neither hurried nor dawdled through, but unfold with a steady dramatic sense of urgency.



A third of the wraiths in London died either in 1914-23 (World War I and the great influenza plague) or 1939-45 (World War II). The rest span the gamut of history from yesterday to pre-Roman antiquity.

First Movement: Assault The Invasion

The invasion from the Dark Kingdom of Jade begins literally with a bang, or rather with countless thousands of bangs.

A Note to Storytellers: What's Going On?

First this chapter presents a guideline to the invasion as Yu Huang and his general planned it: specifically, the nature of the forces available, their goals and methods. Then comes the discussion of how their plan goes awry, followed by a step-by-step breakdown of unfolding events with notes on ways the characters can make a difference. If the initial material looks overwhelming, just be patient. Fate and chance complicate even the best schemes, and Yu Huang will not get his way unopposed.

The day of the invasion dawns without portents in the sky. Skinlands London enjoys clear sunshine; the Necropolis at least lies under no more gloom than usual. The city's wraiths go about their business — soldiers on patrol, merchants vending their wares in back streets and converted warehouses, tourists strolling along walkways and roof-level bridges to see the sights. Convoys sail around Skinlands ships and into the Tempest, while ships (and aircraft and ground vehicles) move out of Byways into the Shadowlands.

There's no warning of the invasion. One moment, those in the Tempest or peering into it see only the usual Byways surrounded by the usual turbulence. The next moment, brand-new Byways, hewed from gleaming White Jade, stretch off into the distance. Where the new Byways cross old ones, the existing Byways deform or even shatter altogether; hapless wraiths moving along the ruined routes disappear into the storm. Yellow Springs aircraft, both relics and Artifacts constructed specially for this assault, fly low over the new Byways, attacking wraiths still on the preexisting paths. Close behind come armored vehicles and wraiths with speed-enhancing arts, leading long columns of troops.

The invasion draws on a variety of Byway forms. Some resemble roads, and carry troops and ground equipment. Others resemble rivers and canals, and carry the Yellow Springs navy, with vessels ranging from two-man patrol craft on up to full battleships. Still other Byways manifest simply as columns of clear air with steady winds, through which aircraft can fly with maximum efficiency.

Troops in the front ranks of the invasion carry catapults or other means of launching bottled Nihils. Most of the Nihils open up on the troops' artificial Byways, letting invaders march onto major streets and sail into the Thames. Some of the Nihils open up in the sky over the Necropolis so that airborne forces can leave the Tempest ready for their aerial missions. Yu Huang assigned his best troops to the attacks on major Necropoli, and made sure that they drilled thoroughly. It pays off. Hundreds of artificial Nihils open all across the city within seconds of each other. The second wave arrives five

minutes later, moving through its own set of Nihils, and the third wave arrives through its Nihils five minutes after that.

Characters anywhere near the invaders' primary targets (see "The Plan of Attack," below) find themselves surrounded by invaders. Characters elsewhere may find themselves near a Jade unit assigned to secondary duties, or may witness the invasion from a distance.

The Jade Army by the Numbers

The Skinlands countries that provide the Yellow Springs with souls (free or occupied) include more than 1.5 billion human beings. More of them become wraiths than do inhabitants of the Western world, but then unpleasant fates await more of them, too. The loyal subjects of the Yellow Springs enjoy a comfortable afterlife only because others go to Ti Yu and the White Jade factories. On the other hand, Yellow Springs wraiths do not suffer the depredations of Great Maelstroms... or at least traditionally did not. So the total wraithly population of the Yellow Springs is larger in relationship to the total living population.

The Imperial army and militia combined usually total no more than 10 percent of the "free" wraiths under Yu Huang's rule. In the years leading up to the invasion, this percentage grew gradually, masked by minor fluctuations up and down and wrapped in stories about response to various crises. Still, the army marches to war with a total strength in the millions. Many of these are in no sense fit for serious combat or other demanding tasks, but can serve as reinforcements, cannon fodder, garrison guards and the like. The effective military force is much smaller, but its members are armed with the best equipment Yu Huang's quartermasters can provide.

The major Necropoli get the lion's share of the military elite. The generals' strategy calls for maximum exploitation of surprise at the points of greatest Stygian strength, with later follow-up actions against weaker Necropoli.

The Plan of Attack

Yu Huang's spies have spent years studying their targets, and the Yellow Springs' best strategists developed plans for seizing the key points within each major Necropolis. The unexpectedly high failure rate among Byway-generating Artifacts forces frantic re-design of timetables, abandonment of secondary objectives and other moves to focus remaining resources. This is what the generals come up with on the spur of the moment.

Attackers hold a decisive advantage only during the first moments of assault. The balance of power then quickly swings back toward defenders. First of all, defenders know the terrain and resources better: not just physical and corporeal features, but where to find Pathos reserves, the Fetters to which Harrowed defenders will return and other stockpiles of useful resources. Both sides can shift between Tempest and Shadowlands, and with their superior knowledge, defenders can arrange complex ambushes. The attackers must gain as much territory as possible as quickly as possible, then secure their perimeters against the inevitable counterattacks. Otherwise, they will be whittled down to nothing very rapidly.

The Jade armies enter the Dark Kingdom of Iron with assets that, their generals hope, will let them make the best use of their initial window of opportunity. The troops themselves are the best available, most of them veterans of campaigns in the Occupied Territories. The Smiling Lord's treachery insures that they do not face equally excellent defenders, since many of Stygia's best troops have been sent to the Eurasian front, where decoy forces keep them occupied until the invasion breaks. In

addition, the Jade troops carry the best equipment available, relics harvested in special levies across the Middle Kingdom and Artifacts of White Jade produced in recent years for this war. Outfitting the expedition emptied many of the Yellow Springs' treasure troves, a carefully calculated risk that will only return its investment with a swift victory.

Scenes From the War: Ambush!

As previously noted, London's wraiths use an intricate series of catwalks and bridges to get around without stumbling through mortal traffic. Residents quickly learn the ins and outs of this maze, but the invading troops have a little more difficulty navigating.

Storyteller Note:

All of the sections marked "Scenes From the War" are optional encounters that you may or may not want to insert into your chronicle. You can certainly feel free to ignore any and all of them, but they serve as touchstones in the greater action, things that your characters can get involved with while the pillars of heaven shake around them. If the examples provided don't work for you, feel free to come up with other encounters — London is certainly full of plenty of excitement at this point. Just don't let the characters become spectators to history. They are the heroes of this chronicle, and they need to act rather than watch or even react.

The Circle comes across a small band of Jade soldiers entangled in a series of walkways, clearly lost. There are eight soldiers, two of whom are bickering loudly as to which way is the best route to their objective. Two of the others stand watchful, while the remaining four simply look bored. Only two have weapons at hand, meaning that in the case of a sudden surprise attack the Jade wraiths would have only two effective defenders. There are several options open to the characters:

- If they have distance weapons or Arcanoi that work at a distance, they can try to attack the intruders from where they stand. (Wits + Stealth, difficulty 5 not to be spotted by one of the guards while getting the attack going) Conversely, the characters may try to destroy the catwalk itself, plunging the wraiths into the busy street where they'll no doubt be pummeled into Harrowings by heavy automotive traffic.

- Sneaking up on the soldiers takes a bit more doing, but allows for a more effective attack. Wits + Streetwise, or an equivalent skill (difficulty 7), allows the characters to get into an effective position to bushwhack the intruders.

If this is the route the characters take, they get in one clear shot before the patrol snaps back to life and starts returning fire. The characters get one turn of ambush, another wherein only the two wraiths on watch can return fire, and then all hell breaks loose.

The walkway the soldiers occupy is wide enough for two wraiths to stand abreast and fight. Clever characters may perform duck-and-fire maneuvers (difficulty on the shot is increased by one for the character firing, while the wraith doing the ducking needs a Dexterity + Melee success, difficulty 6, to keep from tumbling off the walkway, standing up too soon or otherwise doing



something foolish.) Argos and Leap of Rage can also allow characters to get in better or different angles on the attack. Characters wishing to use Leap of Rage to jump to an encircling position on the other side of the walkway can do so at a +2 difficulty, due to the narrow nature of the landing zone.

The soldiers put up a fierce resistance, and do not retreat unless utterly beaten. They will not, under any circumstances, surrender, having been inculcated with all sorts of horror stories about what Stygian wraiths do to their prisoners. After six turns of combat, a Jade patrol starts moving up the street below. If the characters haven't already finished their opponents off, they now come under fire from the street, and may be forced to retreat. How the characters do in this encounter may determine their attitude toward future brushes with the invaders.

- Of course, the characters can always decide on the better part of valor and sneak off. If that's the case, the Storyteller may want to have the befuddled patrol pick their trail and chase them across the rooftops of London, fighting a running battle all the way. The longer the battle goes on, the more likely other soldiers are to notice and join in. Sooner or later the characters will have to stand and fight, lay an ambush or try to hide.

Headquarters

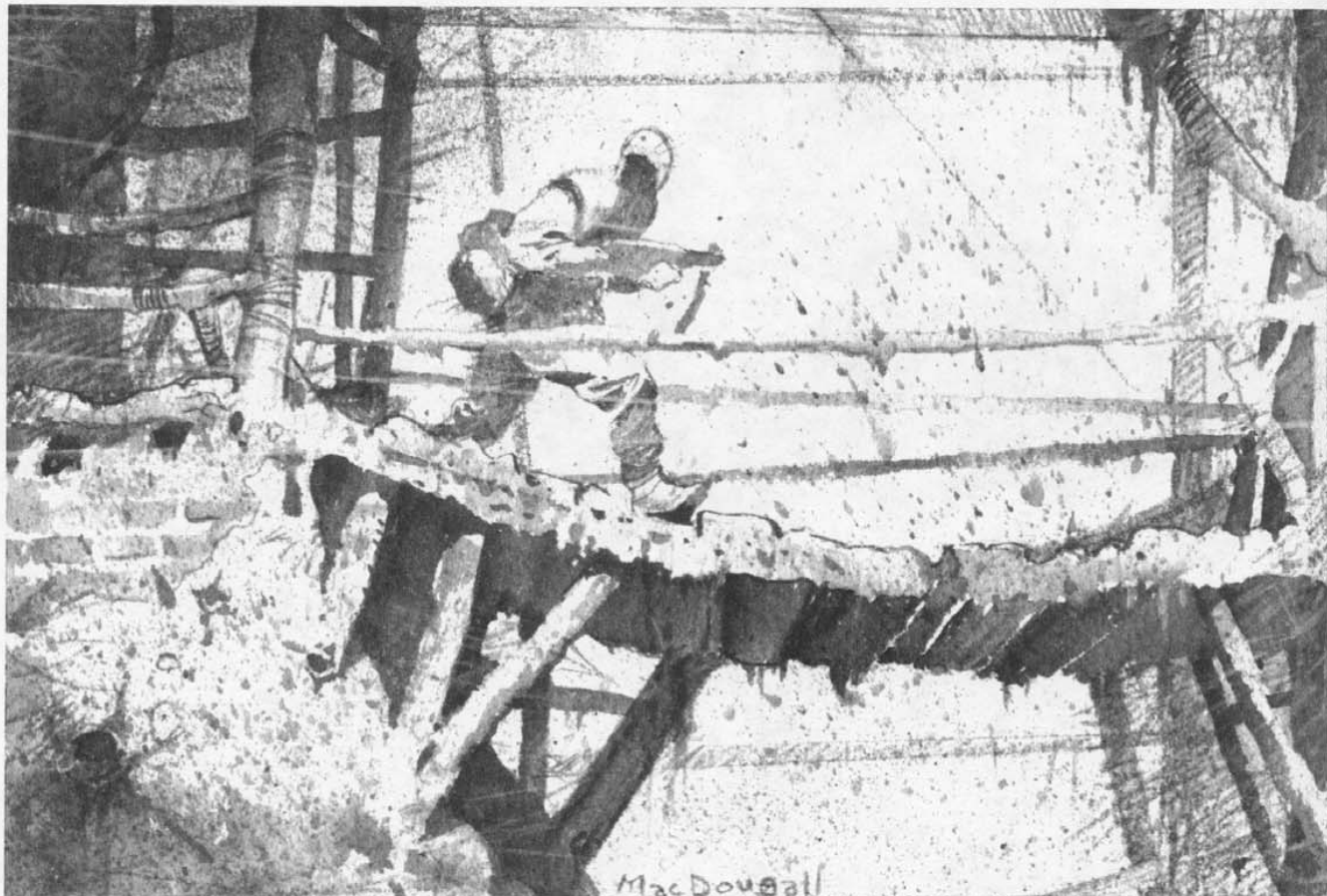
Every unit larger than a platoon includes wraiths whose role is to give orders and collect responses. They normally operate from temporary shelters that provide a level or two of armor equivalent, unless they find convenient local property to use, like Haunts whose occupants now lie on the far side of Harrowings or elsewhere out of the way.

Given the disruptions of the initial assault, many field HQs must operate on their own, something for which they've not been trained or prepared. Unit commanders have experience making decisions on the small scale, but the whole structure of the Jade army weighs against innovation. Perceptive wraiths can exploit the situation further by attacking field HQs. If a unit loses its commanding officers, it splits into smaller components, and for the next scene, is at +1 difficulty to perform any actions due to the confused state of affairs.

The First Wave

Somewhere in the process of preparing the means by which the Jade army breaches the Tempest, Yu Huang's fabricators made some crucial mistakes (see page 27). Half the jade amulets used for flinging the troops into battle explode either when opened or a few seconds thereafter, destroying the invading troops nearby. All across the Necropolis, sudden bursts of barrow-flame mark the failures.

The biggest explosion occurs on the Thames, as the battleship *Righteous Judgment of the Firmament* gets halfway through its Nihil only to break apart as the Nihil collapses. Ammunition stores cut in half detonate and send chain reactions blasting through both halves of the ship, in the Shadowlands and in the Tempest. Not a single wraith manages to make it off the ship. Nearby support craft also catch fire and sink or explode. Smaller but still significant explosions mark the spots where tanks or transports emerging on land get ripped apart; brief flashes and lingering smoke show where foot soldiers perish.



Wraiths of the Dark Kingdom of Iron who have military experience may recognize the degree of disorder the Nihil failures create, with one or more successes on a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 6). Other wraiths more likely see it all as part of some hideous plan, and lose more rather than less courage because of the explosions.

In fact, the Jade plan cannot work as intended given the degree of losses suffered. Contingency plans covered lesser degrees of initial failure, not this massive front-wide problem. Commanders improvise a variety of local solutions and rush to establish new lines of communication.

The Immortal Guard's Activities

The statistics given on page 47 for the Immortal Guard task force assigned to London reflect the capabilities of an elite unit. Each of the soldiers is capable of commanding a regular platoon on his own, and the commander has under his command multiple contingents of these supernaturally powerful wraiths.

A single Guardsman is capable of taking on most groups of characters without any serious difficulty. Allow characters with combat abilities to realize early on just how formidable a target a Guardsman presents, and allow them to retreat. Since the Guardsmen want to get lines of communication restored as soon as possible, they allow minor distractions to remove themselves without pursuing and destroying those annoyances. Actually defeating a Guardsman requires coordinated effort, and a fair bit of luck as well.

The Initial Targets

Insofar as they're able to do so, invading forces concentrate on a few major objectives. These include:

- The Citadel — Sailors take a few turns to remove the restraints locking down guns for safe transit through the Tempest. Once the guns can move freely, the battleship *Emperor's Wrath* concentrates its main guns on the London Citadel.
- The Tower of London — The *Emperor's Wrath* aims secondary gunfire at the Tower. The invasion plan calls for reducing the Citadel first, then turning to the Tower. The Tower holds fewer wraiths than the Citadel and plays a less essential role in the Necropolis' organization, but it's better fortified, thanks to the Pathos invested in the structure over centuries. A dozen cruisers survive the initial Nihil collapses and provide supporting fire, dividing their attention between the Citadel, the Tower and any threatening-looking gatherings of would-be defenders. One pair of cruisers heads upstream, another downstream, firing to pick off minor strong points and keep the invaded population distracted.
- The Eastside docks — Surviving transports make for shore to tie up and unload the thousands of Jade marines they carry. They rendezvous with the survivors of the land force assigned to the docks. Meanwhile, units close to the shoreline help out as they can with transport debarkation.

The Rectifiers of the Way

Any city as busy as London presents formidable obstacles to large-scale Shadowlands operations. Without some way to clear a path for military units, discorporation would be a constant menace. The Jade forces include special squads of wraiths trained in a variety of Arcanoi to deal with these problems: Inhabit to neutralize and remove machinery, Outrage to clear miscellaneous

Angst

It goes without saying that the invasion generates a tremendous amount of negative energy. Fear, terror, pain, greed and other unpleasant emotions rise from the combat like floodwaters, and every Shadow in the city can eat quite nicely without doing much to stir itself.

What this means is that there's plenty of Thorn action going on in the city, not to mention a great deal of Catharsis. Make sure to feed Angst to the characters' Shadows on a regular basis (one point per hour of gameplay is a nice start). Shadowguides should be encouraged to be active, particularly with the use of Thorns like Bad Luck and Trick of the Light. Wraiths the characters come in contact with — on both sides — should also be experiencing severe Shadow difficulties. When the man at the back of the charge gets taken over by his Shadow and starts spraying his comrades with bullets, when the guy holding the line until reinforcements get there suddenly sees enemies where there are none and looks the wrong way — such things can rapidly change the course of a battle.

obstacles, Puppetry to remove particularly troublesome living people and Pandemonium to drive bystanders away.

Rectification squads enter London airborne. They identify targets in advance of major ground units and endeavor to remove problems. A single Rectifier can take on up to a dozen wraiths, exploiting her own speed and combat training to keep targets confused. Rectifiers work together to deal with larger obstacles like crowded intersections. Their standard tactic is to isolate a section of road by destroying or disabling vehicles at each end of a strip one or more blocks long, then destroying or disabling targets within the blocked-off area.

Rectifiers get a +2 bonus to Initiative until characters fight two rounds of combat with them, except for characters with prior experience in aerial combat. Few wraiths have the reflexes or habits of thought to keep looking up for potential enemies.

The Course of True War Ne'er Did Run Smooth

The invasion commenced with a straightforward timetable, now drastically complicated by initial losses.

- **Secure initial beachheads.** This was supposed to be the simplest task. Wherever significant concentrations of Jade force arrive, remove London wraiths; erect barriers and defensive fortifications; set up temporary forges to replace losses in supplies. Without the losses on arrival, this would take no more than a scene or two. The unexpected losses turn it into a matter of hours or even days, and the task will continue until events in future chapters render it a moot point. Units of division strength and above regroup most quickly; units below regiment strength may never get coherent perimeters marked before the Great Maelstrom arrives.
- **Advance on primary targets.** Once divisions (or reasonably coherent smaller-sized fragments) secure their own positions, they advance on the goals identified above in "The Initial Targets." Within secured beachheads, follow-up regiments mount sweeps for London wraiths to take as prisoners, erect forges with which to replenish lost supplies and establish more reliable message relays between headquarters units. Intact units can begin their advances within two scenes of the initial invasion, while

others must persist in securing their beachheads and making contact with superiors.

- **Seize primary targets.** While ground forces gather, the Jade navy directs its fire at the Citadel and Tower (and occasional targets of opportunity). The bombardment must let up as ground forces approach — shelling one's own troops seldom works very well. The Jade commanders try to get the largest groups of more or less intact troops to the most important targets, but the chaos of the actual situation does not allow for perfect match-ups.

- **Later objectives.** Once both the Citadel and the Tower are in Jade hands, the plan goes, a continuous strong perimeter across the center of Necropolis London can be the launching point for systematic looting of the city's resources. Souls, relics, Artifacts, whatever's available can all enrich the Jade Empire in various ways. In practice this stage won't arrive at all. Even the most successful units will be swept away in the Great Maelstrom.

Once More Unto the Breach

Troupes who wish to play out a highly military-oriented adventure should consult the mass combat rules in **Wraith: Great War**. Available relic technology develops more slowly than Skinlands advances, so the Storyteller does not need to write a fresh set of damage charts or anything of the sort. Troupes less interested in sustained tactical resolution should emphasize the flexible, evolving, non-combat aspects of the situation: spying, escape and so on.

The Invasion Step By Step

Step 1: Secure Initial Beachheads

Wraiths caught in areas flooded with Jade troops have only one viable option: escape. Fortunately, the task is difficult rather than impossible. Defenders enjoy these advantages against the watchfulness of the invaders and the launching of patrols intended specifically to capture London wraiths within the initial points of contact:

- **Superior knowledge of the territory** — Wraiths native to London, or who have spent any significant period of time in the Necropolis, know this area well. The main thoroughfares carry constant high volumes of Skinlands traffic, so wraiths learn alternate routes through side streets, along rooftops and through underground tunnels. Wraiths seeking to escape may add the successes from an Perception + Streetwise roll to all Stealth rolls for the rest of the scene.

- **Confusion among invaders.** Subtract one die from Leadership and Initiative dice pools for wraiths in divisions isolated from their superior officers. The smaller the gathering of wraiths, the greater the penalty. While all of this goes on, characters and other London wraiths can exploit the opportunities for surprise and speed.

Characters being hunted by Jade wraiths on perimeter-securing duties must accumulate five successes more than their hunters on a series of Dexterity + Stealth rolls against the hunters' Perception + Alertness. The troupe can simply resolve this ab-



stractly, but it's more fun to play out the chase. The pursuit wends through busy city streets, dark alleys, towering office buildings and cavernous warehouses. With a modicum of planning, the characters can even ambush some of their pursuers. If they succeed in wiping out a platoon of Jade wraiths, the pursuers' accumulated successes are lost; most likely the characters can then escape immediately to safer territory.

The *Emperor's Wrath's* 5" and 6" guns (see page 47 for statistics) open fire on dockside targets as soon as the ship settles into the Thames. Supporting ships add their fire, so that by the end of the first scene, wraiths who spend more than a few turns in the open in view of the East End riverfront face withering artillery fire. Even small shells suffice to plunge wraiths — armored or not — into Destruction Harrowings.

While the ships clear the area, land troops disembark from the *Emperor's Wrath* and transport vessels. Troops with Flicker move onto the docks immediately, to engage in combat with wraiths that shipboard guns can't readily reach. The Immortal Guard commander jumps to shore to apply Chains of the Emperor arts to remaining local wraiths. Jade wraiths with relic diving suits enter the Thames to deal with underwater threats, and soldiers proficient in Outrage or Inhabit move Skinlands vessels out of the way. Then the gangways descend and regular troops move off in formation.

A Storyteller who cannot dissuade players from having their characters attack the main Thames-side forces does not need to play out the ensuing combat in detail. A fight against a squad of Immortal Guardsmen and hundreds of fresh Jade troops can have only one outcome.

Yu Huang's plans called for the immediate replacement of lost stores through quick forging of local wraiths. The surprisingly high failure rate of invading vehicles makes this even more imperative. So "snatch squads"—often composed of several squads of soldiers accompanied by a tank to which captured wraiths can be chained—sweep through the East End. They bring to bear soulfire explosives, battering rams and improvised tools to force their way into storm shelters. Characters with Passions concerned with justice, protecting others and the like should feel the urge to intervene in these cases. Even characters lacking in nobility may well see the pragmatic value in denying the invaders valuable corporeal resources.

Scenes from the War: On the Waterfront

The characters have learned from fellow resistance fighters that there's a cache of relic ammunition sitting in a crate on the docks, along with all sorts of other contraband that normally would get the owners soulforged for possession. These are not normal times, however, and that sort of thing is desperately needed to help repel the invasion. One way or another the wraiths end up with the assignment of retrieving it. They get promised a percentage of what they bring back, so it isn't quite as unfair a job as it seems. Still, getting out with what they need is not going to be easy.

Simply getting down to the dock area is extremely difficult. Several ships are shelling (see page 47) the area, and dodging the impacts is both dangerous and time-consuming. A large percentage of the Shadowlands architecture is being leveled as well, making movement slow and cover harder to find in some places.

Suddenly, the shelling stops. The characters may decide this is the perfect time to move, and break for the ammunition dump (Yes, they have been provided with a map, if necessary). More cautious wraiths may wonder why the firing has ceased, and look around. On a successful Perception + Alertness roll, the reason

becomes all too clear: A pair of Imperial Guardsmen are marching through the area, going from building to building and crate to crate, obviously looking for something.

If the characters are already on the move, the Guardsmen spot them on a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 5) and move in. The Guardsmen will attempt to capture the characters and force them to lead the soldiers to the ammo dump. Wise Circles will split up, with one or two characters drawing the Guardsmen off while the others get in, get as much of the ammunition as they can carry, and get out. The characters probably don't have enough time to go through the other crates, but if they do they find an astonishing quantity and variety of relics, many of them somewhat prurient in nature. (Yes, there is a black market in smut in the Underworld, and the characters have unwittingly stumbled into it.) At this point the scene turns into a pair of challenges: Can the decoys stay ahead of the Imperial Guardsmen and can the other wraiths get their prize out before the soldiers figure out that they've been had. Furthermore, if the decoys get caught, the other characters may attempt a rescue. If they do, their best chance is to hit the Guardsmen before they get back to their lines. Otherwise things can get problematic (though a daring extraction mission is certainly a chapter possibility, as the characters sneak into the heart of the enemy encampment to rescue their friends).

If the characters wait, or don't decide to go with the decoy route, they have a chance of sneaking past the Guardsmen on a Dexterity + Stealth roll (difficulty 7). All of the characters must succeed in this roll, or else the group is discovered. If the roll is successful, the wraiths can sneak out to the ammo dump and get what they need, then try to sneak back. The roll for getting out is at a +1 difficulty to the one for getting in, as the wraiths are now burdened down with rather a lot of ammunition. If the Guardsmen spot the characters, they will pursue as far as they can. Whether or not the characters arrange to have a surprise waiting for the Imperial Guardsmen is entirely up to them.

The ammunition is in small boxes packed into a larger crate. There are 24 boxes in the crate, and an enterprising Circle should be able to figure out a way to get most, if not all, out. Opening the crate requires a relic crowbar or some such and three successes on a Strength + Melee roll; impatient characters can just smash their way in but the noise may attract the Guardsmen.

Once the Guardsmen pass by, the shelling starts again, and sooner or later a direct hit finds the ammunition. Even among the dead, he who hesitates is lost.

The Disorganized Forces

What the pieces of units scattered across the Necropolis, separated from each other by distance and the burning remains of exploded bottled Nihilis, do next depends greatly on the personality of their commander. The usual approach is to secure the immediate vicinity, moving to a better location if the unit simply cannot secure the point of arrival, then attempt to establish contact with the nearest visible concentration of Jade troops.

Not every separate unit behaves like all the others. In particular, when a commander takes enough injury to have difficulty providing effective leadership and the assigned Protector remains healthy, the Protector generally orders aggressive pursuit of the unit's goal whether or not the goal makes sense given present realities. Pitched battles between Protectors and military wraiths break out at various points; characters fortunate enough to witness such a dispute may well wish to exploit the opportunity for flight or attack.

Scenes from the War: The Relic Warehouse

Somewhere not far from the docks sits a relic warehouse which houses relics seized by Necropolis authorities from Renegades and other criminals. But these somehow slipped through the cracks of official record-keeping. A small network of mid-ranking officials doles the relics out to their favored associates, for everything from bribes to anniversary presents. Small relics occupy trays in desks and wall racks; larger ones rest in crates (some labeled carefully, others not).

London wraiths who shelter from the dockside perimeter sweeps here may find the warehouse a mixed blessing. The vast majority of the relics are minor (one- or two-point items), while many of the rest are broken, tainted or otherwise unreliable. Some could explode, and would if struck with significant force during a battle. The interior maze of haphazardly stacked crates lowers visibility to no more than a few feet for any wraith who can't fly, or at least clamber up onto the boxes. Moving along the tops of the stacks requires a Dexterity + Athletics check (difficulty 5) each turn to avoid slipping falling 10 to 20 feet.

Within a few minutes of Jade soldiers discovering the warehouse, a follow-up platoon arrives, well-armed and prepared to remove anything of value. The warehouse can provide only a temporary shelter. Meanwhile, the characters have moved in the back door and are busy ransacking the place for all it's worth. If they decide to duke it out with the soldiers, the cramped nature of the

The 18" guns of the *Emperor's Wrath* lob shells prepared with Yellow Springs Arcanoi to enhance their explosive force. The Storyteller should designate a target spot and roll the artillery's Intelligence + Military (difficulty 6). On failure, each 1 means a drift of up to 10 feet in a random direction. If a forward observer can pass along a report of the previous shell's point of impact, the artilleryist can spend up to three turns preparing for the next one; each turn of delay adds one die to his dice pool. Damage rolls for anyone within 15 feet of a shell's point of impact are irrelevant. Wraiths within the primary blast radius must make a Dexterity + Athletics (or Martial Arts) roll (difficulty 8) to escape. Those still inside plunge immediately to a Destruction Harrowing. Wraiths within 30 feet take eight dice of aggravated damage; wraiths within 45 feet take eight dice of regular damage, which can be soaked. Each success at a Foreshadow roll immediately before a shell strikes allows the Fatalism-using wraith (depending on location) an extra die to roll to escape the primary blast radius, converts aggravated to normal damage or adds one die to the wraith's Soak roll.

Three shell impacts within a 10-foot space break down a section of fortified wall. Defenders can bring Alchemy and other Arcanoi to bear to fix the gap; as a temporary measure, Martialry can meld three wraiths into a man-high barrier that requires another shell or comparable damage to penetrate. This requires three extra successes and two points of Willpower, and takes two turns.

Each 18" gun fires once every six turns. Jade military doctrine calls for firing only one on a given turn, so that each one in sequence can benefit from observations of previous shots. On any turn where no gun fires, waiting soldiers direct small arms fire at any exposed defenders and provide covers for mining or other efforts at subverting defenses.

warehouse evens the odds. The soldiers cannot bring their full numbers to bear in the cramped enclosure, particularly if the characters start toppling shelves, hurling barrowbombs and the like. It will take 10 turns for the soldiers to admit they're backed up and send a squad around the back to try to pincer their opposition; that maneuver takes another two turns.

If the characters just want to smash the place, that's a bit easier. Suitable uses of Outrage and the like (especially the powers listed in the Guildbook) can bring the whole thing down in a matter of turns. Then it's a question of Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 7) to make sure the characters get out as well, if any are foolish enough to remain inside.

Step 2: Advance on Primary Targets

Naval bombardment dominates one scene's worth of action for characters anywhere near the waterfront. Nobody ignores sustained shelling, whether personally near the target area or not. Even characters well away from the Thames should notice (and most likely worry about) the steady rhythm of massive explosions.

While the navy's big guns fire, the divisions along the waterfront maneuver into position. Demolition companies remove buildings and other obstructions. Snatch teams prowl through buildings left standing, searching for forge fodder, concealed would-be snipers and any other London wraiths not yet uncovered.

Organizing Resistance

The Hierarchy never planned for an attack so deep within Stygian territory without plenty of advance warning. Standard Stygian military doctrine assumes advance notice of hours, if not days or weeks, with plenty of time to rally troops in response to observable threats. Even the best emergency-response system in the world can't adjust to a timetable of minutes.

Routine patrol assignments spread Stygian soldiers throughout the city, but nowhere in very strong concentrations. Two or more platoon-sized groups of soldiers in one place means that there's trouble going on as the invasion breaks. Possible causes include:

- Renegades attempting to liberate Hierarchy-held Thralls, or Thralls bought by private citizens. The Renegades can range from starry-eyed idealists to scum who pride themselves on being more brutal than Hierarchy slavers.
- Fighting around a Haunt or gathering of Guildwraiths. The Spooks in particular maintain a fairly sizable presence in London, thanks to a mostly unspoken truce with the Citadel. All of the Guilds maintain some presence in the Necropolis — a Storyteller looking for a way to bring together a mixed group of Hierarchy wraiths and Guildwraiths can even use this as an opening scene.
- Heretics who view the invasion as a form of divine retribution, and who hamper the resistance effort "in accordance with God's will." Bystanders may well join in on both sides, if the Storyteller cares to handle a confused, multi-sided melee.

On the other hand, there are a great many wraiths who prefer the devil they know to the one they don't. As such, in many places Heretics, Renegades, Guildwraiths and Legionnaires are fighting cheek by jowl. The snatch squads have made their presence known, and even the most defiant Renegade knows what's going to happen to him if the invaders get their hands on him. There are stories of defiance and unity as well as pain and defeat to be told here.

Other Incidents

Some other scenes that might be worth attempting include:

- **Recruitment** — The characters try to rally die-hard Renegades or Heretics to the flag, but it might take some convincing.
- **Naval Action** — By some means the characters commandeer a ship and take the battle to the enemy in the river. While the invaders wreck any Shadowlands craft they see, that doesn't mean it's impossible to use something in the Skinlands.
- **Rescue** — Soldiers are taking a cargo of captured wraiths back to the White Jade mills. The characters must intercept the caravan and rescue the prisoners.
- **Escape** — Somehow the invaders have advanced their position past where the characters are hiding. Now the wraiths must get out of enemy lines without being captured or destroyed.

Scenes from the War: Into the Court

Somewhere in the East End, just off a busy main street, lies a small residence court on a steeply sloping street. A narrow road runs downhill to the main street; old worn stairs lead up out of the court's other end to the next street. Two buildings of flats stand on each side of the court. Nobody in the Skinlands lives in any of them except for squatters, not since the whole set was condemned 15 years ago. Since demolition keeps getting delayed by bureaucratic complications, they all provide thriving Haunts.

Like many East End wraiths, the Renegades and Heretics who inhabit Utterson Court hold no great enthusiasm for the Hierarchy. But they hold even less for soldiers, particularly soldiers bent on wiping out Utterson Court and its inhabitants. Characters who succeed at Oratory and Streetwise checks can rouse up to a dozen Utterson wraiths to interest in coordinated action.

Utterson Court lends itself to a very simple ambush: Wraiths acting as bait attract Jade pursuit up into the court. While the bait escapes, wraiths in the flats overlooking the court rain down heavy objects, gunfire if they have any guns available and whatever Arcanoi they can muster. The ambushers earn automatic surprise, particularly if the Jade troops charge after the bait wraiths in haste. Ambushers can topple roofstones to block off the downhill exit and arrange themselves in rough ranks to block the stairs up. Any Jade soldier who enters one of the buildings to strike at ambushers faces more problems, including narrow high stairwells that allow no room for melee weapons but *do* allow for hand-to-hand strikes.

The Battle Below

Underground routes not yet under Jade control make excellent rallying points for London wraiths. The old platforms can accommodate hundreds or even thousands of wraiths, and many were designed to withstand wartime bombardments. The stairs and elevators to the surface provide clearly defined lines of approach, which can be sealed off if necessary by carefully applied destructive force. (A few well-powered Stonehand Punches can collapse many archways, for instance.) The usually narrow stairwells subtract at least one die from dice pools for melee weapons and any combat maneuver requiring space to turn or twist.

Before fighting begins, underground stations, bomb shelters and the like provide good bases of operation for spying and sabotage. Construction designed for the Restless Dead won't come with air

shafts, for instance, but anything built for the living will. Covered grates allow wraiths to peer out with very little risk of being seen (at least +2 difficulty to Alertness and Awareness rolls by Jade soldiers). Many old underground installations were sealed off when abandoned, but often not with undue thoroughness—in many cases only a thin wall of plaster or sheet of plywood stands between the surface world and an old entrance. Wraiths coming up from below can burst through and enjoy automatic surprise for the first round of combat, as long as they get through the barrier in a single turn. Wraiths with arts that don't require tangibility may incur the Rule of Ouch penalty while passing through the barrier rather than removing it.

As regiments gain control of the area around entrances to underground strongholds, companies descend to open Nihilis through which emerge relic locomotives prepared to sweep along old Underground tracks. These trains range from early 19th century to mid-20th century vintage. Each consists of a locomotive, its engine enhanced by concentrated Pathos stores, one carriage to carry troops and a second carriage to carry prisoners and cargo. An engineering platoon operates the train while the rest of a company rides along to chart and attack as necessary. Once a locomotive crew reports a stretch of track free, additional companies descend to finish securing the area. They can then use other exits as the launching points for further attacks.

Characters with train experience can attempt to capture the Jade trains to use for themselves. If none of the player characters know how to operate a train, the Storyteller can allow the use of Charisma + Streetwise or Charisma + Status rolls to locate other wraiths in the area who do. It takes six wraiths to operate one of the Jade trains, though only three have to possess actual engineering competence as long as the others can follow instructions. Other Jade troops will not at first suspect anything if London wraiths approach in a captured train; this is another path to surprise attack.

Many potential complications can arise. The constant shelling from the *Emperor's Wrath* may cause weak roofing to collapse, possibly just blocking a tunnel, possibly opening a shaft to a higher level of tunnel or even the surface. Spectres and Plasmics cast up by the Maelstrom may not want any wraith, Stygian or otherwise, intruding on their new dwelling. Scared Jade soldiers sometimes bolt to go AWOL. More courageous Jade soldiers treat their cowardly comrades as targets at least as important as London's own defenders; characters could end up as innocent bystanders in an existing crossfire. London wraiths who came below to seek shelter from the storm need rescuing, but might be too panicked to understand or obey with even the most sensible orders, and end up creating problems of their own.

How Invaders Fail

Even after losses to accidents and whatnot, the Jade invasion force numbers are still huge. If the fight took place on a level, featureless plain with a clearly defined boundary, the invaders would win: they are better organized, better armed and armored, and better trained.

London has features which complicate the picture.

Above all, the invaders did not expect or prepare for the loss of half their force. All their timetables assumed some minimal degree of loss during the passage. No element of the invasion can move precisely as planned; many isolated units can take no effective action at all, other than perhaps self-defense. The chaos gives defenders crucial time to survey the scene and prepare a response.

Many Jade soldiers become worried about the reliability of their weapons after the initial explosions. Around every smoking bit of ruin, soldiers think, "Maybe my gun will do that too, if I

push it too hard." Jade soldiers with equipment that has a relic or Artifact level higher than 2 must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to muster the courage to use their weapons for the rest of the current scene. Soldiers in units commanded by a leader who gets at least two successes on a Charisma + Leadership roll (difficulty 7) may add one to their effective Willpower for this check. The Storyteller may wish to roll once per discrete unit the characters encounters, as keeping track of a huge number of individuals creates more problems than it solves.

Finally, the invaders have no personal experience with the territory. It's one thing to read on a map that a network of iron cables allows repair crews to maneuver beneath Tower Bridge. It's something else for a captain desperately seeking a general, any general, to remember to check those cables and avoid snipers or demolitions-equipped defenders. In straight head-to-head battles, each Jade soldier can kill several defenders... but in sabotage, ambush and the like, a handful of defenders can reduce entire brigades to devastated confusion. This chapter provides opportunities to use the bombs, mines, missiles and other neat implements of destruction so many characters accumulate but can seldom use without embarrassment.

Step 3: Seize Primary Targets

The Jade forces do win one decisive victory, over the Citadel. After several scenes' worth of naval bombardment, the big guns fall silent and ground forces advance to exploit weaknesses uncovered.

The Jade assault alternates periods of bombardment from ship-board guns with periods of ground troop advance to exploit weaknesses. A few minutes of gunfire followed by several minutes of probing advance is the usual pattern, with forward observers for the battleship using relic telegraph equipment, signal flags or flares. Ground commanders can use Keening-amplified coded shouts to call in extra fire or announce a successful breakthrough (after which the *Emperor's Wrath* turns its main guns on secondary targets like other bridges).

When the guns fall silent to allow for an approach, the troops mass against any visible weaknesses. If shelling hasn't yet produced any promising-looking targets, troops concentrate on gateways and windows. Attackers vastly outnumber defenders, but one well-protected wraith can hold off five to 10 invaders as long as main walls hold. Once the walls begin to go, the defenders must flee or retreat to increasingly confined strong points, or find individual places to hide. Eventually, the Citadel falls.

Elsewhere, chaos prevails among the Jade forces. Advances grind to a halt. Sensible commanders make gathering into defensible safe spaces their first priority; commanders with less sense fall in battle or at the hands of their own insubordinate troops. London wraiths with military expertise recognize the general fallback and move to exploit it—characters willing to take the responsibility can lead the counter-push in their area, either independently, acting in charge of local volunteers or as part of a larger force under someone else's control.

Having Done All, Stand

The chapter concludes with the emergence of a stalemate between invaders and defenders. The invaders have a few key successes to their credit, including the sacking of the Citadel, but can make no further effective advance. The defenders have the invaders contained but cannot yet push in. The Storyteller should conclude the episode at sunset, or sunrise if the troupe wishes to engage

in nocturnal adventures, and the general recognition that the first stage of the war is over with nobody very satisfied by its outcome.

Statistics

Jade Soldiers

Most of the soldiers of the Jade army share about the same level of competence. The Storyteller should feel free to adjust these numbers up (to reflect veteran and special units) or down (to reflect relatively inexperienced groups), however.

The typical Jade soldier:

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 2

Skills: Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Melee 2, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Bureaucracy 2, Medicine 1

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Artifact 3 or Relic 3

Arcanoi: two dots in three of the following: Castigate, Fatalism, Keening, Moliate, Outrage, Usury

Corpus 8, Willpower 6, Pathos 6, Angst 4

Thorns: 4 points, with a wide variety of options; Shadows are, after all, different from one another.

The Artifacts or relics listed above are combat-related: armor, melee weapons, ranged weapons for wraiths to whom they've been issued. Soldiers in special units like weapons platoons possess at least three dots in the Abilities necessary for their equipment and missions. Armor with an armor rating of 2 and swords equivalent to foils are standard. (See **Wraith: The Oblivion**, page 260-262.)

Unit leaders learn Expression, Intimidation and Leadership—add one dot of these skills for platoon and company leaders, two dots for battalion leaders, three dots for regiment leaders, four dots for brigade and division leaders and five dots for higher-ranked generals. Add a dot in one of the standard Arcanoi listed above for each successive level of command, and a point of Willpower. The Pathos available to leaders varies wildly; as a rule of thumb, raise it to 7 for battalion and regimental leaders and 8 or 9 for leaders of brigades and larger units.

Protectorate officers possess Way of the Scholar, at as many dots as the Leadership of the unit commander. The Protectors learn Intimidation at the same level as the unit commander, and Expression and Leadership at one dot less.

Each unit of battalion size or larger is supposed to travel with at least one wraith who knows Way of the Artisan at five dots, and many companies do as well. Each company also has at least one wraith who knows Way of the Artisan at three or four dots; if this wraith does not also know Moliate 3 or above, then another wraith who does works with the Artisan.

Most companies and every unit of larger size has at least one wraith who knows Way of the Soul and Castigate at three or more dots. The Soul arts play a crucial role in holding units together during the stresses of battle; the Jade army puts more effort into this sort of preparation than Stygian military units generally do.

Scouts possess Argos 4 in addition to their other Arcanoi. Some regiments maintain one or more platoons of wraiths who all know Argos 1, and these concealed units can do a tremendous amount of damage.

Immortal Guardsmen

Yu Huang's personal guards operate on an altogether different plane. They've fought together for more than two thousand years and draw on the best resources of the Yellow Springs. Remember their distinctive appearance: their Corpus consists of a substance as solid as porcelain, but flexible, and the colors of their skins, clothes and objects are brighter than anything else in the Shadowlands.

Statistics for the unit commander appear in parentheses.

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5 (6)

Social: Charisma 3 (4), Manipulation 3 (5), Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3 (4), Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3 (5), Athletics 3, Intimidation 3 (4), Martial Arts (soft Shuai-Chiao) 4 (5)

Skills: Archery 4, Leadership 3 (5), Melee 5, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Etiquette 3 (4), Investigation 3 (4), Law 3 (4)

Arcanoi: Argos 2 (3), Fatalism 2, Moliate 4 (5), Chains of the Emperor 4 (5), Way of the Scholar 3 (5)

Corpus 15, Willpower 8 (9), Pathos 150 (200)

Armor Rating: 5

Weapons: Jade weapons which inflict aggravated damage, at least two for each Immortal Guardsman

Artillery

Use these figures for the naval and land guns described below. The accuracy of the fire depends on the competence of the gun crew commander. The officers assigned to the attack on London have Intelligence 4 and Heavy Weapons 4. Roll the commander's Intelligence + Heavy Weapons (difficulty 6). On one or more successes the shell lands fairly close to where it was supposed to go (within the first blast radius' distance). Each failure translates into a five percent drift in a random direction; on a botch the shell might jam and refuse to fire or go wildly astray. It takes the rest of the scene to clear a jammed gun.

Heavy guns take six turns to load, aim and fire. The shell does 20 dice of damage, plus two dice per extra success on the targeting roll, to everything within 30 feet of the blast point. Everything within 75 feet takes 10 dice of damage, plus one die per extra success. Everything within 200 feet takes half damage.

Medium guns take four turns to load, aim and fire. The shell does 12 dice of damage, plus one per extra success, to everything within twenty feet; eight dice (plus one per extra success) to everything within 50 feet; and half damage to everything within 100 feet.

Light guns take two turns to load, aim and fire. The shell does 8 dice of damage, plus one per extra success, to everything within 10 feet; four dice, plus one per success starting with the third success rolled, to everything within 25 feet; and half damage to everything within 50 feet.

Emperor's Wrath (Musashi)

The Japanese battleship *Musashi* entered the Shadowlands in 1945 during the battle for the Marianas, and Jade troops were ready. It took only minutes to enslave the infant Japanese sailors and install a loyal Jade crew. Since the mid-1950s (after a full refit), it has provided heavy firepower wherever there's unrest on the fringes of the Middle Kingdom. The ship's assignment to London now is a mark of imperial trust, one that fills the crew with pride.

The *Emperor's Wrath* is 862 feet long and 121 feet wide amidships. Thanks to relic engines, it has a maximum speed of 35 knots

—substantially faster than most ghost ships and also faster than all but the quickest Argos-using wraiths. A permanent crew of 2000 wraiths operates the ship and its weapons; for the invasion, the ship carries another 2000 soldiers in (very cramped) temporary quarters.

The ship's weaponry includes nine 18" (heavy) guns, six 6" (medium) guns and 24 5" (light) guns. Sixteen inches of armor belt provide an Armor Rating of 10.

The Imperial Guardsmen enter the Shadowlands standing on the deck of the *Emperor's Wrath*.

Small Ships

The dozen cruisers accompanying the *Emperor's Wrath* come from a variety of eras and nations, but the Yellow Springs military overhauled them to conform to a standard design. They each carry eight 6" (medium) guns and 12 5" (light) guns. They have armor of varying compositions and thicknesses, which provides an average Armor Rating of 8.

The Restless Dead of London

The typical London wraith:

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Raise two Attributes to three dots each. (Remember that even the baseline rankings for player characters reflect greater-than-normal capabilities.)

Talents: Alertness 1, Dodge 1

Knowledges: Bureaucracy 1

Backgrounds: Distribute six dots among Allies, Artifact, Contacts, Haunt and Relic.

Arcanoi: Distribute six dots among Argos, Castigate, Inhabit, Keening, Moliate, Outrage and Usury. Keep in mind that wraiths who demonstrate Arcanoi likely to flout the *Dictum Mortuum* attract official attention, and probably need to develop Stealth and Survival Abilities as well.

Corpus 6, Willpower 5, Pathos 5, Angst 3

Part II: Into the Depths

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid.

— Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*

A Screaming Comes Across the Sky

The last chapter ended with the emergence of a stalemate, which the characters should have helped to create. This chapter begins a few hours later.

In the meantime, characters need all the rest they can get. Fortunately, their local piece of front line stays calm enough for relaxation, healing, emergency Castigation and so on. The characters get few opportunities for rest later on. *Now* is the time for healing, preparation and the like.

The existence of a stalemate does not put an end to all fighting. It merely describes the overall situation, neither side making major advances. Wherever there's a weak spot in one side's lines,

the other side sends in forces to exploit it; it's just that follow-up pushes inevitably peter out when the threatened troops get backed up by their better-secured comrades nearby. Major advances meet with major opposition, so that the situation can change (for the moment) only in detail.

Characters can seek out whatever level of local action suits them. One block lies quiet, with wary Jade troops peering across strong barricades and perhaps the rubble of some old buildings at equally wary London wraiths. The London wraiths might be Hierarchy troops, a well-organized band of independent fighters or simply everyone in the neighborhood willing to help out. Just a block away the situation can be very different, with skirmishes between forces of company or even battalion scale, small-arms fire mingled with artillery and combat Arcanos arts.

Some neighborhoods vary block by block. Others maintain a constant level of active conflict for many blocks or even square miles at a time. The one sure fact of urban warfare is that it's unpredictable. Almost any outcome you care to present can be made to fit in somewhere.

Fighting along the front isn't the only option available to characters. Underground London is a vast, complex and poorly known environment; characters seeking to strike at the enemy behind the front can try sneaking through old underground tunnels, utility conduits or the sewers, emerging through manholes and access hatches. Keep in mind the imperatives of the Jade plan; the more major a thoroughfare, the more likely it is that Jade forces control it, or are working hard at clearing it of opposition. Side passages offer the best routes of approach (and departure).

Jade troops don't control all the territory within their front lines. Characters can take part in heroic defenses of encircled buildings and defensible areas, or in efforts to rescue heroic defenders through underground routes. Stealth and combat capabilities count in equal measure. See Chapter Nine of *Wraith: The Oblivion* for rules on pursuit, shadowing, sneaking and many more dramatic things.

Scenes from the War: The Deputy

Eliza Maston died in 1865, at the age of 101. She'd been a famous adventuress, traveling to every continent and writing popular narratives of her adventures. After death she joined the Iron Legion as an observer/spy, continuing her travels and reporting. The Fourth Great Maelstrom nearly destroyed her, and upon surviving she decided that maybe she'd had enough adventure for the time being. She returned to London and settled down, devoting herself to observing the evolution of her favorite neighborhoods.

Most storm wardens take up their work after having done something else for a while: It's a way to be of service without being in constant action. Maston's experience is dramatic but not really unusual. Storm wardens should have interesting stories to tell about travel, intrigue, war and the like, if there's a lull in the action. They all possess at least four dots of Castigate and at least two of Fatalism or Lifeweb, as the basic tools of their job. While they may not look corporeally impressive, wardens tend to be very experienced at Dodge and other methods of evading potential assailants.

Maston encounters the characters while spreading news about where to find shelters once the alert sounds. She can help out in a pinch; if you need, you can use her as a source of support without being blindingly obvious about it.

The Ill Wind That Blows Nobody Good

The Iron Legion's Maelstrom Prediction and Preparation Unit (MPPU) is a small office; in times of crisis it relies on the assistance of deputies recruited from local Citadels. In London, veterans of civil defense efforts during the world wars provide most of the deputies. They lead safety drills, teach simple mnemonics about the warning signs of approaching Maelstroms and attempt to instill a sense of duty among wraiths at large. Whether their efforts seem comic, serious or pathetic depends on Storyteller presentation. The

Maelstrom Force Levels

- Force One — Winds blow up to 40 mph. "Rain" includes liquids carried up from the Tempest and some small pieces of solid debris. Unprotected wraiths take no more than four dice of damage per scene, soakable. Class Two armor and minimal shelter offer complete protection. Haunts reduce damage by two dice per Haunt level.

- Force Two — Winds blow up to 80 mph. All tasks undertaken outdoors or in places the wind can reach are at +1 difficulty. "Rain" includes strange, noxious liquids and wriggling live Plasmics. Solid debris includes chunks of pavement, wind-sharpened fragments of bone and Stygian steel and other dangerous objects. Spectres often move through the storm. Unprotected wraiths take four to six dice of damage per scene, soakable. This damage is aggravated up to one-quarter of the time. Armor provides its usual protection, while Haunts reduce damage by one die per Haunt level. The storm blows in windows, rips away loose roofs and the like, but cannot break through solid structures.

- Force Three — Winds blow up to 120 mph. Outdoor activities are at +2 difficulty. "Rain" consists of a mixture of harmless and dangerous elements, including dangerous fluids from the Tempest and hostile Plasmics. Spectres fill the storm and converge on exposed wraiths. Unprotected wraiths take six to eight dice of damage per scene; this damage is aggravated about half the time. Armor provides one less die of protection than usual; Haunts reduce damage by one die per Haunt level. The storm smashes through flimsy Shadowlands doors, roofs and walls.

- Force Four — Winds blow to at least 200 mph. Outdoor activities are at +3 difficulty (or higher). Rain and debris slash in from all angles, penetrating any place not tightly sealed. Spectres fill the storm and attack anyone outdoors for more than a turn or two. Exposed wraiths take eight to 12 dice of damage each scene; this damage is aggravated half the time. Armor provides one less die of protection than usual; Haunts reduce damage by one less die than Haunt level. Buildings that lack strong reinforcement may collapse.

- Force Five — Storms this strong blow only at the moments of greatest chaos, like the outbreak of a Great Maelstrom. Wind speeds are immeasurable. Outdoor activities are at a minimum of +4 difficulty, and possibly much higher. Spectres converge almost instantly on exposed targets. Exposed wraiths take at least 14 dice of damage per scene, usually aggravated. Armor provides half normal protection, rounded down; Haunts reduce damage by one die per two Haunt levels, rounded down. Only massive Citadels, structures of Stygian steel and the like stand much chance of surviving.

See *Wraith: The Great War* for an extended discussion of Maelstrom behavior and how wraiths may protect themselves against it.

MPPU deputies take their work very seriously (and make no mistake, it ultimately is important work), but they also tend to cling to half-century old memories of how such things ought to be done.

The Smiling Lord's plan to use relic nuclear weapons is, of course, a secret held at the highest levels of the Hierarchy, but the public face of the campaign justifies concern. Any major military operation creates risks for minor Maelstroms, and operations against mysterious, powerful enemies must be assumed to carry additional unknown risks.

Storm wardens circulate even during the invasion. They don't rush to the front lines, but they try to remind as many wraiths as possible that large-scale violence in the Shadowlands often stimulates storms in the Tempest. Deputies may stop to lecture wraiths on the importance of keeping an eye on nearby shelters, or scold someone who makes fun of a deputy's safety jingle or rhyme. But the cumulative effect of constant warnings, combined with implausibly cheery and optimistic "news" reports from Stygia about the progress of the campaign against Enoch, should be one of worry.

The Alert

See page 7 for the direct experience of Enoch's destruction.

The Night Mail, an informal alliance of pilots with relic aircraft (both heavier- and lighter-than-air), circled the battlefield at a safe distance, and raced off in all directions when the mushroom cloud erupted. A single plane races high over embattled London, its pilot shouting down in a Keening-amplified voice, "Storm coming from Enoch!" Some Jade artillery units open fire on the plane, but the pilot makes her way around and above the flak, zooming off in search of safety somewhere else.

When Anarchy Comes to London

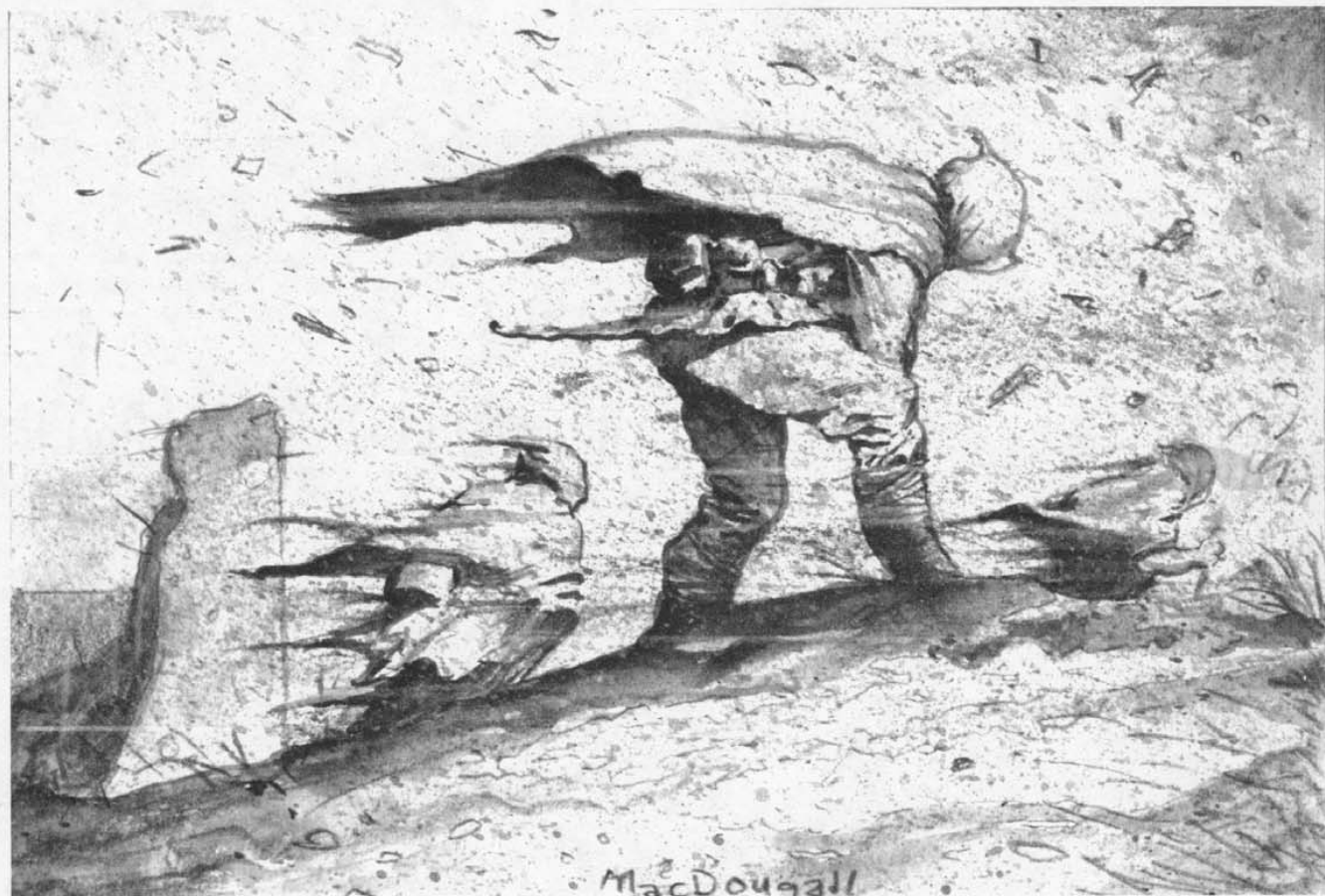
The invasion provided a clear, external enemy against whom London's wraiths could rally. The storm presents a different sort of peril. Wraiths see each other as part of the problem, competing for the resources necessary to ensure their own survival. Fragile accords among wraiths with differing agendas fighting together against the invaders break down in the face of the storm. Only the most disciplined or dedicated wraiths avoid panic and collapse into the naked pursuit of narrowly defined self-interest.

Only a fraction of the city's wraiths could get to shelter even without the complications of the war. As it is, every shelter not actually on the front line becomes the focal point of a desperate scramble among wraiths demanding admission. The Citadel would normally take care of high-ranking officials, but now it's rubble being sorted through by Jade soldiers. Surviving Hierarchy wraiths join the press for shelter along with everyone else.

None of London's wraiths know how long they have until the storm arrives. This is your opportunity to present the characters with raw, naked panic. Moments of chaos with which to challenge characters include:

- London wraiths guarding a stretch of artillery-damaged buildings against a Jade offensive break and run for nearby shelters. Jade troops scramble after them, hoping to get shelter for themselves. The characters must rally resistance to deal with the problem... or manage to get out of the way.

- Adventurous wraiths sneaking behind enemy lines through abandoned warehouses or slum flats suddenly find Jade troops pour-



ing in through every available opening, searching for some scrap of shelter. Whether the characters fight or flee, they find themselves in a volatile situation. A mass of panicked troops is in some ways harder to deal with than an organized corps, since the scared individuals pay less attention to what happens to anyone but themselves.

- Wraiths flood into the West End and North London, hoping to find some hiding hole amidst the bustle of Skinlands affairs. Rule of Ouch collisions push refugees closer and closer to the brink of collapse, and inevitably some of the wraiths fall into Harrowings. Those who remain merely become that much more desperate. Roof-level networks of footpaths fill up past capacity; those that do not host impromptu battles break, sending wraiths spilling into the living crowds below. *Dictum Mortuum* violations follow inevitably; some panicked Hierarchy wraiths focus obsessively on doing their duty to punish violators as a way of avoiding thinking about the larger situation.

Storyteller Note

Don't let the storm play out for more than a scene or two. Use it to mark the transition between the invasion and the desperate descent about to begin; in these scenes the characters dive literally and figuratively beneath the surface of the Underworld. The storm erases their tracks and hurries them along. You can use the storm for this purpose in various ways:

- Wraiths with strong Haunts or possibly useful relics face the attacks of wraiths without. Characters with three or more dots in Backgrounds like Haunt and Relic undoubtedly face this sort of attack. Lesser property may also seem like sanctuary worth seizing by wraiths who've become sufficiently worried.

Half an hour passes between the Night Mail warning and the arrival of the storm. In some parts of town, frenzied action fills the whole time. Elsewhere, an initial bout of action gives way to long waiting that takes as least as much psychological toll as the panic.

Ashes from the Dark City

The storm itself rises up out of the Tempest and blows across the Shadowlands, ripping through open Nihils to tumble forth in all directions. In five minutes the wind rises from nothing to more than a hundred miles an hour, and it continues to build after that. Storm clouds tower miles overhead, Spectres swirling inside them. All the Spectres drifting free in the Tempest when the mysterious, menacing city gets vaporized rush to join the storm. Tempest-stuff resembling everything from water to oil to acid sleets down on unprotected wraiths.

Storms bring out bad behavior in wraiths. Panicked shelter-seekers grab at proffered Shadow dice and succumb to Catharsis. Looters, Shadow-dominated and otherwise, swarm forth with improvised armor to take advantage of the difficulties confronting guards. Enemies of Citadel officials take the opportunity to toss their victims into Harrowings; in the confusion of the storm, who's to tell the difference between assassination and accident? Individual exploitation of the general calamity undercuts all efforts by MPPU deputies and others to organize for safety.

- The characters gather in a secure storm shelter, likely an old underground station (one that Jade troops didn't attack) or bomb shelter, and visit with Eliza Maston as she tends wraiths brutalized by storm debris.

- Martialy inclined characters can use some secure shelter as the launching point for a counter-offensive against the Spectres

who rise with the storm, the Jade invaders or both. The Spectres have no love for the invaders — in the depths of the Hive-Mind, rumors circulate about Yu Huang's ultimate plans, and the forces of the Labyrinth do not care to surrender what they see as their rightful domain to anyone.

- Once away from outdoors and battlefields, characters may explore. Much of London took only minor damage from the invasion. Both above and below ground level, there are buildings to wander through, living people to observe and secrets to seek.

- If your troupe would enjoy a crossover, this is a good moment to bring in the Corax. The handful of Corax with experience of the Shadowlands do what they can to help guide wraiths to shelter, all the while observing the overall course of events. They gladly cooperate with wraiths who share concern for the well-being of innocent victims.

Squads of Jade soldiers with *kuei-go* prowl for souls to capture and hammer into White Jade, escorted by soldiers prepared to fight the Spectres and London wraiths who might object. Improvised workshops light the night around major ships and clusters of land vehicles, as Jade troops work frantically to repair the damage so many units suffered upon exiting their improvised Byways. Looters prowl the streets, relying on stolen arms and armor and their own knowledge and quickness to let them dodge the storm's perils.

Tempus Fugit

Down in the depths of the Tempest, Xerxes Jones (see *Mediums*) flounders ahead of the storm from Enoch and finally falls. When the storm sweeps over him and destroys the nuclear warhead he carries, the Sixth Great Maelstrom begins. Xerxes can survive only a few hours in the teeth of the initial storm blast, and does not survive the detonation of his own weapon. You can adjust the precise details to suit the pace of your troupe's progress, but do not let characters linger. Use the Oracle John Davis, described below, to impress upon characters the need for urgent action, if characters dawdle too much. If the characters *really* don't want to leave, as an absolute last measure, have Davis abduct them. He can incapacitate and command them with Keening if he really needs to, but he'd rather not — he continues to worry about what that might do to Fate's skeins.

Characters with Foreshadowing should rouse from Slumber with the sense of great, great trouble coming. Characters with Lifeweb may pick up a vague sense of impending disruption, more severe and wide-ranging than the strands cut by the invasion.

The Second Death of Charon

John Davis

In 1827, John Davis opened the first casino in New Orleans, introducing many European games of chance as well as providing space to play familiar American games. By the time he died, gambling had become a major enterprise for the city. He crossed the Shroud filled with continued zeal for exploiting the risk-taking impulses of others, but found the New Orleans Necropolis uncongenial. Neither the increasingly powerful faction loyal to the Dark Kingdom of Ivory nor the early aristocrats suited his fancy. He traveled at random for some time, finally settling down in Necropolis London at the beginning of the 20th century. He soon became a fixture of the sporting scene there; the Hierarchy overlooked his not-heavily-concealed ties to the Oracles Guild in exchange for his occasional services for the Citadel.

What Davis Knows, What Davis Says

Davis knows that Charon was reborn as a mortal, that the Mnemoi carry Charon's memories and that the Sixth Great Maelstrom is imminent. He doesn't know how thoroughly the Oracles manipulated Charon's fate in life, about Charon's impending Transcendence or Stygia's doom.

Davis won't tell the characters everything he knows. The story given below is a mixture of truths, selective emphasis and genuine distortion. He justifies this to himself as being what's necessary to motivate the characters to discharge their assigned roles.

Three years ago, Davis' long-standing run of lukewarm luck turned red-hot. He shot up through the ranks, and suddenly found himself being discussed seriously as a candidate for assuming the office of Dealer, once the current Dealer inevitably started losing. When the Pantheon decided it was time to send instruction to the prophesied guardians of Charon — the characters — Davis was the obvious choice, close enough to the center of power to need little briefing and thoroughly familiar with London. He was on his way home from Stygia when the invasion and storm broke.

Davis cultivates the image of a 19th-century riverboat gambler. Davis' appearance is very much a deliberate construct, with heavy borrowings from Twain. When presenting even the most basic information, Davis likes to leaven his speech with colorful metaphors and exotic slang. The more passionate he becomes, the louder and more colorfully he talks, to the point of near incomprehensibility.

Wherever the characters are half an hour after the storm breaks, Davis find them. Thanks to a touch of Pandemonium, obstacles in his way tend to fall apart, while Fatalism and Lifeweb help him steer around impending trouble. He greets each character in turn, using any formal titles they possess. If the characters show any surprise at this (and presumably they do), he describes aspects of their experience of the invasion and storm to make it clear that he knows things about them nobody could have witnessed by normal means. By doing so, he hopes to establish at least a curiosity about him in the characters, so that they'll hang around long enough to listen to his pitch.

Once he has the characters' attention, Davis tells them that Fate chose them to rescue Charon from his current situation. He produces scraps of records taken from the Oracles' archives: medieval illuminated manuscripts, shards of Etruscan poetry and battered clay tablets whose hieroglyphics spell out the characters' names, as well as making references to the Circle freeing Charon from some sort of imprisonment. One picture shows Davis presenting these very treasures to the characters. (Note: If Davis has to produce more evidence than seems plausible for him to be car-

When Fools Don't Rush In

Not every troupe will include at least one character willing and able to kill Anderson. But Fate says that Charon's mortal shell dies now. If all of the characters decline, Davis uses Outrage to do the deed himself. But he worries greatly about doing so — it tampers with the skeins of Fate as he understands them, and the consequences might be unimaginably bad. So it's very much the last resort.

rying on his person, he may escort the Circle to a Haunt wherein he's secreted his *bona fides*.) The Oracle explains to the characters that the prison from which they must liberate Charon is that of the material world. In short, they are to kill Charon, who now dwells in London.

After delivering that bombshell, he provides some context:

- Long ago, the Oracles told Charon that he was doomed to perish in battle with Gorool. He made plans with the Mnemoi to protect his memories, so that when he fell, his empty soul could escape the Underworld. He would then return at Stygia's moment of greatest need.

- The plan worked. The Mnemoi received Charon's memories and scattered in the guise of the Empire's worst enemies. From time to time, Charon would disappear from watchful gazes, going off to refresh the Mnemoi's records of himself. When he fought Gorool, he was ready to pass from the Underworld, and did.

- Charon was reborn as Charles Anderson, citizen of London, and grew up to become an investment banker. He's in his mid-50s, and in failing health, since he's a heavy smoker who's having bad luck getting decent service from National Health Service. He would not have many more years to live in any event.

- But the crisis at hand (and crises yet to come, to which Davis alludes only vaguely) requires Charon be reunited *now*, without delay. So it's necessary to Reap him. Prophecy says that the wraiths Davis now addresses are to be Fate's instruments for the task.

Where Oracles Fear to Tread

Davis' revelations probably provoke extensive questions and arguments from the characters. He deals with them as best he can, endeavoring to offer reassurances about the rightness of it all, while leading the characters to Anderson's current location.

The church of the parish of St. Dismas and St. John of God (the patron saints of prisoners and the sick) occupies the end of a small side street. It's large enough for a pulpit, 20 choristers, and 200 worshippers. This particular evening only a handful of pews hold anybody. Anderson sits alone off to one end of a pew halfway between the door and the pulpit, so that the characters can approach without risking Rule of Ouch interactions. The pastor is a middle-aged man, scarred from youthful service in colonial police forces but otherwise comfortably middle-class and nondescript. The choir members range from high school to old age, and sing Palestrina arrangements of psalms with equal measures of talent and enthusiasm. The parishioners are mostly elderly men and women, with a few adults of varying ages there because they enjoy the music even though they don't care about the religious message (Anderson is one of these), and a smattering of teenagers and young adults using the church as crash space. Pillar candles provide illumination, supplemented by glints of lights from busier nearby streets refracted through the church's stained glass windows.

The actual murder of Charon takes only a few moments. Removing his Caul and Reaping him takes only a few more. Now the characters and Davis must escort the single most important wraith in the Empire to home and safety... and their companion doesn't know any more of what's going on than any *Enfant* does. He has no Shadow; the legacy of the Pardoners' great accident continues. While he can and may act in self-destructive ways, there's no dark voice within his head luring him on. The characters must explain everything about Underworld existence to him.



Picture of the Gone World

Niska

The wraith who now calls herself merely “Niska,” or “water spirit,” died not very many generations after Charon himself. She was a teenage girl, engaged but not yet married, when Mount Thera erupted and swept her away with the rest of the village on Crete’s north shore that she called home. She was fond of sailing and had resented not being allowed to join the men at their deep-sea work; after death she used Inhabit to travel with sailors across all the seas of the known world.

Some centuries after death, she discovered an emerging talent for Mnemosynis and joined the Mnemoi. She managed to hang onto one Fetter, a pillar she and her sisters had decorated with carvings in honor of Demeter (which now rests in a museum in Athens). She therefore never had to abandon the Shadowlands altogether, but gradually her Mnemos duties took more and more of her time. But when the prophecies of future doom became clear and the great ritual of preserving Charon’s memories was complete, she gladly returned to a quiet afterlife, enjoying the sea.

She received warning of the need for Charon’s imminent reunification through the Mnemoi’s limited Hive-Mind, and used Argos to journey to London to meet with John Davis. Unfortunately, she’s fated to be destroyed in the meeting.

Passing the Torch of Memories

Niska emerges from her last jump in the street outside the church of St. Dismas and St. John of God. She’s haggard, and her Shadow’s been fighting her every step of the way for days. Both Psyche and Shadow sense through Fatalism (and the Mnemos Hive-Mind) that the crisis they’ve anticipated for centuries is at hand, and her Shadow wants to stop her from playing her part. When Niska arrives and senses Charon’s presence, through a faint resonance with the memories she carries, her Shadow pushes for a suicide maneuver. It uses a Thorn that transforms Corpus into Pathos, without requiring the Psyche’s approval. In half a dozen turns, Niska will drain to nothing and disappear, even though she can use some very powerful arts in her final moments.

Niska shouts out for Charon and all with him. She staggers toward Charon, her Corpus sloughing off with every step. She screams at the characters to give her their hands, that this is Charon’s only hope. Every effort at establishing her intentions, whether through Soulsight or analytical skills, shows her to be free of Catharsis and apparently bent on doing good. The fact that she recognizes Charon should be an indication that she’s part of the big story — characters who miss this altogether on their own might discover it with a little hint from the *Common Sense Merit* or other channels of Storyteller input.

All the characters she touches experience a brief moment of vision. They find themselves all sharing the same point of view, that of a girl descending a beachside cliff path in bright Mediterranean sunlight. It’s the living world, with their perceptions unclouded by Deathsight. If any of the characters speaks, they find that they can hear each other, dimly, with the unfamiliar point of view overlaid on but not wholly displacing their usual senses. The girl wears a bright red and blue tunic and worn leather sandals. She’s heading to a pier extending north into the ocean; two ships are tied up at the moment, and one sailor offers a sacrifice of fish at an altar with a carved pillar at the shoreward end of the pier. It’s a warm, clear

So What's a Memory Palace?

The Mnemoi learned a long time ago that masses of memories stored without order become confused. They pioneered techniques for imposing mental frameworks within which to sort things. Charon's memories fall into a symbolic landscape derived from his beloved Stygia; the characters now encounter just one small piece of the whole. They'll encounter the whole in the next chapter.

day except for a massive black cloud rising up from somewhere over the northern horizon. Characters whose players succeed at an Intelligence + History roll (difficulty 8) identify the scene as belonging to the Mycenaean culture destroyed by the eruption of Mt. Thera.

The characters find that they have no control over the point of view. The girl whose memory they're experiencing isn't being influenced from what is, from her point of view, the distant future. So the characters see what she sees. They're not aware of her thoughts, but they do perceive the environment as she does, including understanding the ancient Greek being spoken by the sailors.

Suddenly the black cloud in the north swells and rockets higher, miles into the atmosphere, while hot winds blow across the Aegean Sea and Crete. The sky darkens from ash and fast-moving clouds. The sea churns into a white-capped frenzy. The docked boats pound up and down, bouncing repeatedly against the dock (fatally crushing any sailors who slip). Earthquakes bring down huge pieces of the cliff face. The last thing Niska sees in the Skinlands is the altar pillar. She's thrown into it by a passing tremor, her vision filling with a freshly painted bas-relief of a bull leaping, then flashing to blackness.

The next thing she sees is the Shadowlands, and her Caul being removed by a kindly looking wraith. He wears a simple robe, and his face is that of the just-Reaped Charles Anderson. He tells Niska, "There, there, family-daughter. The worst is past now. Time to learn what comes next."

The Memory Palace in Darkness

Without transition, the characters who were in Niska's memories find themselves apparently standing at the bottom of a spiral staircase. There's a blank Stygian steel door at the foot of the stairs. A few arrow loops provide openings along one wall, but beyond them the characters can see only a featureless black void. The stairs curve up in a circle several hundred feet in diameter. At each floor, there's a Stygian steel door emblazoned with the sigil for one of the Arcanoi. After the last of these, the top landing ends in another blank door.

Each of the doors swings open with the distant sound of grinding gears when the characters approach. The doors at top and bottom open onto flat white walkways stretching off through the void, leading to a remote glow within which no details are visible. Characters who stand in a threshold for a moment may hear a variety of uncertain sounds, like rodents scurrying, something bubbling or metal plates slamming together. The sounds disappear as soon as the characters move away from the threshold again.

Characters who set out on either of the white walks find themselves moving very rapidly. In a few steps they arrive at a doorway identical to the main door of the Church of St. Dismas and St. John of God. It also opens into darkness broken by white walk. If they step through, they return to their own Corpus, as described on page XX. The characters return immediately once all the doors have been opened.

As each door opens for a first time, one wall of the landing on that floor disappears, offering a window (of sorts) onto one of Charon's memories. The point of view in each case is Charon's. Characters cannot enter into the scene or affect it; it plays out, and then the wall regains its usual nature.

The Alchemy Door. No scene plays. Either Charon has no memory he strongly associates with this Arcanos, or Niska didn't carry it if he did.

The Argos Door. This scene is a quiet vignette, not a particularly special moment, but representative of the way Charon spent many, many years. He poles his raft through the River of Sorrows, as it was long ago. The river flows wide and deep, unclogged except along its banks. From time to time he lifts his lantern high to peer into the gloom on each side; he moves his head slowly, memorizing each line and curve of the shores. There's a distant buzzing sound. Characters who concentrate may be able to recognize it as Charon's still-developing Shadow, whispering threats of the destruction of everything Charon now examines.

The Castigate Door. Charon tours the basement of the Pardoners' chapter house in Stygia, with Sister Acceptance at his side. He looks up at the huge container full of Angst as Pardoners acolytes empty their individual flasks of Angst into tubes running up. Sister Acceptance speaks with confidence, "Of course it's safe, my lord. Look at these beams, forged from Nhudri's finest material, tested to withstand far more load than we ever put upon them."

"It is my experience," Charon says, "that everything can break — people, walls, empires. Surely the Underworld teaches us that nothing lasts forever. I fear that you may put too much trust in your things, and not enough in preparations for when the worst comes."

The Embody Door. No scene plays. Either Charon has no memory he strongly associates with this Arcanos, or Niska didn't carry it if he did.

The Fatalism Door. Charon sits on an outcropping of rock somewhere in the Tempest. It's sometime before the Third Great Maelstrom. The sea lapping around the rock moves with a slow, viscous rhythm, and the dark clouds overhead aren't anywhere close to being storm clouds. A Mediterranean woman of unguessable age sits next to Charon, one arm around him; tears track down her cheeks. Her forehead bears a deathmark whose shape constantly drifts and evolves, passing through all the Legions' marks in turn. Charon concludes some speech already underway when the memory begins. "...and after all that, I return, and pass away again? That's it?"

The woman — the Lady of Fate — nods. "It is. It's not the story you would have chosen, nor the story I would have chosen for you. Fate does not offer us the choice. All I ever wanted was to be reunited with my husband, and that won't happen for a long, long time yet."

After a moment's silence, Charon stands up and turns to survey the endless sea. "Well, then, all I can do is make the most of what Fate gives me. Let it be an existence worth remembering when I'm gone."

The Inhabit Door. Charon stands in Nhudri's forges, examining a sword whose hilt Nhudri grasps. "I'm not sure I see the problem, Master Artificer."

"Look more carefully, damn it!" Nhudri stops and looks embarrassed, then his scarred and burned face is suddenly illuminated by innocence. "My apologies."

"Never mind. Let me see." Charon stares intently at the sword, shifting his head to cast a shadow. Within the dimmer illumination, flaws in the sword's construction glimmer by reflected light. "Ah, I see. Yes, you have unworthy apprentices."

"I should work out some kind of system, I suppose, for training them. But this—" Nhudri gestures at the work around him, "—this is what I do. Perhaps you could advise me on choosing someone to do the rest?"

The Intimation Door. No scene plays. Either Charon has no memory he strongly associates with this Arcanos, or Niska didn't carry it if he did.

The Keening Door. Charon stands facing the Smiling Lord in a throne room (that of the Smiling Lord's palace). The city of Stygia spreads out along mountainous slopes toward the Sea of Sorrows. The Smiling Lord is accompanied by two guards who wear uniforms of the Great War era. He addresses Charon in a calm voice, "No, I will not explain. If you have charges of treason and can convince my fellow lords of them, do so. Otherwise you're wasting my time. You speak of leadership, but you haven't actually led in centuries. I can use the contacts you accuse me of to clear away the debris and build a better society on a clean foundation. But I admit nothing of your charges."

Charon answers, quietly at first, then gaining volume and intensity. He combines Crescendo and Requiem beneath Sotto Voce. By the time he finishes, the guards have collapsed, stunned; strips of torn Corpus dangle loose from beneath the Smiling Lord's mask and armor. "Your predecessor went to the forges for an offense less than what you plan. Judgment will come for you in due season. Fate doesn't rely on me alone for these things; the events you set in motion will destroy you in the end. When the last moment comes, you will have no time for repentance, so if a worry or regret ever crosses your mind before then, treasure it. You'll need a final shred of hope when you boil away. You *admit* nothing. But in your every move you confirm the truth of the reports given to me. You *are* an admission, with each step, of greed and soul-rot. When your end comes, remember that I offered you the chance to confess and make amends now, and that you refused."

The Lifeweb Door. Charon stands in the Shadowlands, in a German museum. (All the signs are in German, and a newspaper headline dates the scene as April 1, 1871.) He peers at a collection of funerary urns decorated in Roman imperial designs. He leans back and half-closes his eyes, and the network of Lifeweb connections comes into focus. One of the urns has a strong strand running down and out of sight; the urn glows faintly with the deathmark of the Skeletal Legion. Charon approaches to reach into the urn. After a moment's tugging the strand comes loose, and with a brief push through the Shroud he knocks it over onto the floor. He speaks softly to himself, "Three Deathlords down. On to Cairo."

The Mnemosynis Door. Charon sits on a black throne, facing a semi-circle of about three dozen wraiths with the marks of Mnemosynis. The characters may recognize Niska among them. Charon gives a short laugh, then speaks with a touch of sadness in his voice. "They'll see you as villains even if our plan works perfectly, you know. Deception takes on a life of its own. If any of you want to leave now, go with my blessing." He waits; none of the Mnemoi leave. "Very well, then. Let your last visit to the Onyx Tower be a productive one. Let's begin." He leans forward and stares at his hands for the remaining moments of the memory.

The Moliate Door. Charon examines himself in a mirror. He looks like a squat Russian soldier, dressed in early 20th century uniform, with no resemblance to his usual self. Characters may not be able to recognize him at all until he speaks, with the familiar voice. "Thank you, Slander, it's a marvelous disguise."

A completely neutral voice, betraying no clue about the nature of its owner, comes from somewhere behind Charon. "You're welcome. It was an interesting challenge. Not quite my usual line of work."



Charon laughs, "Nor mine. But if the fools in their palaces want to fight each other, I'd as soon be out of the way for a while. After all, who could pay you if they decided to remove me as an obstacle? Now let's attend to my voice."

The Outrage Door. No scene plays. Either Charon has no memory he strongly associates with this Arcanos, or Niska didn't carry it if he did.

The Pandemonium Door. No scene plays. Either Charon has no memory he strongly associates with this Arcanos, or Niska didn't carry it if he did.

The Phantasm Door. No scene plays. Either Charon has no memory he strongly associates with this Arcanos, or Niska didn't carry it if he did.

The Puppetry Door. No scene plays. Either Charon has no memory he strongly associates with this Arcanos, or Niska didn't carry it if he did.

The Usury Door. In the midst of the First Great Maelstrom, Charon and other wraiths battle against Spectres on the Stygian waterfront. The storm whips the sea into endless ranks of whitecaps, and city-sized monsters splash up in the distance. The battle's just turned in favor of the defenders, with Spectres falling back along a gradually eroding front. Charon swivels from side to side to see how his fellow warriors are doing, and misses a Spectre with long claws until the Spectre actually impales him. Charon swings Siklos around to decapitate the Spectre, but staggers and falls.

One of the wraithly soldiers drops her axe and withdraws from some pocket a pair of Usurer's scales. She slices off Corpus from her own arm, weighs it in the scales and applies it to Charon's wounds. In a moment he stands again. "My thanks. Your sacrifice means much to me. Get to shelter, and let your comrades carry the battle for you now." He picks up Siklos again and charges back into the fray, slicing through more Spectres as he goes.

Memory and the Moment

Time does not stop for the rest of the Underworld while Mnemosynis-touched characters explore Charon's memories. The memories do flow by faster than real time, though they don't feel hurried while the characters experience them.

Wraiths around the characters wandering this part of the Memory Palace see the characters suddenly become unresponsive. While in Mnemosynis-related trance, the characters' eyes lose their focus. They stand motionless, apart from occasional movement of their heads in response to unfolding recollections.

Anyone trying to get the attention of characters in the Memory Palace must succeed in an opposed Willpower roll (difficulty 8). Within the Memory Palace, characters hear outside sounds very dimly, if at all, unless they concentrate. Then the memory freezes; while they continue to see only the scene, their other senses report the world of the present day. As soon as the characters stop concentrating on the present day, then the memory resumes.

See page 112 for the full story of the Mnemoi's plans. If the Mnemoi reveal themselves now, they'll want very much to establish that they're not enemies, and submit willingly to examination via Soulsight and the like. One or two of them have Shadows perilously close to Catharsis, but none have the deep stench of evil that any informed wraith would expect the treacherous, perfidious, *dangerous* Mnemoi to have. Kismet shows them all to have the same mark of importance to Fate's schemes.

The characters then regain their usual perspectives. Davis and Anderson stare curiously at them; Davis is reaching out, about to try shaking one of the characters in what Davis saw as a momentary trance state. Those who didn't partake in Niska's parting gift saw the others freeze, stop responding to their environment and turn their heads in unison, following Niska's movement. If the characters describe their experience, Davis suggests (if none of the characters think of it) that it sounds like Mnemosynis at work.

Cautious characters may well wish to examine themselves and each other for signs of spiritual corruption. After all, contact with the dreaded Mnemoi may carry all sorts of unknown, dreadful risks. In fact, Niska passed along nothing but her share of Charon's memories and a few of her own. There's no taint, no increase in Angst, no lurking damage to the soul. Since neither the characters nor Davis can readily know that, they should be allowed to try Soulsight, Bulwark and anything else that comes to mind. In response to rolls that generate only a few successes, the Storyteller should feel free to preserve ambiguity. Provide definite "no"s only when rolls produce three or more successes.

The Dark Descent

With great distaste, Davis explains any lingering questions the characters may have. Yes, the Mnemoi carried Charon's memories... and now that Niska is lost, the characters must complete her part of the mission. So it's doubly necessary that they get to Stygia.

The characters can go by Midnight Express if they lack transportation of their own, or by some other way if they have it. Davis should strongly discourage any effort to go through the Tempest without a vehicle of some sort, since there's a Force Three storm blowing and the ever-present risk of its worsening.

By Train Through Layers of Afterlife

Before World War II, St. Dismas Station South was a significant stop on underground routes leading to the city of London. But it took enough damage from bombing raids that after the war, civil engineers found it easier to seal off the station and a few blocks of track on each side. Now an underground line runs a quarter-mile to the west. In the 1950s, St. Dismas Station South reopened for business in the Shadowlands as a stop for the Midnight Express. The train slides into the Shadowlands on the abandoned tracks at one end of the station, and slides out again on the tracks at the other end.

The trip from church to station can be as eventful as the Storyteller thinks appropriate. The characters must not forget that there's an invasion underway, but the Storyteller can present any of several spectacles that convey the menace as well as a fight scene would:

- Battlefields abandoned because of the storm — Some front lines remain thickly manned, and combat actively rages along a few. Many less-defensible positions now stand vacant. Broken weapons and machines litter the landscape. Broken Haunts line the streets, ripped open and their occupants hauled to the forges in chains by invading troops.

- Distant conflict — *The Emperor's Wrath* continues to fire at prominent targets while smaller Jade units engage with defenders. London forces rally for strikes at weak points in the Jade perimeter. Patrols sweep along, making only cursory searches for forge candidates. There's a lot of dramatic potential in the approach of a band of warriors, who close in only to veer away, or pass by one street away. Characters can, of course, rush to do battle, but aren't forced into it.

• Close-up conflict — See the previous chapter for various battle scenes, but keep in mind the complications created by the storm.

• Threatened Fetters — This can provide a moment of more personal challenge in the face of broader struggles, and open up potential for intense roleplaying as character must balance their own well-being and their mission.

Where the Express Stops

Six other wraiths wait on the platform. See the Statistics section in the previous chapter (page 47) for the template for London wraiths. The waiting passengers include two wounded Hierarchy soldiers (each down three Corpus levels and no Pathos), the last survivors of their company; two independent wraiths whose storefronts were destroyed in the panicked search for storm shelters; and a pair of doubtful Heretics, whose faith in the evil and uselessness of the Hierarchy was badly shaken by the invasion and response.

The station itself is nondescript. Artifact lights provide a dim, yellow illumination. Posters advertising tooth powders and stage shows from the early 1940s still cling to the walls, since in the Skinlands the station remains almost completely sealed off. Leaves and papers accumulate in corners where the wind blew them, but there are no signs of regular inhabitation by transients or others seeking a place out of the public eye. The Midnight Express crew put up a brief notice about their stops here at some point in the past, but made no other effort to improve the place apart from maintaining the lights.

As Charon Waits

While waiting for the train, many characters may want to examine Charon. Charon, or, as he still thinks of himself, Charles Anderson, is simply bewildered. He has no Shadow; that's a legacy of the pre-Gorool separation, and it remained part of his nature. Whatever self-destructive impulses he had in life now lie inert rather than speaking with an Oblivion-granted voice. But likewise he remembers nothing of his previous existence.

Even in his current state of ignorance, however, Charon is not a typical wraith. The absence of a Shadow makes a real difference: he moves with a confidence and internal unity that other wraiths simply don't possess. He doesn't face constant second-guessing or efforts to undermine him from within. All efforts to manipulate him via Social abilities are at +1 difficulty; mood- and mind-manipulating Arcanos arts are at +2 difficulty. Wraiths near Catharsis, with Angst within a point or two of permanent Willpower, feel uncomfortable around Charon. Wraiths with very low Angst (3 and below) feel especially comfortable near the man. Others merely notice something different, and may take a while to figure it out.

The Express

Right at midnight, the Midnight Express pulls in. The engine is a gleaming black-and-brass locomotive from the 1880s, freshly restored wherever it is the Ferrymen perform their maintenance. Only the first car emerges fully from the tunnel the train now fills. This car gleams, with polished hardwood and silvery inlays. From within come sounds of people talking and laughing.

The door slides open, and a grizzled old wraith in a uniform of some obscure 17th century European army addresses the characters. "Get a move on, we're not waiting the full time." Porter Jacob Risovich is actually scared out of his wits by the combined invasion and Oracular warnings (see below), and conceals it with a gruff exterior. Not very far away, a company of Jade soldiers and

tanks seeking wraiths to forge approaches, with a clatter of boots and tank treads. Risovich peers out nervously and hustles the waiting passengers onboard. The train pulls out just as an advance platoon of Jade troops rushes down the station steps, firing a few (pointless) shots.

Anyone looking out the windows sees the train pass through a long dark tunnel and emerge on a narrow railway bridge running high above a turbulent sea. Every few minutes the train goes through a bank of clouds, mist or pure sourceless visual distortion and enters a different Tempest region. Possible sights include:

• A plain of what appears to be cast-iron plates bobbing on some unknown medium beneath. The sky overhead is a solid sheet of iron, pierced by occasional Nihilis.

• A river of some viscous liquid that glows bright green, passing through fluorescent red rock-life cliffs. Gusts of wind blow through the canyon, stirring the liquid into "whitecaps" that glow an intense yellow. The train runs along a ledge carved from one side of the canyon.

• A prolonged period in which the train occupies a featureless gray void. From time to time, shadows cast by things that must be miles long fall across the train and the light dims; the tracks may vibrate at the passage of the sources of the shadows.

• An apparently endless progression of limestone caves (or something that looks like them). The natural caves twist and turn in three dimensions, but the train runs along a straight tunnel hacked out for the tracks.

The final approach to Stygia takes place along a raised normal-looking track bed crossing a turbulent sea of what appears to be water.

The Gambling Car

The car into which the porter ushers the characters is a gambling car, rescued from a turn-of-the-century train crushed in a Mississippi flood. A sub-sect of a Heretic cult known as the Riders of the Wheel operate it, with the not-very-amused tolerance of the Midnight Express crew, for the benefit of passengers. The Riders absolutely deny the existence of Fate, or indeed of anything but pure blind chance; for them, gambling in all its forms is an act of worship that brings them in contact with the only truth of the universe. The Ferrymen of the Express find that sometimes the experience of real randomness brings insight to a troubled wraith, and (very occasionally) leads to the resolution of a Passion or Fetter.

In the center of the car, the Riders mounted their pride and joy, a roulette wheel from the Hanging Gardens casino in Atlantic City. It's charged with a huge quantity of Pathos, having been used for almost two decades by desperate patrons both living and dead. The Riders use it in Gambler-like ceremonies to read the present moment. (Most Riders disbelieve in time as such, regarding it as merely a hallucination, but do believe that the whims of sacred chance can be read and used.) Slot machines run along one wall, tables for blackjack and other card games along the other. At the back of the car, a bartender tends a small selection of bottled liquid Pathos in various emotional flavors. The dealers all use Moliat to present handsome or beautiful, generally young, features. The bartender is a heavily scarred former Grim Legionnaire who turned to the Riders' doctrines after her experiences fighting in the Fifth Great Maelstrom.

Characters who wish to gamble may pit their Wits plus Caring, Gambling or Enigmas against the dealers' Wits + Gambling. The stakes range from single oboli to relics and Artifacts. The game is fair — cheating would interfere with the workings of blessed chance — but the house generally wins in any case. The Riders also seize any opportunity expound their philosophy.

The End of the Line

The Midnight Express steams on through the Tempest. The next act in the tragedy begins with Stygia visible off in the distance. The storm kicked up by Enoch's destruction continues to rage, though astute observers (particularly veteran Harbingers) notice that it's settling down with something of the unnatural speed with which it blew up. The tracks run through "generic" Tempest, on a bed of crushed rock and woodlike pilings in the midst of a dark oily sea. Spectres and high winds lash at the train but can only succeed in rocking it a bit as it passes.

See page 148 for the story of Xerxes Jones' calamitous failure. What characters, who are unaware of the hapless explorer's fate, experience is a sudden series of extremely violent tremors. From horizon to horizon, the surface of the Tempest lights up with a blindingly bright white light. At its peak, the light inverts, leaving the Tempest a featureless black mass, while every Nihil overhead winks open to admit a second flash of light from above. Through the din of Spectral shouts, the characters hear the tolling of the great bells that Stygia rings to herald the onslaught of a new Great Maelstrom.

The Tempest whips into a frenzy, with gusts from the Labyrinth tossing up geysers and the equivalent of waterspouts. All resemblance to water disappears, leaving behind a mixture of pitch-black viscous sludge and writhing Spectres. The Storyteller may wish to show the characters the fate of an unprotected Tempest traveler or relic vehicle: in seconds it's overwhelmed and ripped apart. The lights of Stygia disappear behind miles-high waves scouring the Tempest in all directions.

With a series of harsh squeaks and jerks, the Midnight Express bucks against the twisting track bed, then derails. This episode ends with the characters stranded in the midst of the new Great Maelstrom, so close and yet so dangerously far from Stygia.

Two If By Sea

Characters may own (or have the use of) vehicles of their own. Those without may attempt to seize one from the Jade invaders, or "liberate" one no longer being used by a London wraith. (The owner might be destroyed, or Harrowed, or simply injured and incapacitated.) Whatever the circumstances, they can attempt to drive or sail or fly through the Tempest on their own rather than relying on the Midnight Express. John Davis does his very best to dissuade any group of characters about to head off on foot, and if push comes to shove will take Charon away from them, into his own custody.

Remember that a Force Three storm is blowing when the characters leave London. See page 48 above for the sorts of obstacles this presents, and the damage done each scene. In addition, add +2 to the difficulty of vehicle-handling rolls. Driving in the worst weather the Skinlands has to offer is nothing compared to trying to control a vehicle in the storm-wracked Tempest.

If at any point the characters' vehicle crashes, smash it somewhere near Midnight Express tracks. Then, when the Great Maelstrom erupts, the train can derail nearby, and the wraiths rejoin the flow of events given above and in the next chapter. (In a worst-case scenario, Davis and Charon can be on the train, resolving that dangling plot thread neatly.) Even if their vehicle doesn't crash, have its flight path approach the tracks so that when the Great Maelstrom erupts, they're fairly close to the train. No small group of wraiths can survive the first shock of the storm alone; they need the resources the train can offer.

See page 56 for some sample Tempest landscapes to use. The characters should spend no more than a couple of scenes in each. In addition to the constant problem of storm-borne Spectres, feel free to bring in Plasmics. See **Wraith: The Oblivion** and **Doomslayers** for many Plasmic menaces, distractions and complications.

Statistics

John Davis

Nature: Gambler

Demeanor: Gambler

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 5, Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Empathy 4, Expression 5, Intimidation 3

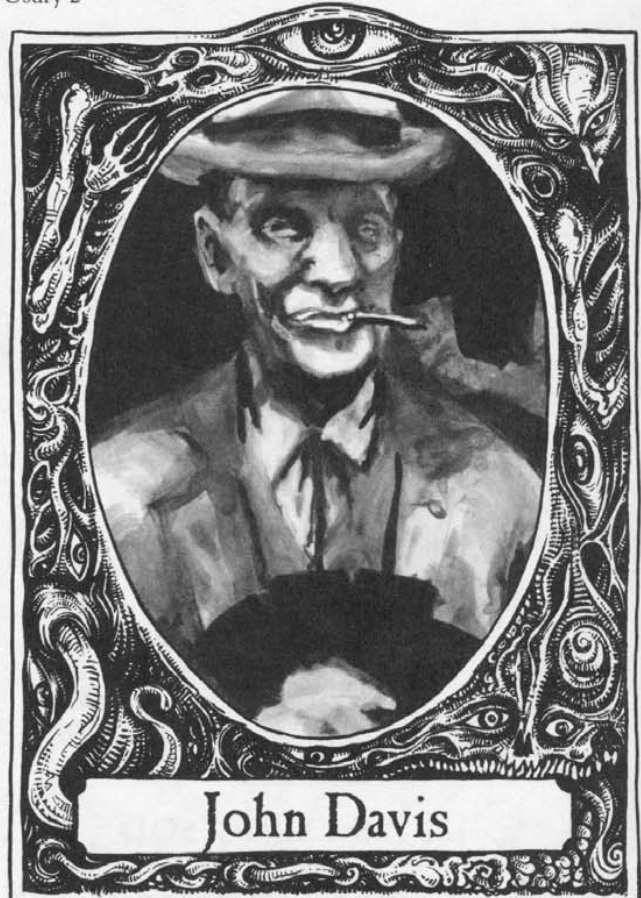
Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 3, Firearms 2, Leadership 2, Mediation 1, Repair 1, Stealth 3

Knowledges: Bureaucracy 3, Enigmas 4, Investigation 3, Law 1, Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Politics 3

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Contacts 4, Eidolon 2, Legacy 1, Status (Legion of Fate) 4

Passions: Serve Fate (Devotion) 5, Explore innovations in gambling (Fun) 4, Help other wraiths (Compassion) 3, Promote Stygia's fame (Envy) 2

Arcanoi: Argos 5, Embody 2, Fatalism 5, Keening 4, Outrage 4, Usury 2

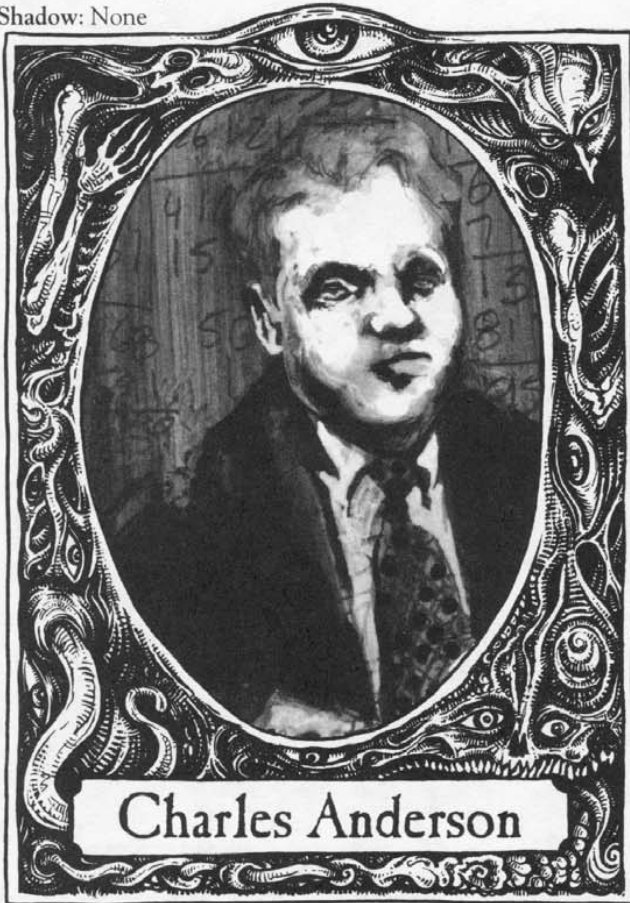


Willpower: 8
 Pathos: 9
 Permanent Corpus: 7
 Shadow: Abuser
 Angst: 4
 Shadow Passions: Meddle with Fate's Workings (Hate) 5, Seize Power in the Guild (Greed) 3

See page 51 for image and roleplaying notes.

Charon/Charles Anderson

Nature: Leader
 Demeanor: Explorer
 Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
 Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2
 Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3
 Talents: Awareness 2, Empathy 2, Streetwise 1
 Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 2, Leadership 1, Repair 1
 Knowledges: Bureaucracy 3, Enigmas 2, Investigation 2, Law 3, Politics 1
 Backgrounds: None that matter at the moment
 Arcanoi: Latent potential in all the Arcanoi. Charon may manifest defensive arts if threatened; bring in up to three Arcanoi if necessary to prevent him from getting seriously harmed.
 Willpower: 10
 Pathos: 15
 Permanent Corpus: 20
 Shadow: None



The writeup here applies to Charles Anderson as freshly Reaped. See the next chapter for a summary of Charon's capabilities once he regains his memories.

Midnight Express passengers and crew

Use the template for London wraiths in the previous chapter (page 48) for the passengers. Treat the crew as typical Heretics.

Part III: Journey to No End

*What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.*
 — T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

Through the Storm

The Personalities of the Midnight Express

The Ferryman who established the Midnight Express intend it as a sort of experiment, one of many alternative approaches to Transcendence. Its crew share a common devotion to the Ferryman who oversees it and to the hope that every worthy, ready wraith may find peace. Nicholas the Ferryman hasn't told the crew just what's happening, but all the train's regulars know that remarkable times lie ahead.

Nicholas

The Ferryman who now calls himself Nicholas seldom thinks about his life in Britain 14 centuries ago. He became the man he is now long after death, after centuries of wandering — alone, with the Fishers and with an elder Ferryman. For more than a thousand years he's devoted himself to helping others prove themselves worthy of the Transcendence he declined for himself.

Nicholas is a short, stocky man, with light blond hair and attentive green eyes. He usually dresses in simple, functional

Action

If the characters are a little too complacent about what they've just gone through, some suggestions for shaking them up include:

- Having other surviving passengers on the train undergo Catharsis suddenly, hampering the efforts to protect the remaining car and possibly driving the characters outside into the storm.
- A suicide attack by some Haints or other minor Spectres who've decided to settle for easy pickings.
- An assault by Plasmics (or maybe just one big one) riled by the storm. Examples of Plasmics can be found in *Buried Secrets* and *Wraith: The Oblivion*.
- Maybe the car the wraiths were on is one of those about to go off the track. Having the characters escape before the car teeters into the abyss should provide some excitement, not to mention plenty of opportunities for Shadows to strut their stuff.

Storyteller Note:

There should be precisely as many survivors of the wreck as you deem appropriate. If the Circle is badly battered, more help might be useful. If you want to throw the wraiths back on their own resources, have the Riders get crushed beneath their own roulette wheel and sucked down into Harrowings. Even better, if the other passengers sacrifice themselves for the characters, gasping about "the importance of the mission" (and just how did they learn about it, anyway?), it can lend a real sense of urgency to what the Circle is doing.

clothes of no particular era, favoring plain shirts, trousers and boots. In moments of crisis his garb reverts to leather armor with iron fittings, which he wore in life.

Nicholas seldom mingles with passengers. He may sit quietly and observe them, but he almost never chooses to take part in conversation, unless something he can say would make a real difference to a wraith well advanced toward Transcendence.

Gabriel McClintock

McClintock knows more about the inner works of the Express' engine than anyone except the Ferryman who built it. He's tended it for more than a century, since dying in a train wreck in 1887. The locomotive he died in currently houses the engine that lets the train slip through time and the Underworld.

McClintock loves precisely one thing in the universe: the Midnight Express itself. He invests no effort in anything else. Characters who can discuss engineering, the geography of the Underworld or other subjects that matter to McClintock find him gradually warming to the conversation, and eventually becoming friendly and voluble. Everyone else gets the brush-off, and that includes Ferrymen.

The engineer stands more than six feet high, with a muscular Corpus and perennially soot-stained features. He dresses in worn coveralls and boots, and often mops his perpetually dirty forehead with a perpetually dirty rag.

Jacob Risovich

Risovich joined the train's crew just a few years ago. He died of malnutrition and neglect in Prague after the abortive 1968 uprising, and spent the years after that roaming the Shadowlands in search of the romance and glamour his life never offered. It took Risovich half a decade to convince Nicholas that he could be an asset to the Midnight Express' operations, but eventually he pre-

Ways Through the Storm

The main text assumes that the characters proceed with the train's other survivors along the broken tracks. But there are other options, including:

- Cobbling together something from the wreckage of the train
- Finding something adrift in the storm, possibly even another wrecked vehicle
- Catching a lift from one of the many Ferrymen now heading toward Stygia (This should be held back as a last resort, however.)

vailed. Now he carries baggage, checks destinations and does other menial work, and he loves it. Anywhere else in the Underworld the work would be laborious and dull, but this way he gets to see the whole Empire and meet fascinating people. Complex notions like Transcendence escape him; he basks in the wonder of his routine experience.

Risovich retains the short form and twisted arms he had in life, the product of medical incompetence during delivery compounded by a life of bad care. While the porter's Corpus is withered, it doesn't actually interfere with his physical capabilities. He dresses in an outlandish combination of "professional" uniforms from throughout the century, constantly adjusting this element or that to convey his sense of the ultimate in garb.

Derailing

The Midnight Express' derailing happens in just a few seconds, almost faster than characters can notice. One moment the Express is steaming through the Tempest above a waterlike sea, with all the speed the engineer can muster. The next, the Great Maelstrom has erupted, and the initial blast shakes the track like cracking a whip. Each car in turn bounces up and lands a little off-center from where the tracks now lie. The engine scrapes along for instant, then topples over. The other cars twist in turn. (A Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 7 is required to avoid up to four dice worth of damage in the incident.)

Anyone looking out a window sees the train and cars draped at a 45 degree angle across the tracks. The engine hangs almost entirely off the rails, nose tilted sharply forward toward the abyss. Two cars, behind the gambling car, each lie with one end off the track and one on, and a third car dangles almost all the way off like the engine. The cars behind the third snap off and fall into the storm even as the characters watch. The screams of those trapped in the plummeting cars can be heard even over the howling winds of the storm.

Fortunately for the passengers, Nicholas' arts keep many of the storm's worst effects at bay. Location helps, as well. The Midnight Express is an easy target for Spectres boiling up out of the Tempest... but then they'd have to stop to deal with it, and let other Spectres ride the storm into the Shadowlands. Spectres shake the train as they pass, but prefer to go in search of more interesting targets. After all, they reason, the train's not going anywhere.

Those who endured (or landed near) the wreck now face two challenges.

First, they must make sure they can protect themselves. Stores of Pathos available to support Housecleaning (while on the train) and Bulwark (once they leave) include individual relics and the bar of the Riders' gambling car. The Storyteller should allow quick-witted characters the opportunity to propose some scheme of Pathos allocation. If none of the characters suggest some way of settling the problem, Nicholas imposes a simple rotation schedule based on the order of wraiths as he sees them at the moment he lays down the order.

McClintock encourages everyone with Castigate to exercise Soulsight on as many of the passengers as possible. (He sees the matter as an engineering issue: The train cannot function properly if its passengers are attempting to destroy it.) The porter and one of the Riders of the Wheel both possess Usury and use it to channel Pathos into Pardoners able to help with the train's defense. They solicit but do not compel the characters' help. On

What Castigation Joins Together

Bulwark extends to protect every wraith touching the Pardoner using that art. The protection Bulwark grants lasts even once the wraiths no longer touch each other, extending for the rest of a scene. If action flows without an easily identifiable break point, Bulwark lasts two hours, until the conclusion of a battle or until the Castigator falls into a Harrowing. As soon as any of these conditions is met, the Bulwark collapses, and those wraiths who were formerly protected are vulnerable.

the other hand, characters who decline to take part in the common defense lose trust that may come in handy later on.

The second and greater challenge is to get from the train to Stygia. Astute observers saw the lights of Stygia through the storm just before the Midnight Express derailed, but judging distances in the Tempest is difficult at the best of times. Needless to say, a Great Maelstrom is not the best of times. Experienced Argos users may use Orienteering to provide a general estimate, suggesting a few hours' travel on foot.

McClintock decides that it would be wise to cut the engine loose, to allow passengers to go out the front end of the gambling car straight onto the tracks. This requires Dexterity + Repair (difficulty 7 in most cases, though the storm or aggressive critters in it may increase that); characters with relevant experience may take part in planning the details. If none of the characters are qualified or interested, then it's sufficient to say that the engineer uses small explosives to do the job. The Express uses Living Chains to secure valuable or dangerous cargo. Quick-witted characters (Wits + Alertness, difficulty 7) may notice and retrieve the chains before releasing the locomotive.

Nicholas contributes little to the ensuing discussions. When it comes time to take action, he's there using his abilities to the fullest. Strategy for crises is not one of his strong points, and he's aware of not knowing all the technical details that might matter in planning. He knows wraiths and their needs. In other words, if the characters figure out how to put him to use, he's an excellent resource. However, he is not going to save the day or act as a sort of supernatural scout leader to get them out of the woods.

Risovich, much to his surprise and delight, brings a wealth of experience to bear. He knows about dealing with widespread devastation, a legacy of surviving a world war and an invasion. He grew up scavenging; he knows how to recognize structural supports about to fail, how to spot potentially useful or valuable objects in a pile of rubble and generally how to make the best out of being trapped in a hellhole. His deformities make it difficult for him to do any fine manipulation, but he's an astute observer.

When All Else Fails: The Lady of Fate

The Lady of Fate has many things to attend to in this moment of crisis. One of them is making sure that Charon endures long enough to regain his memories and choose his final fate. If the characters face impending doom — for instance, if they all stand one blow's distance from Destruction Harrowing — the Lady of Fate intervenes. She prefers to kindle a spark within the characters, the equivalent of three levels of short-term Eidolon and three points of Pathos. The glow of confidence fades once the dice are spent. If that's not enough, she can also direct mindless but cooperative Plasmics to provide distraction or relief.

Along the Tracks The Nature of the Challenges

As long as the ranks of the wraiths leaving the Midnight Express include characters (players or otherwise) who have Bulwark and five points of Pathos to spend at the start of a scene, the train wreck survivors need not worry about Spectral attack. Bulwark does nothing to protect against winds, rains of disgusting Tempest debris and the other corporeal complications of a Force Five Maelstrom, but it does free characters to concentrate on them.

The Storyteller may therefore run one or more scenes which focus on the storm challenges. These combine some of the flavor of alpine and mountaineering adventure with deep-sea exploration and spelunking, and include some aspects that have no Skinlands equivalent at all. Scenes with this emphasis involve no little or no combat — Spectres cannot attack, and most Plasmics won't — even as they present many obstacles requiring physical traits and skills to overcome. On the other hand, dragging this part of the adventure out too long can get monotonous. Once the characters establish their credentials for slogging along through the storm, it's best to hurry them through the long, slow process.

Spectres held at bay by Bulwark are not altogether helpless, however. Direct assault is only one of their weapons. They can prey on fears and vulnerabilities, whether discovered by the Spectres' own observations or harvested from secret dialogue with wraiths' Shadows. Spectres can search with Hive-Mind to bring in the Shadow-eaten souls of wraiths' friends, associates and loved ones to engage in targeted psychological warfare. Further, while the Spectres themselves cannot strike at wraiths covered by Bulwark, the Castigate art does not automatically defuse all incoming applications of Arcanoi and Dark Arcanoi. Spectres can strike at the wraiths' immediate environment, and the journey as a result is not necessarily a safe one.

Incoming!

Although most Spectres caught up in the storm swoop on toward the Shadowlands, some Spectres see targets on the move and dive in to take advantage. The sample Mortwrights in **Wraith: The Oblivion**, page 275 should serve as a good statistical base for the attackers. Should any of the characters Shadows have a Thorn that might serve to attract the attention of Spectres, an assault is almost certain.

Even if there's no invitation from anyone's Shadow, individual Spectres or small groups of Shadow-eaten present themselves from time to time as well. Make another roll against current Pathos when a wraith uses an Arcanos; on one or more successes, the burst of activity attracts the attention of a Spectre. In addition to Mortwrights, the Spectres most likely to prowl the Tempest and be available for these attacks include Striplings and Doppelgangers. Keep in mind that Shades are very formidable enemies; don't bring one in if the characters already bear significant damage.

For more information on Spectres, see **Wraith: The Oblivion**, page 270 and **Dark Reflections: Spectres**.

Moments of Crisis

The Great Maelstrom's winds blow steadily. Each scene (once per hour or thereabouts), each character must make a Dexterity + Athletics or Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 4) to maintain a

secure footing. A wraith who fails takes one point of Corpus damage for each 1 rolled; on a botch, the wraith gets one last-minute effort to avoid being swept away into the Tempest. (Rescue attempts should involve use of Argos and Dexterity + Athletics rolls, plus Strength rolls to make sure the rescuer can hang on. Incoming Spectres are optional.)

Weak wraiths may not wish to risk themselves all alone. They can, with permission, lash themselves to stronger wraiths. The strongest individual in a chain of wraiths makes the roll for all of them, with the difficulty rising by one for each wraith relying on the strong one. Living Chains, rescued from the locomotive or brought with the characters, provide their usual protection for wraiths lashed together.

Debris clutters the track. Every few hundred yards, storm detritus and track wreckage must be cleared or maneuvered around, with the same roll as required above to cope with the sustained effects of the storm. Weak spots may collapse. Perception + Alertness and Perception + Repair rolls (both at difficulty 6) can spot weak points in time for wraiths to avoid stumbling onto them; characters who fail to notice the approaching peril must again make the rolls described above to avoid falling or slipping. Debris ranges from platform-loads of machinery strewn by winds across yards of tracks which are otherwise undamaged to long spans where one or both rails are simply missing.

The Tracks

For dozens or hundreds of miles (insofar as distances exist reliably in the Underworld) on the final approach to Stygia, the Midnight Express runs along a custom Byway. The train tracks rest on a solid soulsteel scaffolding surrounded by platforms made from relic wood and woodlike Plasmic Corpus. Supporting pillars hold the tracks a hundred feet above the usual level of the Tempest; the pillars perch on rocky outcroppings somewhere beneath the Tempest's surface.

Solutions include:

- Leadership allows wraiths to better coordinate their efforts. A wraith who succeeds at an Intelligence + Leadership roll grasps the opportunities for joint action. Each success on this roll after the first allows one selected wraith working with the Leadership-using character to roll any of the following ability checks at -1 difficulty.

- Repair allows wraiths to identify points of weakness in the tracks and their supports, and to develop quick fixes. Each success at a Perception + Repair roll (difficulty 6) identifies a spot that would otherwise put a wraith at risk of falling. Each success at a Strength + Repair roll can fix one such spot; the difficulty is 6 if the wraith has appropriate tools (perhaps to be appropriated from some nearby platform), or 8 if the repairs must be improvised or done without tools.

- Crafts also helps in making repairs. Each success at a Strength + Crafts roll fixes one point of weakness. The difficulty is 7 with appropriate tools, 9 otherwise.

- Enigmas contributes as well — Tempest engineering is not just a matter of physics, but of the soul. Each success at a Perception + Enigmas roll (difficulty 8) adds one success to a Repair or Crafts roll.

- Argos cannot contribute directly to repairs, but may help in keeping an eye on the surrounding environment, so as to protect the wraiths doing the actual work.

- The Fatalism basic ability Kismet can identify specific points of failure, on one or more successes on a Perception + Fatalism roll (difficulty 8).

The Approach to Stygia

The wraiths making their way from the wrecked train do not know that they don't have to cover the whole distance themselves. Oracles within the Skeletal Legion explained to the Skeletal Lord that Charon and his memories approached, and (with a heart filled with hatred for the idea that declared enemies of the Empire could ever be so useful) the Skeletal Lord set out to bring his long-lost master to safety. The Storyteller may choose to foreshadow the Skeletal Lord's approach with glimpses of troops or sounds of battle against Spectres, or spring the military force on the survivors of the Midnight Express as a surprise. If you use the latter approach, you may want to wait until the last minute to reveal that the Skeletal troops are actually friendly, just to make the wraiths sweat a little more.

The Lord of Pestilence

The characters round a bend (or emerge into a pocket of relatively calm space, allowing them a longer view) to see a fight taking place a few hundred yards away, moving slowly toward them. A wraith who resembles a skeleton in armor leads gaunt-looking soldiers in battle against Spectres. The lead skeleton's armor prominently displays the deathmark of the Skeletal Legion, just in case any character has problems figuring out who this is. (Even in Stygia, there aren't that many walking skeletons almost seven feet tall.) The Spectres finding them have forms chosen to be irritating or enraging: bloated, fleshy and reeking of rot.

The Skeletal Lord leads a small contingent of Equitae (whose horses are almost as bony as their riders) up the tracks toward the characters. Behind the riders, the Legionnaires move in two columns, one along each rail. They fight in teams of three, attacking a single Spectre until it's eliminated. The Spectres use almost nothing in the way of coordinated tactics. Each attacks a wraith individually, and any approach more sophisticated than "try to strike from behind" eludes the doomshades. As such, the Skeletal Lord's troops are cutting them to pieces.

The Skeletal Lord has little use for Moliate, taking pride in his appearance, though many of his troops have been reworked with Martialry. He favors the simple power of Outrage, coupled with his own strength and distinctive abilities. When he grabs a Spectre, all the non-bony parts of its Corpus boil off in two turns, leaving behind a husk stripped of sentience and motion. (Legionnaires who need weapons scoop up some of the bones to use as clubs.) Some of his barehand blows turn the area of impact on his target into a calcified bonelike material, which impairs the target's speed and dexterity. Small Plasmic creatures like magnified bacteria swarm around him, eating away at exposed bare Corpus and corroding soulforged metals.

Skeletal observers using Leap of Outrage and Phantom Wings survey the area around their current battlefield, and spot the Midnight Express survivors on the way in. As soon as they notify the Skeletal Lord, he rides up with several squads of his best troops.

As soon as the characters come into range, some of the Spectres in the area attack. The Shadow-eaten here include a mix of Striplings and Doppelgangers; the Shades present continue to home in on the power of the Skeletal Lord and his senior soldiers. Once the Skeletal Lord reaches the characters, confrontation ensues. The Lord should be intimidating: completely without humor, and speaking in a flat monotone that conveys no passion. He speaks clearly and directly, explaining his hatred for everyone who fails to meet his standard of loyalty to the Empire and his devotion to Charon's well-being. Efforts at decep-

tion do not impress him. But equally direct, honest responses do — he cares about integrity, and listens to those who show no fear.

The Skeletal Lord carries two fixed thoughts: Charon must be preserved at all costs, and no enemy of the Empire can be tolerated one moment or one inch more than necessary. Since he's not entirely convinced that the freshly Reaped wraith actually is Charon, the Skeletal Lord begins with a battlefield interrogation of Charon. That, of course, generates no useful information, so he turns to the characters and other Express survivors. Gradually he can be persuaded by the accumulating weight of evidence, but he does not like it, not one bit. Bear in mind that all of this is going on while the sortie party stands on the devastated tracks, being buzzbombed by Spectres and assaulted by Maelstrom winds. The scene is a crowded and chaotic one, fraught with peril for all concerned.

Wraiths who push matters with him may well find themselves the targets of his wrath, and the Skeletal Lord is not gentle. Furthermore, in his anger, the Skeletal Lord may, at Storyteller discretion, use some of his powers unconsciously. If the Skeletal Lord must arrange for the healing of damage he's done — the healing to be performed by Skeletal Legionnaires with Moliat and Usury as appropriate — his anger only deepens. Apology never comes easily to God's chosen instrument of vengeance, and in the long run he'd prefer to completely remove anyone whose presence serves as a reminder of failure.

Presumably, as soon as the Skeletal Lord is convinced of the Circle's *bona fides*, he turns the expedition around and escorts them back to the city. The trip in is uneventful. There are more than enough soldiers to keep things safe for the characters, plus there's the tall, bony gent. Soon enough, the wraiths reach Stygia.

Paths to Stygia

The Skeletal Legion holds open a passage to one of the gates in the Stygian seawall. If the characters have won some measure of respect from the Skeletal Lord, he lets them proceed by themselves a good distance ahead of the body of troops, with the instruction to report to the gatekeepers that the characters are those whom the Lord sought. If the Lord does not feel any confidence in the characters, he escorts them to the gate himself.

The Skeletal Lord does invite characters who show martial ability to join the defense of Stygia. Characters who accept won't be present for the ceremonies in the Onyx Tower, and characters who carry Charon's memories won't be allowed to fight on the walls. Any characters who do decide to join in receive the thanks of the unit they're assigned to and relic arms and armor at the four-dot level. However, as the real action is going to take place in the Onyx Tower, it is suggested that the characters stay with Charon.

Stygia: The Governors of the Dead

A Brief Guide to the Capital

Stygia is the City of Cities for the Western world. Nothing now found in Stygia was trivial or unimportant in life. Each building and street survived not one but two purges. First it survived destruction in the Skinlands to emerge as a relic, and then it met with enough favor when threatened with displacement from the Shadowlands to warrant the Hierarchy's transporting it to this

safe place in the Tempest. Even if now neglected, every back alley and minor edifice once seemed profoundly important. Pathos infuses everything in Stygia with an atmosphere of significance.

Above all, Stygia must seem impressive. Three thousand years of the history of many of the world's most dynamic civilizations have come to rest here. The wraiths whose decisions (and whims, compulsions and obsessions) set the course of the Empire gather here, and Stygia provides them with what they feel is a worthy meeting place.

The Isle of Sorrows

The Isle of Sorrows emerged from the Tempest in the unobserved distant past. It resembles the head of a giant sickle resting in the sea. The side facing the mouth of the River of Death slopes up gradually, with plentiful harbor space along the shore. The side facing into the Tempest drops off sharply from the summit holding the Onyx Tower. A few narrow plateaus hold some buildings and roads do wrap around the whole island, but most of the Tempest face is cliff and near-cliff. Plasm accumulates in depressions and closed valleys, overflowing in "seasonal" channels after intense storms. The major thoroughfares include bridges rising above flood-prone channels.

Starting with Charon's lighthouse (which became the nucleus of the Onyx Tower), Stygian development proceeded haphazardly. Charon's "plan" for the city included the Road of Steel at water level and the Road of Souls from the point closest to the River of Death up to the crest. Beyond that, each group of wraiths building their settlement did more or less as they pleased. Charon and the Deathlords engaged in coordinated planning only after the First Great Maelstrom, and then only because it was clear how important something like coherent layout could be in emergencies. The Deathlords' palaces stand in an arc just below the Onyx Tower, on the encircling Road of Lords; each Legion oversees development on the slopes below it.

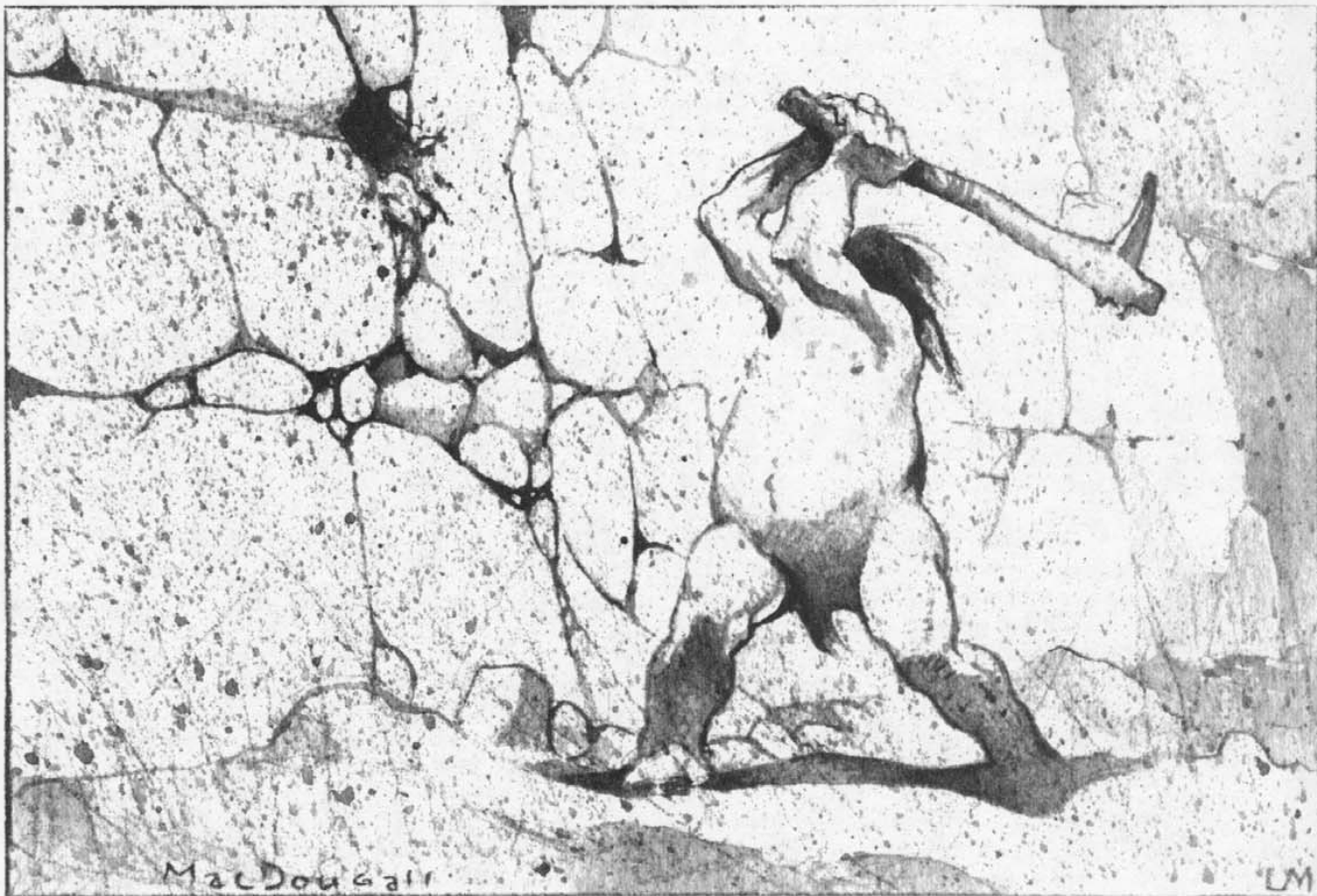
Centuries ago, the last bare ground on the Isle (except for the Tempest-facing cliffs) disappeared beneath relic buildings. Now the general shape of the island remains visible, but towering buildings — individual relics and elaborate fusions of pieces of many different structures — cover every spot of ground except those reserved for roads. Bridges, walkways and buttresses stretch overhead to make use of the "airspace."

The City in Storm

For all the Deathlords' failings, their defenses against Spectral invasion hold as the characters approach. Soldiers line the seawall, fighting with melee and ranged weapons (up to and in-

The Towers of the Dead

The architects of the Underworld don't have to pay as much attention to gravity as Skinlands builders. Sheer belief does matter, as do the special engineering arts available to wraiths. So the tallest towers of Stygia rise far higher than anything in the Skinlands. Buckminster Fuller's dreams of mile-high buildings find expression along the Road of Souls, and even lower structures can dwarf the World Trade Center or the Docklands development.



cluding 20th-century siege guns like Big Bertha and the abortive Iraqi super-cannon) against Spectres in and near the Tempest. Archers and gunners in towers across the island keep the “sky” overhead clear. The defenders take their losses, particularly when one of their own falls into Catharsis and attacks everyone nearby, and the battle lines flicker constantly as Nihilis open for an instant to seize wraiths thrust into Harrowings. Still, the attackers remain outside Stygia’s first line of defenses.

Streets of Pathos: The Pattern of the City The Lines of Approach

Once the Sixth Great Maelstrom broke out, Stygia lost most of its connections to the rest of the Empire. Storm-surge waves pound up the River of Death; any travelers so unfortunate as to be sailing the river’s lower reaches were immediately smashed. Waves whip across the surface of the Tempest, some towering hundreds feet in the air. Byways of any solid structure take serious beatings, and most have already broken apart. Winds of unparalleled speed and variability make flight of any sort a dangerous activity.

Getting to Stygia depends on both military might, to deal with Spectral attacks, and Arcanos mastery, to deal with all the other challenges that arise. The Midnight Express tracks offer the corporeal foundation for an approach, and the Skeletal Legion provides the support the characters need to complete their journey. Nobody else moves in or out of Stygia at this point.


The Seawall

Stygia’s first line of defense is a hundred-foot-high wall built of mixed materials. Labyrinthine rock and Stygian steel provide the framework; sheets of soulforged metals and relic blocks of stone, concrete and the like fill in the spaces. Spectres concentrate their attacks on weak points where outer layers of metal sloughed off in the storm or had been weakened by corrosion in earlier decades. Shades and Haints batter against the wall, while Doppelgangers and Mortwights search for weaknesses, try to coordinate their efforts and operate whatever Artifact drills and mining gears they can find.

Half a dozen gates open through the seawall. Each consists of three separate doors, one at each side of the wall and one in the middle, all made of the heaviest Labyrinthine metals reinforced by arts Nhudri keeps to himself. Slits in the walls open onto adjoining rooms, allowing defenders to rain down missile fire on intruders. In the midst of the Great Maelstrom, the gates stand shut except when opening to let a unit of troops in or out, and the gates open only after masters of Castigate raise Housecleaning across the gatehouse.

The Sea of Souls

The space between the seawall and the Isle of Sorrows consists of a semi-liquid mass made of countless millions of almost-lost souls. Chains hold them in place, so that they slosh about only within a limited circle of drift. Stygian policy says that only mindless souls and those on the verge of being lost to Oblivion forever are consigned to the Sea of Souls. Rumors of political ad-



versaries of the Deathlords, Renegades and Heretics and other undesirables also spending an eternity at sea circulate constantly despite the absence of hard proof. Whatever the souls were before, now they lack any independent existence. Their Corpus blends together into something more like a lumpy, congealing broth than a mass of separate bodies.

In normal times, the Sea of Souls shows the lingering wakes of passing ships, since it takes much longer for wakes to disappear from the soul-sea than it would from water. Now the only ships moving carry troops and equipment to the soldiers on the seawall. Strong bridges run from each of the seawall gates to the Isle of Sorrows, alternating low spans with ones high enough for relic battleships to sail under.

The Road of Steel

A metal roadway circles the Isle of Sorrows at waterline, at the top of a low retaining wall. The isle's piers attach to the retaining wall, and warehouses cluster along the landward side of the road. The warehouses range from Phoenician open colonnades to commercial trading centers abandoned by economic downturns in the last few decades. Most consist of a small original building to which many others have been grafted over time. Sometimes expert craftsmen built new facades and joined everything so carefully that observers cannot isolate the components; more commonly, barely covered seams and wildly clashing architectural styles make it easy to trace the history of a storage business' growth. Prime property along major roads up the Isle's spine goes to those who earn and keep the favor of the Deathlords. Most patrons show their appreciation by displaying prominently the deathmarks of their patrons.

The road itself gleams with a dark shine that, though polished, does not reflect. The surface remains a constant burnished gray-white. It resists the corrosion that takes its toll on most of the city, with Nhudri called upon to replace a piece of paving only once every few decades or centuries. Only Great Maelstroms make a significant mark on it, and then only once the city's outer defenses fail.

The road is wide enough for an infantry regiment to march in typical formation, wide enough for half a dozen large trucks to drive side by side. Sidewalks of more typical Stygian steel flank the road, raised a foot above the Road of Steel's surface.

In normal times, crowds through the Road of Steel: merchants and longshoremen, soldiers and bureaucrats, tourists seeing the sights. Once the city's bells announced the Great Maelstrom, most wraiths scurried for shelter. Some cargo palettes lie abandoned in mid-street (or shoved to one side by troops reporting for duty). Only occasional individuals and small groups make their way through the turmoil, and they mostly dash from one sheltered doorway to the next.

The Road of Souls

The main thoroughfare of the Isle of Sorrows, the Road of Souls rises from the Road of Steel straight up to the Onyx Tower and Charon's lighthouse. It's even wider than the Road of Steel, flanked by a two-tier sidewalk. Regular pedestrians move at ground level, while official messengers can speed along a story overhead.

Stygia doesn't have "blocks" in the usual urban sense. A road runs around the island every quarter of a mile, and relatively straight thoroughfares mark the boundaries between Deathlords' jurisdictions. Apart from those, the only routes between buildings resemble back alleys: cramped, twisting routes which may or

may not be at all lit or paved. Much of the Isle's traffic therefore uses the Road of Souls to get as close to its destination as possible, and a large fraction of any trip's travel time is spent covering relatively small distances away from the Road of Souls.

As with the Road of Steel, most of the Road of Souls' regular traffic stopped at the outbreak of the Great Maelstrom. Military couriers relay messages from the Deathlords' palaces and units muster in the public squares that line the Road of Souls before trooping down to the waterfront for assignment. Bureaucratic couriers use the upper tier of the walkways, when their rank makes them eligible, while lower-ranked messengers sprint for shelter.

The Road of Soul maintains a constant slope. At some points this requires extensive excavations, and the ground level of the surrounding buildings is dozens of feet above the walkway (which sometimes tunnels through the rock, with windows looking out onto the Road). Elsewhere it requires equally extensive landfills and bridges, and wraiths walking the Road can peer into the upper stories of surrounding buildings.

The Deathlords' Palaces

See **The Book of Legions** for descriptions of the seats of power for each Legion.

The Onyx Tower

The center of the Onyx Tower is Charon's Lighthouse, remodeled over the centuries to continue to stand taller than any other structure on the Isle of Sorrows. Most of its height is a simple stone column with a ladder along one side. The light needs very little tending, running on huge sulfure crystals.

The tower contains 18 stories, the topmost a huge high-roofed ceremonial chamber. (Player-characters with Niska's memories have already seen this, the room where Charon shares his memories with the Mnemoi.) A single door leads in. It's made of the same flat black Tempest-rock as the tower, and carries two rings of embossed sigils. Inside, each of the Legions' primary deathmarks lie in a circle. Around them, in a square, there are the embossed sigils of each of the Guilds. Those of the three banished Guilds were defaced long ago: not removed unobtrusively with Moliare or Inhabit, but smashed away with strong blows, as a constant reminder.

A single hallway bisects the ground floor, with doors opening off to each side. A single spiral staircase leads up, along the inner wall of the tower. There's a separate door for each level, and each door carries a single Arcanos mark. Each floor has a single main hall, running off at right angles to the staircase landing at that floor. When the characters enter, all these halls lie empty and all the doors are locked.

Narrow arrow-loops look out along the staircase. The top chamber has huge arched windows offering panoramas in every direction. The dais on which Charon's throne (also simple in design, also jet black) rests can rotate, so that the Founder could survey all of his domain with minimal effort. In the space in between windows, statues and tapestries commemorate public and private moments from Charon's histories. The Storyteller can work in elements from the memories characters experienced. The staircase continues up to the roof, for wraiths tending the beacon or (as at the present moment) fighting a Spectral invasion. There is a constant flow of wraiths up and down this stairwell, reinforcing the troops on the roof, bringing armaments, removing the wounded and so on.

The 16th floor is a single open room, occupied by a complex mechanical system like an orrery (a model of the solar system). Systems of metal and crystal gears support small globes, each labeled with a deathmark or other identifier. Each globe refers to one of the major personalities of the Empire: the Deathlords, the Guildmasters, the Anacreons of major Necropoli and so on. The machinery that moves the globes can be tuned to make any globe the center of the system; the orbits the others trace around it convey information about patterns of relationships. At the moment the system centers on a dull globe that contains no labels at all, around which all the others spin gradually closer. A Wits + Enigmas roll (difficulty 5) should reveal the symbolism to any observer who cares to speculate.

The 17th floor is a mostly empty chamber, centered on a rough stone table. Careful observation will note grooves in the black stone of the tabletop, clearly designed to drain blood away. The table is the oldest relic in Stygia, and radiates both age and a sense of almost palpable hunger. (Nothing comes of this sensation unless someone with a **Hunger** Dark Passion gets a little too close, but the wraiths should be uncomfortable in this chamber in any case.) There are a series of chairs around the table, all rough and unmarked. This is the chamber in which the Deathlords ceremonially meet. It is kept deliberately sparse, as a reminder of where they came from and what eventually waits for them.

Charon's Return

From the Tempest to the Tower

The Skeletal Lord accepts his Oracles' report that the wraith the characters bring is in some sense Charon. But the Lord also has no desire to rouse false hopes or start a panic. So he wants the characters to proceed directly up the Road of Souls to the Onyx Tower with as little fuss as possible.

He won't get his wish.

The very fact of the Skeletal Lord setting out in person on a mission arouses attention and sets rumors flying. The entry into Stygia of a nondescript group of wraiths with the Lord's personal escort merely confirms that something important is going on. The storm itself keeps many wraiths inside, and the demands of crisis management keep others busy, but gradually a growing number of wraiths peer out to see for themselves whether Charon returns. The more courageous, curious and nosy among the audience step out to speak with the characters and their party.

The Crowd

These are a sample of the personalities found in Stygia, covering the range of first reactions to returned Charon. Presumably the wraiths will encounter any and all of them as they make their way through the streets of Stygia.

- **The Crossbowman:** Bryan Shield belongs to the Emerald Legion; he's part of the city's inner lines of defense, on patrol, keeping an eye out for wraiths in Catharsis and shooting them down before they can do serious damage. He has Perception, Castigate and combat skills all at level 4, and does his job well. He died as a young man in the 1970s, crushed when a book-

case in his favorite store collapsed and buried him in toys and books. The military branch of the Emerald Legion respects his competence with the crossbow and rifle, but doesn't fully trust him: he retains a wide-eyed fascination with Underworld existence, and is as likely to say "That's cool!" as "This is a valuable opportunity the Legion can turn to its advantage." In short, he's quietly barred from advancement through the ranks. He knows this but doesn't mind, being content where he is. Bryan is 5'8" tall, with a solid big-boned Corpus and short brown hair and sideburns. He continues to wear relic glasses even though his Corpus eyes work just fine. Charon is for Bryan a name and a symbol, one he's eager to know more about — he plies the characters with courteous but persistent questions if he gets a chance to interact with them.

- **The Librarian:** Lizabette Julian tends an administrative library on the waterfront, keeping track of transactions to and from the Necropoli of western Europe. She died in the Thirty Years' War, mistaken for a zealot of one side by the zealots of another. The Penitent Legion claimed her and found that she made a fine administrator, willing to pass along orders and work within the boundaries laid down from above. Patient service brought her gradual promotions, as she proved more capable of routine chores and more willing to do them year after year after year than most wraiths; promotion to Stygia followed in the middle of the 19th century. Having seen two Great Maelstroms strike the Isle, she has a pretty good sense of when it's really necessary to run, and knows that that moment hasn't arrived yet. Charon is for Lizabette a baffling figure, someone capable of founding the order that sustains her existence and yet also prone to uncertainty and chaos-promoting decisions. She wants to see for herself who this man is, and at the moment no trade demands her attention.

- **The Helldiver Theologian:** Brother Alex Bryell spends most of his time in the depths of the Labyrinth, seeking proof for or against the philosophical propositions he and his colleagues debate. He's been doing this for almost 300 years, since he died under mysterious circumstances on a boating trip with other monks assigned to the Vatican. The Legion of Paupers took him in and put him to use working out conceptual models of the Underworld which might suggest lines of advantageous strategy for the Beggar Lord. Brother Alex does not deal well with other wraiths and prefers to work as close to the fundamental mysteries as he can get. In the Underworld, that means the Labyrinth, where he can put his formidable talents in Moliate and Pandemonium to use. For Brother Alex, Charon is another enigma to analyze and categorize.

- **The Citydweller:** Amos Carmody has dwelt in Stygia for over four centuries, putatively a member of the Iron Legion but bouncing from profession to profession as the years rolled by. At one point he rose in the ranks of the Legion's bureaucracy to a point where he regularly accompanied deputations to the Onyx Tower. He endured Great Maelstroms and revolts, and to Carmody Charon is almost a figure of worship. The emotions Carmody has about Charon's disappearance and return are near-Messianic in their intensity. Charon *will* return. He *will* save Stygia.

And, in the way that fanatics sometimes have, he recognizes Charon instantly. As soon as Carmody sees the Reaped Charon, he sets up the cry, "Charon is here! Charon has come back!" Other wraiths take up the chant, and soon the sound reaches the walls. The effect is immediate: The defenders take heart and fight with much more courage, while the Spectres are discouraged, and the press is driven back from the walls.

Assassin!

At some point before the Skeletal Lord arrives to expedite matters but after the crowd envelops the Circle, a deep-cover Doppelganger who's been lurking in Stygia for decades makes a play to Harrow Charon. If Charon can be knocked into a Harrowing, all bets are off, because the rules of Harrowing go out the window under these circumstances. Once the Labyrinth gets its talons on a reborn Charon, it isn't letting go.

The Doppelganger, named Janosz Brusche, is undercover in the Emerald Legion. When the crowd starts chanting, he works his way close to Charon with a maggot revolver. He knows that there is no chance in hell of getting away, but frankly doesn't care; he just wants one clean shot.

Appropriate Arcanoi may detect Brusche's approach. Failing that, A Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 8 because of the surrounding noise) may uncover the approaching menace. Otherwise, the Doppelganger gets off his bullet before anyone notices anything is wrong.

If the characters detect Brusche, he tries to get past them to get a shot at Charon. He has six maggots in his revolver, and will empty five into anyone who gets in his way. If he gets multiple shots at Charon, the Doppelganger will take them. If he flees, it is only to distract attention from the stricken Charon. He may even try to continue his charade and try to frame another wraith for the deed, if the characters are particularly slow on the uptake.

Brusche's pertinent statistics are as follows:

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2



Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 4, Subterfuge 3, Firearms 4, Melee 2, Stealth 5, Bureaucracy 4

Arcanoi: Argos 2, Hive-Mind 3, Larceny 3, Moliate 4, Outrage 3

Artifact: Heavy Maggot Revolver — Difficulty 7, Damage 6 (Aggravated), Range 35 yards, Rate 2, Clip 6. The gun fires maggots instead of bullets, which burrow into the target's Corpus on a hit (even with no damage successes). Each maggot does a level of aggravated damage for each turn it is in the victim, plus it increases the difficulty of all of the target's actions by +1 to a maximum of 10. The maggots can be removed through Castigate ••• at no risk to the victim, through very careful Molation or by simply digging the maggots out. The last approach risks wounding the victim further, however.

With any luck, the characters subdue Brusche and save Charon. If not, the Skeletal Lord may ride in to save the day, as he has a vested interest in keeping Charon in one piece. Brusche is not part of any organized conspiracy, though he may make one up if interrogated.

The Hoi Polloi

Wraiths with all the above views want to know things the characters probably can't answer: how Charon survived his battle against Gorool, what he plans next, how it will all turn out. Responding to the questions requires all the social competence the characters can muster, plus they must work hard just to keep from getting crushed in the press of curious wraiths.

As the crowd swells and slows the characters down, the Skeletal Lord rides up to get things back on track on again. He does not actually *harm* any of the crowd, but is perfectly willing to *intimidate* them as much as seems necessary to get them to fall back. Then he marches his mount at a pace just slightly less comfortable than comfortable walking speed, escorting the characters up to the Road of Thrones.

Into the Tower

The Skeletal Lord sent messengers to alert the other Deathlords once he made contact with the characters. Then the Lady of Fate presented herself to each of the Deathlords, instructing them to choose eight acolytes and gather for the ceremony of Charon's restoration. The contingents wait on each side of the Road of Souls, just before the Onyx Tower.

The Lady of Fate and Ladies of Fate wait furthest down. Whether or not the Lady of Fate has met the characters in person before, she takes the time to greet them each by name and thank them for their services. Behind her, each of the factions within

Reactions

It is highly unlikely that the Mnemoi's assertion is going to be unchallenged. The fraud they perpetrated with Charon's assistance was too good, and has grown in the telling. It's going to take a lot of shouting back and forth before wraiths who have spent centuries hunting Mnemoi accept this. Only the evidence of the Masquer and Usurer Guildmasters (who have sheltered the Mnemoi), the characters and the Lady of Fate can eventually quiet the room.

But it's a fun argument while it lasts, and it provides an opportunity for the characters to score points on some of the biggest names in Stygia.

the Oracles Guilds has its representative. John Davis takes part as the Gamblers' delegate.

The guard the Skeletal Lord assigned to the characters forms half his contingent. The other four stand in a line, each with a Corpus showing progressive effects of decomposition: one with the unhealthy pallor of the recently dead, one green and rotting, one with strips of fleshlike Corpus hanging off in strips, the last a bare skeleton like his master.

The Grim contingent wear armor with holes cut and framed to show their death wounds. The eight delegates show a variety of causes of violent death, from lethal dueling to warfare to terrorism. Each also wears an extensive collection of decorations for valor in service over the centuries; the Smiling Lord wishes to impress on the other Deathlords (and the characters) how much the other Legions owe to his.

The Emerald contingent wear a variety of natty suits from different eras (not necessarily the eras in which their wearers died). The Emerald Lord wishes to project the image of innovation through the ages, reminding the other Legions of how many useful steps he and his took first.

The Silent contingent wear simple uniforms. They have no boasts to make and no mighty deeds to declare. Their reserve is its own statement: The Silent Legion matters for what it does day in, day out, and others may do their own grandstanding.

Statistics

Needless to say, if the Smiling Lord were at any fraction of his full strength, the characters wouldn't stand a hope in hell of bringing him down. However, he's not at his best after his treachery is revealed.

At the moment he makes a break for it, the Smiling Lord's pertinent statistics are:

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 7, Awareness 5, Brawl 8, Dodge 8, Intimidation 9, Subterfuge 5, Leadership 7, Firearms 9, Melee 5, Stealth 5

Guards

The Smiling Lord also has four guards with him, who are ancient and powerful Gaunts, armed with Artifact pistols and swords, and armored in Stygian steel as well. If they intercede, it will be nearly impossible to fight through them in time to prevent the Smiling Lord's escape.

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 5, Awareness 2, Brawl 5, Dodge 4, Firearms 5, Melee 5, Stealth 4

Arcanoi: Argos 4, Fatalism 2, Keening 4, Moliate 4, Outrage 5, Usury 3

Artifacts: Heavy pistol — Difficulty 8, Damage 5, Range 30 yards, Rate 3, Clip 7+1

Saber — Difficulty 6, Damage Strength +4, causes aggravated damage

The Laughing contingent swing between extremes of frenzy and stasis. They stand motionless, moving only their eyes, then move with exaggerated leaps and bounds. They speak infrequently, but when they do, it's in rapid torrents of speech, often laden with digressions and complex metaphors that make no sense to others.

The Iron contingent watches everyone else with amused contempt. They dress in simple armor or the clothes of their death eras, and move with a careful reserve. They waste no energy, and never seem to hurry.

A mixed group of soldiers from each the Legions oversees a small throng of other wraiths. The Lady of Fate explains to the characters that master practitioners of each of the Arcanoi will take part along with the Mnemioi, providing a symbolic framework as Charon regains his old soul. Characters who get one or more successes on a roll of Perception + each of their Arcanoi (difficulty 9) may recognize that in each case, the "leading practitioner" either is a Guildmaster or someone high up in the Guild hierarchy. The Ladies of Fate understand this perfectly well, and intimidated the Deathlords into not asking many questions about it.


Behind even these unwanted souls is another cluster of wraiths who watch the proceedings, unblinking. These are the Mnemioi, loathed for centuries, and as soon as the other wraiths realize who they are, a mob starts brewing. It is up to the characters, based on their association with Niska, to shout down the incipient riot, though wraiths like the Skeletal Lord are going to need a lot of convincing. The Lady of Fate will intervene if things look like they're getting too ugly, but she gives the characters as much slack as they can handle. After all, it's never too soon for them to get a handle on dealing with the Deathlords.

The Assembling

The delegations from the Legions, the Guilds and the massed Mnemioi ("Pitifully few," characters may hear the Lady of Fate mutter to herself) make their way up to the throne room of the Onyx Tower. The characters attend as Charon's personal delegation. Like the orrery room, the throne room occupies the entire floor. Charon's throne is, like the walls of the tower, flat black. It sits on a round dais that can pivot when the throne's occupant leans to one side or the other. Rows of benches circle around the throne, with gaps to allow light from high arched windows to shine in. (With the Great Maelstrom blowing, light is scarce, and the windows are reinforced with steel bars.)

The head Mnemos steps forward and explains why he and his followers are here. They have been carrying, by Charon's express order, his memories against this day. It has been their sacred mission to guard the soul of the Emperor for his return, so that he might have all of his experience and powers at his disposal when he returned, rejuvenated, from his sojourn in the Skinlands. To protect those memories, he gave them to the Mnemioi to guard, then banished them so that none of the Deathlords might learn this secret and seek to exploit the Mnemioi while risking the safety of the Empire. And so, for centuries, the Mnemioi have hidden and waited for the call. Now that the call has come, the Mnemioi have answered it.

What happens next has the inevitability of ritual. One of the Smiling Lord's servants comes forward and hands his master Charon's mask. The Deathlord takes it to Charon, kneels and offers the Artifact. Then Thusimos of the Sandmen (see **Guildbook: Sandmen**) comes forth with Siklos, and likewise presents that. Charon accepts both gifts, and he dons the mask of office without hesitation.



The Lady of Fate then explains that before it can be safe to restore Charon, she must uncover the traitor in their midst. As soon as she says that, shouts and debates erupt. Every Deathlord has accusations to make against the others. It takes the Lady of Fate some time to restore order. The Storyteller may include the threat of inter-Deathlord violence, or even actually have some (Smiling Lord versus Skeletal Lord being most likely) come to blows. Calming the Deathlords down most likely requires both Keening and a little luck in imposing corporeal barriers.

Eventually the Lady of Fate makes herself heard over the roar, and explains that the Ladies of Fate can perform a ritual to detect the traitor. Everyone agrees to submit.

The Ladies of Fate circulate through the crowd with a bronze bowl. They use knives to make a slit in each wraith's palm and collect a drop of plasm — far less than one point's worth, doing no harm in game-mechanical terms. Once everyone's donated, the Ladies chant briefly over the concoction. The liquid Corpus, which came out in a variety of hues, turns a uniform silver and bubbles with great heat. Curiously enough, the Lady of Fate then asks the characters to bear the bowl around the room. The unprecedented action causes a tremendous stir. Hopefully, the wraiths accept. Charon stands apart, at the center of the floor. The Ladies carry the bowl to whichever one of the wraiths is going to carry it, and they begin a procession around the room.

As they approach the Smiling Lord, his mask begins to bubble in time with the plasm in the bowl. He screams in intense pain, but cannot remove the mask. The First Augur, there to represent the practitioners of Fatalism, steps forward and demands that the Smiling Lord confirm his treachery. With a sob, the Smiling Lord confesses, and attempts to bolt. The characters are the only ones close enough to tackle him before his guards can close and cover his escape. If the character carrying the bowl of fluid has the presence of mind to toss it on the Smiling Lord (Dexterity + Melee, difficulty 5), he is instantly paralyzed. Even if the wraiths don't think to do that, the ritual has stripped the Smiling Lord of his Arcanoi temporarily, making it a matter of sheer physicality to bring him down.

Memories

What the Mnemoi are actually doing is returning Charon's memories to him, rebuilding his Memory Palace from the ground up. In theory, each and every one of Charon's memories is being carried by one Mnemos or another against this day. In reality, too many Mnemoi have been lost, along with what they carried, to the persecution instigated by the Smiling Lord. Charon's plan worked too well.

In the meantime, however, there are still a great many of Charon's memories about for characters to explore. Some recommendations include:

- The rescue of Nhudri
- Any of the prior Great Maelstroms
- The Breaking of the Guilds
- The revolt of the Fishers
- The *wanderjahr* Charon undertook during World War I

Storytellers should feel free to invent any and all appropriate details to give the memories that needed touch of verisimilitude, without contradicting extant Wraith history too badly.

If the Smiling Lord gets more than a turn's head start, his guards come into play to cover his exit. At this point, all becomes chaos. The character still have the best shot at catching the traitor, but things have just gotten a lot more complicated. At Storyteller discretion, there can be an extended chase sequence down the stairwell of the Onyx Tower, with the Smiling Lord desperately trying to make his escape through the crowds of wraiths now thronging the place.

In fact, it is entirely possible that the Smiling Lord may escape. If he does, it really doesn't affect the story that much, but it certainly will get the other Deathlords up in arms.

Once the traitor is taken down, the First Augur reaches into and through the Smiling Lord's mask, drawing out a flat mirrored surface. It shows a scene of sometime in the past, with Yu Huang himself and the Smiling Lord standing on some remote Tempest shore, making plans for how the Smiling Lord can render Stygia more susceptible to invasion. The scene takes only a few seconds to play out, but should leave no questions about the Smiling Lord's guilt.

At this point a debate begins on what to do with the Smiling Lord, and the characters should be a part of it. They may or may not have prior standing within the Legions, but as Charon's rescuers and the villain's captors (in theory), they've proven themselves worth taking at least somewhat seriously. The Skeletal Lord will, for instance, agree that a member of the Grim Legion should administer the terminal blow, and can listen to arguments about duty with regard to various possibilities. Most of the delegations have no clear idea how to proceed, so the characters' words and actions can make the difference in tipping the balance toward execution or imprisonment.

Either the Smiling Lord plunges immediately into a Destruction Harrowing or he spends the rest of the scene wrapped in chains; in all honesty, it doesn't matter that much in the grand scheme of things. In either case, the process of restoration itself now begins.

Into the Memory Palace

The Legions escort in the Arcanos experts, who take their seats in between Legion contingents. The Mnemoi stand around Charon on his throne. Charon still doesn't have any memories to explain what's going on, and relies on the characters as the closest thing to stability he has. The Lady of Fate explains the process, but he's not quite sure whether he believes it or not.

The ritual taking place now resembles greatly the one characters witnessed through Niska's eyes. Charon, somewhat calmed by the Lady of Fate, sits on his (not yet again familiar) throne, leaning back, eyes closed. The Mnemoi gather around him, and bring in any characters carrying Charon's memories. The Mnemoi instruct the characters to simply breathe deeply and follow the experience.

Without transition, the characters find themselves standing with the Mnemoi on a featureless twilight plain. The lighting suggests a just-past twilight or not-yet-arrived dawn. The ground and sky are very slightly different shades of gray. Charon himself is nowhere to be seen. A wind blows from each corner of the compass, and seems to blow through the characters' heads. As it rushes in to the center of the ring, the wind carries dust motes that gleam like precious metals.

The dust motes arrange themselves into the form of the dark hall the characters experienced before. But this time it's brightly lit by torches and smooth balls of light, and it's not alone. Connecting passages run off in all directions. The wind continues to switch direction rapidly, spreading the motes throughout the ring of Mnemoi and beyond — the Mnemoi all step back as motes settle into place and form an ever-growing building. Over the course of a few minutes, the motes give rise to a gorgeous castle in

A Note on Events

This all happens, as does the return of the Ferryman to Stygia, while the characters are in the Memory Palace. It is the entrance of the Last Martyr Knight that alerts the characters — and Charon — to what is going on. In the meantime, the Spectres escape, the Angst battery bursts and the Ferryman return to Stygia.

a late medieval or Renaissance style. The castle shines with layers of thin metallic film.

As the pace of growth slows, the characters have time to explore. The castle becomes more solid with every passing moment. One of the Mnemoi explains that this is a symbolic framework within Charon's memories can be housed. When it finishes aligning itself, then it can be grafted onto Charon's existing soul. As long as the characters disturb nothing and confine themselves to passages and chambers already solidified, the Mnemoi have no objection to characters' investigations.

Suddenly the sky darkens and the ground shakes. Some parts of the memory palace — a tower here, a corridor there, a suite of rooms somewhere else — dim and even crumble. The dust released by their collapse does not reunite with itself, but simply floats aimlessly on the still-shifting currents of wind. This development shocks and dismays the Mnemoi, but they press on regardless.

The actual process of reattachment draws on Empathy, Meditation and Occult. Characters who possess all three of these abilities may join in. They must make Perception + Empathy, Intelligence + Meditation and Wits + Occult rolls to contribute. If all three rolls produce success, then the ritual proceeds a little bit faster. The process of reattachment takes 10 turns, minus one turn for each triple success like the one described here, plus one turn for any botches rolled during these attempts. When it's done, the characters experience a final rushing movement, this time away from the Memory Palace and back into their own bodies. A character who rolls a botch at any point in the process must succeed on a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) or be lost in the Memory Palace.

The Verdict

Charon opens his eyes. His expression isn't *different* than it was, but there's much *more* going on inside his head. Charles Anderson wasn't just a shell, he was a real person, who expressed Charon's personality. That link remains even as the primary soul returns to speak for itself.

If the Smiling Lord stands in chains waiting for judgment, Charon passes judgment on him. The Emperor finds the Smiling Lord guilty of (in reverse order) treachery on behalf of the Dark Kingdom of Jade, criminal negligence and attempted genocide during the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Sentence is passed, and Lord Nhudri (who has been standing at the back) takes charge of the prisoner. Both vanish into the shadows, not to be seen again.

Charon then stands and paces around his chamber. He peers out the windows at the Great Maelstrom and the battle for Stygia. With a sad smile he turns to the Lady of Fate. "This is what you warned me of that day. I didn't understand then, but now I know, it's not enough."

After a moment's contemplation, Charon turns around to face the gathered wraith. He paces along the edge of his throne, to look at each wraith in turn. "All of you, for whatever reasons, have played your part in bringing me back to myself. I appreciate it more than I can say. But all of us together are like peasants carrying water in leaking sieves.

Too much of what I was lies... somewhere out there, gnawed upon by Oblivion's servants or drifting in the Tempest. I cannot be Emperor anymore. There just isn't enough of me to do the job well, and to do it properly. I have enough of myself remaining only to fail spectacularly, should I attempt to resume my mantle of old. The same mistakes, the ones I thought I had insured against, would occur again. The same errors would be committed. The same crimes against you all."

Tears come to his eyes. "I can lead you one last time. Then it will be time for another to lead you." He regains composure and beckons to the Deathlords. "Come. We have little time to prepare a defense against the assaults to come."

As the Deathlords overcome their various combinations of fear, rage and confusion, Charon takes the characters' hands, one by one. "You brought me here. You have borne yourselves nobly through great trials, starting with my own death. Before I go, I will have gifts for you, presents from what remains to me to give."

Part IV: The End of All Things

And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done.

— Jeremiah 2:12

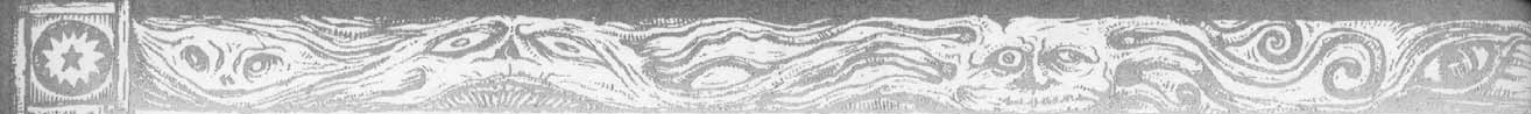
The Walls Fall

While the Mnemoi rebuild Charon and Stygia's soldiers hold their positions at the seawall, trouble brews elsewhere on the Isle of Sorrows. As Charon remarked in one of the memories the characters observed, too many things on Stygia have the potential to create serious harm when they break.

The Spectral assault on the Stygian seawall sends occasional tremors throughout the Isle; so do particularly strong gusts from the Great Maelstrom. Wraiths across the island must secure their fragile, dangerous possessions... and inevitably one slips. After that, calamities cascade in ever-escalating volume. By the time the characters and other forces on the scene learn what's going on, the terminal blows are already falling.

The Pardoners' Guildhouse and the Commandery of the Martyr Knights occupy the basements of nondescript buildings halfway up the Road of Souls. "Nondescript" in Stygian terms means that the buildings which stand over them stand only a few dozen stories high and consist of relatively coherent amalgams of office buildings destroyed in World War I and World War II. The buildings therefore blend in with those around them, not as flashy as those that include cathedrals, sports stadiums or museums. The bureaucrats (and the Domems desperately seeking some way to eke out a subsistence) who toil on the floors overhead generally lack any clue as to what goes on beneath street level.

The Great Maelstrom hammers the Isle of Sorrows with unthinkable force. Waves and winds bear items — and Plasmics — out of the Tempest, to batter the fragile seawall. The flotsam thumps against the seawall and drifts away again, serving as nothing so much as a monstrous battering ram. The vibrations from one such collision crack a few containers holding Spectres in the Commandery and an



intake valve for the Pardoners' vat of Angst. In seconds, Spectres flood the Commandery while Angst throws every Pardoner in the Guildhouse into Catharsis. (Catharsis also strikes all the wraiths in the building above, and many more wraiths in the surrounding streets.) The Stygian defenses suddenly matter much less, because they're about to come under assault from within as well as without.

The Last Martyr Knight

Precisely one Martyr Knight lasts long enough to make it to the Onyx Tower. Albert is a young wraith, in both senses of the word. In life he was a French rebel, fighting in turn against the Nazi occupation and then against the French colonial government in Algeria. He died in a car accident in his mid-40s. He knew at once that the Hierarchy wouldn't satisfy his sense of justice, and drifted through various Renegade groups before settling on the Martyr Knights. It's been less than half a century since he died, making him one of the younger wraiths on the Isle.

Albert presents a Corpus Moliated into a very generic set of features: middling height, plain Gallic features. But when he speaks, it's with fiery, poetic enthusiasm. He tells the lords assembled in the throne room of how Spectres destroyed his comrades (make use of Dark Arcanos descriptions in **Wraith: The Oblivion, Dark Reflection: Spectres, Doomslayers, and Wraith: Great War**), and fears that the city must fall in the face of the new onslaught. Despite his fears, he heals himself up (accepting but not soliciting help from any Usurers present) to be fit to take part in the battle. Albert has no confidence in the Empire as an institution, but he hates Oblivion, and stands ready to give everything he has and is to allow wraiths the chance to choose their own fates. Portray him as a quiet but supremely confident individual.

Stygia Mobilizes

Initially the defenders of the city are at a tremendous disadvantage: All of their high commanders are in one room, far removed from the action. The Guilds and Legions are effectively headless while Charon is restored. That's not to say that there aren't some excellent officers and subordinate Guildmasters who do their best to rally resistance to the assaults, but there's no substitute for raw power and authority, which is what's missing on the scene.

The grandees of Stygia don't let this situation go unrectified, however. Charon assumes command as if he had never been away, commanding the various Deathlords to rally all of their resources (the last is said with especial emphasis to the Beggar Lord) and ordering them to sweep up Stygia's two main thoroughfares. One of the Smiling Lord's guards is given a field promotion and the remains of his master's mask, and told to stick very close to Charon. The Guildmasters are offered reinstatement in Stygia for their services in this dark hour; their followers are assigned to support the Legion troops and do side-street sweeps in efforts to clean out pockets of Spectres. The entire process takes perhaps a half an hour, a remarkably efficient mobilization. The characters may be asked for input, but at the moment they're clearly out of their league. However, if they try to leave to get into the fighting, the Lady of Fate has one of her servants unobtrusively block their exit. A Perception + Subterfuge roll (difficulty 7) may allow a wraith to see what's going on, but not why. The Lady of Fate is more subtle than that.

In any event, as soon as the council of war finishes, Charon and his entourage descend the Onyx Tower to take the fight to the streets. The Deathlords and Charon don their masks; the Emperor takes up Siklos once more. As the procession wends its

way down the steps, the wraiths inside begin cheering, chanting Charon's name and renewing their courage. By the time Charon reaches the street, the word has gone out to the troops all over the city. Stygia has gone back on the offensive.

Charon invokes a blessing on all his company. He calls upon the gods of his Mycenaean childhood, and the gods honored by his favorite wraiths over the centuries, and all the worthy gods he does not know. In his brief prayer, he asks for the courage to fulfill the highest callings of virtue and the will to persist until whatever end Fate chooses to offer. Then he mounts his steed, takes up Siklos and with a shout, leads the charge into battle.

In the Streets

Newly freed Spectres and newly Shadow-eaten wraiths pour into the streets in irregular mobs. They have no coordination beyond the barest minimum of Hive-Mind and no particular strat-

Overwhelming Hordes!

Running a combat wherein there is seemingly an infinite number of foes — like this one — can be challenging. The horror and impact of the fight comes from the fact that the bad guys *just keep on coming*. Drop one Spectre, and two more fight each other to get at you in its place.

Needless to say, that sort of thing can be difficult to Storytell. However, there are a few hints that can make this sort of sequence easier to run.

- Don't roll for every single attack by every single Spectre. If there are hordes and hordes of them, by the time you finish rolling each and every action your players will have fallen asleep. Instead, decide what you want the Spectres to accomplish in terms of attacks and Arcanos effects. Roll a reasonably large handful of dice. Get a sense of how the horde as a whole does, and then dole out successful attacks as necessary. Yes, it's inexact, but it keeps the action of the game moving.


- Spread things out equally. Don't pick on one target too much, unless the target is really, *really* asking for it. (Pounding one's chest in the middle of battle, shouting "You want some?" and letting a Spectre take the first shot are all forms of really, *really* asking for it.)

- Don't miss anyone. If one character is being overwhelmed by 30 Spectres and the next guy isn't facing any, something's wrong.

- Think about space. Only so many enemies can get at a single wraith at a given time. Bear that in mind as you structure things.

- Keep your numbers straight. Just because the wraiths are in no position to count their swarming foes doesn't mean that you shouldn't know how many they're up against. Nothing's more disheartening to a player than hearing the Storyteller say "Oh, did I not mention the dozen more in the back?"

- Know when to say when. Horde battles depend on shock and initial impact. If they go on too long, they become the equivalent of chopping wood. If the pace of the battle starts to slacken, have the remaining foes melt away, or have the characters find that they were facing fewer foes than they originally thought. In theory, a horde-style encounter works best when the characters are constantly on the brink of being overwhelmed. If the fight gets too easy, it's dull. If it gets too hard, it's over.



egy beyond doing as much damage as possible as quickly as possible. Groups of a dozen or more Spectres set upon soldiers traveling singly or in pairs. Cathartic wraiths grab bureaucrats and couriers, then pour concentrated Angst down the throats of their prisoners. Soon most of the road running horizontally halfway between waterfront and summit belongs to Oblivion's forces, with front lines spreading in both directions along the Road of Souls and through the buildings in the heart of the city. Fast-running (or flying) Spectres and Shadowed wraiths leap into other parts of the city to create new beachheads. Oblivion's armies outside the seawall detect the sudden burst of activity and redouble their own efforts, pushing weak spots ever closer to collapse.

The Ferrymen Return

Whether or not characters notice the early stage of Stygia's succumbing to Oblivion, *everyone* notices the next development. From their haven deep in the Tempest, the Ferrymen converge on Stygia. Most converge on the shore of the Weeping Bay and force their way into the city; others stay outside the walls to reinforce the defenders and draw off the worst of the assault.

See page 82 for a detailed discussion of the Ferrymen's powers and abilities.

Even the Ferrymen have difficulty making their way through the Great Maelstrom. Their rafts buck and pitch. Sometimes a Ferryman actually falls off and must scramble back to safety. The most powerful Spectres attacking Stygia's walls — Nephwracks, Hekatonkhire and Pasiphae — turn to fight the Ferrymen. In the meantime, other Ferrymen sweep into the streets, taking up strategic points and making the very air hum with the sound of their scythes. Some of the ensuing battles are hard to see, as clouds of

Taking Up the Oar

Playing the part of a Ferryman can be challenging. Remember, the Ferrymen are incredibly old, incredibly powerful and inclined to regard Charon as a sibling who's managed to disappoint the rest of the family dreadfully. Furthermore, Ferrymen have no Shadows, which means that they can focus totally on any given task at hand. It is this distinct lack of a second nature that drives the Shadows of perceptive characters mad with terror.

Remember, the Ferryman is a creature of myth and legend. While the characters have already had their share of conversations with mythic figures, a Ferryman is something else entirely. Every wraith hears stories about Ferrymen in much the same way we hear stories about Robin Hood or the Lone Ranger; to actually meet and converse with one is like stepping into a storybook.

The Ferryman should radiate power and sheer presence. The characters are not equals, and he should not treat them as such; any attempts at being buddy-buddy are shot down with cold dismissal. If the characters are respectful, the Ferryman returns the respect that is due to them. If they are rude or petulant, he should have no hesitation about demonstrating precisely which way the power dynamic in the conversation should go. If the characters are foolish enough to attack the Ferryman (unless under the influence of Catharsis), they deserve whatever they get.

storm debris swirl around; others blaze with the reflected energy of the most powerful Arcanoi and Dark Arcanoi.

Scenes From the War: Finding the Ferryman

As the Deathlords, Guildmasters and other wraiths of note charge into the fray, the characters (not surprisingly) get lost in the shuffle. With Legions and guilds to coordinate, Spectres to fend off and the shock of Charon's return to deal with, there's no one who really has a handle on what the characters should be doing. So, as the battle spills back into the streets, the wraiths quickly get separated from the assorted powerhouses they've been dealing with up until now. Charon, the Lady of Fate and the others all have bigger fish to fry at this precise moment, so if the characters seek some direction, they're handed down from subordinate to subordinate, eventually being told "Stand here and someone will be along in a minute with orders." Needless to say, the characters get forgotten, no one ever comes along with orders and the battle moves on. Within minutes, they find themselves on a side street, alone except for some Spectres.


The Spectres are refugees from the Martyr Knight's redemption program, freshly escaped and coked to the gills on Angst from the explosion in the Pardoners' Guildhouse basement. There are four of them, two Mortwights and two Doppelgangers, and they're not so much interested in the conquest of Stygia as they are in making someone pay. Unfortunately, "someone" means the wraiths.

The street the Circle finds itself on is narrow, with tall, decrepit houses overhanging the roadway proper. There are sounds of battle off in the distance, but this place is almost preternaturally quiet. Only one of the Doppelgangers is visible. It's playing hurt, pretending to be a wraith who was wounded in the attack. It attempts to draw the characters' sympathies (Perception + Subterfuge, difficulty 7, to see through the act). The second the wraiths drop their guard, or even focus all of their attention on the Doppelganger, the other three leap to the attack. The Mortwights come out of second-floor windows, while the remaining Doppelganger bursts from a doorway on the left side of the street. If any of the characters have Thorns that allows their Shadows to talk with Spectres, those will come into play. Wraiths have a slim chance (Perception + Alertness, difficulty 8) of noticing the attack and being able to react to it instantly; otherwise, the Spectres surprise them.

While normally Doppelgangers and Mortwights are not among the more savage castes of Spectres, but these aren't normal circumstances. The Shadow-eaten wade in without strategy or thought toward anything except inflicting pain. As such, they close as quickly as possible and then bite, claw and otherwise try to cause as much bodily harm to the wraiths as possible. Arcanos use is minimal, except for Larceny. The characters' Shadows do what they can to assist the attackers, and if one of the characters falls into Catharsis, he will turn around and attack his friends.

If the wraiths look like they're going to lose, one of the Spectres might go into Catharsis of its own — miracles are everywhere today, after all — and that brief defection should turn the tide. If the Psycheguided Mortwright is still standing at the end of the fight, he begs the characters to destroy him and put him out of his pain. How you handle this, and whether or not euthanasia feeds the characters' Shadows, is up to you.

When the characters finally finish mopping up the Spectres, the street returns to silence. They have a moment to heal, and then the sounds of combat start up down the street, coming from around a bend so that no details of the combat can be seen. Per-



ception + Streetwise or an equivalent roll allows the wraiths to track the sound of the fighting. If the characters follow the noise, they come upon a terrifying sight: a single Ferryman beset by dozens of Striplings. The Ferryman is laying about with his scythe and Arcanoi and extracting a fearful toll of the Spectres, but there are what seem like endless numbers of them. At the wraiths' intrusion, a handful of the Striplings break off the attack on the Ferryman and go after the characters instead.

If the wraiths decide not to follow the noise, an acceptable tactic is to have the wraiths harried by encounters with bands of Spectres and herded by collapsing buildings, eventually winding up where the Ferryman is hewing down his foes. Optimally, a maximum of three encounters/close calls should get the characters where you need them to be.

With any luck, the wraiths help the Ferryman defeat the Striplings. He puts on a truly awe-inspiring show, and it should be quite obvious to the characters that they are in the presence of impressive power. While the story thus far has brought them in contact with many of the most potent wraiths in Stygia, they haven't really had a chance to see anyone of that sort of capability in action. Now they have, and it's terrifying. Furthermore, each wraith gets a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 9). Any success means that the wraith's Shadow is cowering in gibbering fear from the Ferryman's presence, for reasons that are not immediately obvious.

Eventually the Ferryman, in conjunction with the characters, finally clears the street. He surveys his helpers and thanks them without formally introducing himself. Characters who press the Ferryman for his name get stony silence. Hopefully, they'll eventually get the hint and stop trying.

If the Ferryman is paying attention (which he should be), he notices something odd about the characters, something relating to Charon. He will spend some time trying to pry out of them what precisely has happened. If they prove recalcitrant, he may (Storyteller discretion) uncork Intimation to make someone *want* to tell him, but that's a last resort. If the characters do explain matters to him in a reasonably straightforward and factual manner, he demonstrates his appreciation, either by providing the wraiths with some sort of useful relic from the folds of his robe or using various Arcanoi to heal Circle members, grant them better armament and so on.

When the Ferryman finishes, he asks the characters what they know of Charon's current whereabouts. In all probability all the wraiths can do is wave vaguely in the direction they came from; if they can provide anything more concrete, the Ferryman will be most gratified.

"I have an appointment with him two thousand years in the making," the Ferryman says, and then strides off. "I thank you for your assistance. We shall, undoubtedly, meet again." He strides off into the city at an astonishingly rapid pace, and within seconds is gone.

In the City

The next series of encounters is not mandatory in any sense of the word, and there is no linear progression to them. The idea is not to have the characters get hauled all over Stygia before the city goes down for the last time, but rather for them to experience what it is that's being lost. Therefore, the following encounters are designed to show off Stygia at its best — and worst. There's no specific order in which they should be run, and if the players are getting restive you can skip some or all and get to the fireworks on page 75. On the other hand, this is the last chance to see Stygia,

and the wraiths may appreciate getting to see the Great Library and other monuments of the ages for the very last time.

So after the characters finish dealing with the Ferryman, they find themselves lost in the streets of Stygia. Sounds of fighting, screams and explosions come from all directions. A geyser of Spectres bubbling up out of the ground can be seen intermittently over the rooftops; occasionally the stream stops and the sounds of battle wash over the city. Snatches of eerie song, courtesy of Chanteurs fighting for their very souls, and other, less identifiable sounds carry over the fray. Stygia is in a struggle for its existence, and the battle has not yet been decided.

It should quickly become apparent that while there may not be a right thing to do, there certainly is a wrong one — and that is to stand around, waiting for matters to be decided. If the wraiths just hold position for too long, a squad of Spectres finds them and chases them through the streets toward any one of the following destinations:

The Great Library

The Hierarchy's Great Library stands at the upper edge of the mid-city battle zone. The oldest piece of the Great Library is the Library of Alexandria. It's surrounded by other lost libraries, from temple collections destroyed in Jerusalem's various falls to universities torched during the Thirty Years' War and museums looted or bombed during this century's conflicts. Around them, outbuildings house further collections and the indices for it all. Three tiers of Stygian steel platform hold additional libraries and institutions, many merely shells of their old selves, remodeled to fit the Hierarchy's needs. The combined edifice stands more than 20 stories tall, and Charon alone knows how deep underground.

Spectres attack it at its weakest points, the pillars supporting the upper tiers. In seconds at least one pillar gives way and the whole structure topples over. The upper tiers slide off their platforms diagonally, sprawling across the Road of Souls. The platforms themselves plunge down through the lower levels, crushing almost all the wraiths beneath. Fragments of irreplaceable relic books and manuscripts swirl through the dusty air, along with a few traces of records kept on the exotic soulforged papers used in the upper ranks of the Hierarchy.

By the time the characters arrive, most of the Spectres have moved on. Only a few remain, picking through the rubble for new victims. The characters should, by a determined assault, be able to clear the area, as the only Spectres here are weak Striplings and Haints. With any luck, the fight is vicious but brief, and the Spectres break and run when it becomes clear they're up against serious opposition.

Once the area is clear, the characters' focus should shift to rescue and recovery. If they *want* to pursue the fleeing Striplings they certainly can, but before too long they're going to run into a solid mass of Spectres who will claw their way over one another just to get at some fresh meat.

Wraiths who stay at the Library have other matters at hand: survivors (so to speak), treasures and the threat of further imminent collapse. It's harder to get trapped wraiths out of the rubble than it is to get objects. Excavating a trapped wraith requires a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty variable, depending on how deep the wraith is buried in the rubble) even to know where a victim might be, then a series of Intelligence + Repair and Strength + Repair rolls (difficulty 8) to plan and execute a method for rescuing an imprisoned wraith. Of course, the more wraiths the characters free, the easier the job becomes, and the more the difficulty drops. The characters become the leaders of the operation (Charisma + Leadership, difficulty 5, to give any actual orders) and direct the

other wraiths. If they're wise, they set some of the rescued victims out as a perimeter; otherwise, there's always a chance that a Spectre might stumble onto things at a suitably delicate moment.

There are also plenty of other things to pick up at the Library besides the corpora of the Restless Dead. The Library's priceless collection is either buried under tons of stone or blowing free in the wind. Wraiths minded toward posterity — or possibly toward currying favor with Charon — may seek to save various documents and volumes. Perception + Alertness is required to find books and other items, while Intelligence + Enigmas (difficulty 7) is required to determine whether the item saved is of value or not.

After a few minutes bagging relic manuscripts and the like, the characters should feel a nagging urge to move on. If they're smart, they'll delegate the wraiths they leave behind to continue picking up the pieces. If the characters stay too long, pieces of the Library that are still standing start falling off thanks to the storm winds; dodging them becomes more and more difficult, and the pieces of masonry falling get larger and larger. Sooner or later, the characters should figure out it's time to move on.

The Agora

Huge piles of rubble block the entrances to Stygia's marketplace. Wraiths peer out from behind the barricades, gripping weapons and preparing for the next assault. Sentries posted on rooftops call out the Circle's approach, and the wraiths are aware that there are a score of relic rifles trained on them as they approach the defenses.

The approaching wraiths are challenged by man in late-18th century styled clothing, complete with powdered wig and bloody slash across his neck. He introduces himself as Max, the commander of the defenses. With him he has a Pardoner named Brother Despair, a thin, horse-faced man given to intoning predictions of imminent doom. Max apologizes for the necessity (which brings catcalls of derision from the other wraiths in the area), but says that the Pardoner must check to see if any of the characters are Spectres. Any objection to this is seen as an admission of guilt, and the full force of the defenders pours down on the Circle *en masse*.

Once the characters prove that they are indeed on the side of the angels, they are welcomed inside the defenses. Max looks at several of the wraiths strangely, and finally confesses that he has a weird feeling about the entire situation, as if he'd been here and done this before. Several of the other wraiths defending the Agora chime in with similar comments, though those in Grim Legion uniforms have recollections of seeing the defenses from the outside.

Characters carrying Charon's memories can check (Intelligence + Enigmas, difficulty 9 — and Storyteller discretion) to see if any of this rings a bell with them. On the off chance that it does, the character finds that he has Charon's memory of hearing about the fighting in the Agora between Renegades and Grim Legion troops during the Great War, and of having ordered the incident removed from Stygian history for the sake of the unity of the Empire. Whether or not the wraiths choose to share this revelation is up to them.

There is an attempt made on the Agora defenses while the characters are within the barricades, and they are expected to help repel the assault. The attack comes from the north, and is led by a pair of Shades being driven by a Nephwrack. Supporting them are a mob of lesser Spectres, primarily Haints. Unless someone does something spectacularly stupid, the defenses should hold, albeit barely. The battle should be brief but nasty, and Catharsis on the part of one of the defenders should be a constant possibility.

Once the fighting dies down, Max asks a favor of the characters: "We can't hold out forever here. We need help. Go find someone in authority and get us reinforcements or we're doomed." Brother Despair chimes in with his equally chipper predictions, and an opening is cleared in the defenses for the characters' escape.

(For more information on Max, see **Renegades**. For more information on the Agora battle, see **Wraith: The Great War**.)

The Street of Extinguished Lanterns

The Street of Extinguished Lanterns earned its name because once, long ago, many Pardoners worked and dwelt in the tall houses that line the road. Now their houses are empty, or filled by squatters, and the iron lanterns that once hung over every doorway are dark and dead. Few wraiths like to visit this place, and those who dwell here do not do so by choice.

The Street of Extinguished Lanterns has already been swept clean of Spectres by the time the wraiths arrive. Guild squads have been through here, and have attacked any intruders with especial vigor. Guildwraiths, in particular, have no love for this place any longer, and demonstrated their displeasure upon the corpora of their opponents.


When the characters reach the Street of Extinguished Lanterns, all here is silent, almost unbearably so. Even the distant noise of battle is muted here. An overwhelming air of sadness, tinged with bitterness, hangs over the place like a pall. Wraiths with Passions or Dark Passions relating to either of those emotions can make checks to see if they acquire any Pathos — or Angst.

The silence of the place should be unsettling, and any wraith who succeeds on a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 7) should sense a subtle wrongness that's growing rapidly stronger. Characters with Fatalism should also feel discomfort without the neces-

Other Encounters

If the characters seem intent on roaming around Stygia for an even lengthier stretch of time, here are a few possible encounters:

- **Catharsis:** Wraiths infected by the explosion of the Pardoners' Angst Battery are roaming the streets, looking for others to infect. A few find the characters, get close to them, and then attempt to pour liquid Angst down their throats. If even one succeeds and pushes a character into Catharsis, the victim jackrabbits off into the maze of side streets and forces the rest of the Circle to go look for him....
- **The Last Martyr Knight, Redux:** Albert, the wraith who carried news of the new devastation to the Onyx Tower, is trying to fight his way back to the Commandery. From a distance, the characters see him go down under a tide of Spectres. Do they go to help? Carry on his mission? Or flee?
- **Chance Meetings:** At any point the characters are liable to find any of the wraiths they met on their progress through Stygia in either peril or Catharsis. It's up to the characters to choose whether to help, harm or ignore these souls and move on.
- **Fugitives:** The Smiling Lord was not alone in his treachery. Some of his top advisors were also in on the corruption, and these are being hounded through the streets of Stygia by Spectres and wraiths alike.



sity of a roll. Should the wraiths stand stay on the Street of Extinguished Lanterns for more than a couple of turns, a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 6) allows a character to notice the sound of many shambling footsteps coming up the road, along with a faint keening or moaning and the jingling of chains.

The Mourners are coming.

When the shrouded, chain-wrapped figures of the Mourners appear in the distance, an Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 7) allows any wraith viewing them to identify them. Little is known about the Mourners in Stygia, save that they are to be feared above almost anything else short of Oblivion. It is said that if a Mourner so much as touches you, you are doomed to join their ranks. Beyond that, little is known save that any attempts to keep the Mourners from their chosen targets invariably end in failure.

If the characters are smart, they'll run or attempt to find shelter. The doors and lower windows along the Street of Extinguished Lamps are all locked and barred; some have inhabitants who are hiding from the storm; some have just been abandoned and made sure of. If the characters can find a way to break into a building or convince the inhabitants to let them in (not terribly likely — if the Mourners are after one of the characters, they're not going to let a little thing like a locked door stop them), then more power to them, and the Mourners march on down the street toward their date with destiny at the Onyx Tower.

If the wraiths decide to stand and fight the Mourners, then there is every chance that they'll be trampled and eventually added to the chain of doomed souls making its way through the city. Should the Circle be truly foolish enough to want to slug it out with the Mourners, a Ferryman may swoop down to rescue them by diverting the Mourners, though the effort obviously takes a toll on him. (See page XX for details — if you want to make the scene particularly poignant, the Ferryman may contract Mournerism himself and, with his last conscious thoughts, explain to the characters what they've done. If that doesn't produce a guilt trip of epic proportions, nothing can.) He then proceeds to administer a severe tongue-lashing, telling the characters in no uncertain terms what complete and utter idiots they are, and how risky it was for him to rescue them. That should leave the wraiths suitably cowed (and wondering why the Ferryman bothered). If the characters are unfazed at being chewed out by a creature of legend who has just rescued them from certain doom, it may be time to take a break.

If, however, the characters just run, things get interesting. The faster the wraiths run (Dexterity + Athletics, difficulty 6), the faster the Mourners follow. Storytellers may wish to simulate this with contested rolls, with the Circle moving only as fast as its slowest member (unless someone gets thrown to the wolves) and each time the Mourners gain an additional success beyond the number the players get, they close the gap by 10 feet. The Mourners never actually catch the characters, but particularly slowfooted wraiths may feel the figurative breath on the back of the neck.

Eventually the characters come to a side street, the Via Furorum, which is both considerably wider than the Street of Extinguished Lanterns and more crowded with fighting. If the wraiths turn off in hopes of shaking the Mourners, their hopes are rewarded. The Mourners look neither left nor right, but continue toward the Onyx Tower without sparing the wraiths a second glance. It may strike someone as a particularly good idea (Intelligence, difficulty 8) to follow the Mourners and see whom they're after; it seems likely to be of some significance, after all.

Guilty Bystanders

The Mourners do not take part in the battle. Instead, they head to the scene of the fray and then stand aside, as if to bear witness. Sharp-eyed characters may notice clusters of Mourners all over the battlefield, essentially containing the action. Spectres who try to get through the silent figures are destroyed, quickly and efficiently, but other than that, the Mourners take no action.

Note: These are not the same Mourners who appear in front of Erik on page 147. There's more than one band wandering around the Underworld, and they're all coming to Stygia.

Finding Charon

The Mourners can lead the characters straight to where the climactic events of "The Last Danse Macabre" occur. If the characters don't follow the Mourners, they can bang about the city through however many more encounters interest them until such time as they decide to look for the real action. That should be precipitated by a series of loud explosions (whenever appropriate and a thick pillar of black smoke rising over the horizon. The smoke is the funeral pyre for Lord Ember and several other noteworthies of Stygia, who have given their ultimate in an effort to defend the city.

A series of Wits + Enigmas (difficulty 7) rolls allows the characters to find their way through the city to the place where the remaining Deathlords, Guildmasters and Charon himself are making a last-ditch effort. Ironically enough, the final confrontation is taking place near the Onyx Tower itself. While Stygian and Guildwraith troops have swept many of the lesser Spectres before them, the largest knot of Shadow-eaten, and the one that contains the most powerful Spectres, is directly in front of the reborn Emperor himself.

Going Across Town

The fighting through much of the city has died down. The Spectres have been, in most cases, pushed back toward the walls or the harbor. That means that cross-city travel is not as hazardous as it might be, at least from one perspective.

On the other hand, there's a whole new set of navigational hazards to worry about now. Crumbled buildings make old maps of the city useless, and a wraith who formerly knew his way around Stygia is in for a series of nasty surprises. Taking to the skies with Argos to check on matters is a risky proposition because of the storm winds, so getting from point A to point B is a hit-and-miss proposition.

More threateningly, neither the sky nor the land is terribly stable at this point. Stygia has long been honeycombed with tunnels for secret meeting places, hideaways, workshops, bunkers, exhaust vents, Spectre storage facilities, forges, holding cells and other, less identifiable chambers. With the various shocks the Isle of Sorrows has taken in the past few hours, portions of the streets are collapsing into those underground rooms. The ground, and indeed the Isle itself, has become increasingly unstable. With winds and Spectral assaults toppling buildings as well, the city has begun the slow, but irrevocable slide into collapse.

Assistance

Hacking through six of Coldheart's Companions is no easy task, and it's quite possible that the characters simply aren't up to it. If that's the case, there's no shame in giving them a little bit of help. The best bet for that sort of thing, if you're thinking ahead, is allowing the wraiths to ransack buildings in earlier encounters, coming away with a supply of Barrowbombs, Instant Nihilis and the like, and being able to use these to great effect against the guard. Failing that, the Ferryman whom they met earlier can fight his way to their side and hold off some or all of the Companions, urging the wraiths to go in and take a crack at Coldheart.

Characters moving across the city should be able to keep an eye out for developing trouble from above or below. Periodic Perception + Alertness checks should allow the characters to see and avoid incipient disasters, though a chunk of plummeting masonry or two, or a sinkhole that suddenly opens beneath a character, could make for an exciting incident. Indeed, if the hole that opens up leads to someplace particularly interesting (a basement of a Guildhouse, for example, or a secret Legion weapons cache), it may be worthwhile to allow the wraiths to descend and check the situation out. Of course, they may not have been the only ones to find the inviting emptiness. Mortwights and Doppelgangers are particular hazards of this sort of exploration, and the Circle that descends so confidently into the wreckage of an Artificer's forge may come scrambling back out, post-haste, with a Shade on their heels.

The Last Hour

When the characters find Charon and his remaining cohorts, the situation is desperate. Though everywhere else in the city, the Legions and freewraiths are winning slow, steady victories, Oblivion has concentrated its forces here. Coldheart, general of the armies of the Labyrinth, knows that if he can destroy Charon he can effectively break the back of the Stygian resistance. As such, he's driven the cream of his troops here — Hekatonkhire, Pasiphae, monstrous Shades — and plowed directly into the vanguard of Stygian resistance, led by Charon, the remaining Deathlords and the Guildmasters who are still standing. The fight is brutal, the scene illuminated by flashes of light from Arcanoi unknown to lesser wraiths. Nihilis are constantly opening and closing, swallowing wraiths and disgorging Spectres. Coldheart stands at the back of his forces, directing the assault on the Stygian salient. Charon is at the forefront of the defenses, swinging Siklos with a will, surrounded by allies modern and ancient.

The characters come upon the scene from the flank and a little above, having a good view of the whole battlefield. Sharp-eyed characters (Perception + Alertness) can see off in the distance, a column of Ferryman cutting into the rear of the Spectral ranks and making a beeline for Coldheart himself. Even as the line against Charon moves back and forth (with entities on both sides going down in the press of battle), Coldheart shifts his forces to deal with the new threat.

This gives the characters their chance. With the main forces tied up with Charon, and the reserves being thrown in against the Ferryman, Coldheart's back is barely protected. A determined, quick thrust just might get through. The only wraiths in position to make that assault, however, are the characters. A Perception + Leadership roll (difficulty 5) allows one of the characters to notice that fact. After that, it's up to the wraiths.

Into the Breach

The characters' charge to Coldheart is not an easy one. There are still milling ranks of Doppelgangers and Mortwights in the way, who aren't going to lay down and let the wraiths walk over them. Instead, they fight with the fury of desperation. Fortunately for the characters, as they charge into the fray, the Skeletal Lord is overwhelmed and many of the Spectres who might otherwise foil the charge rush to the front.

Fighting to get past an opponent is very different than fighting to subdue or destroy. Should a player choose, on a successful attack he can take one die off his damage pool and consider his character to have "moved past" the Spectre. Characters who try to hack down every Spectre in their way are liable to get bogged down and swamped, but those who seek to avoid or move past opponents still stand a chance of getting to Coldheart.

After three turns of this sort of advance, Coldheart notices the characters' approach. He orders his personal guard to deal with them, then turns back to directing the battle. The guard, six members of Coldheart's Companions (see below), are powerful and determined Spectres, and they can't be moved past. The good thing about the situation is that Coldheart stops paying attention to the characters once the guard engages them, and gives them no further thought.

Coldheart

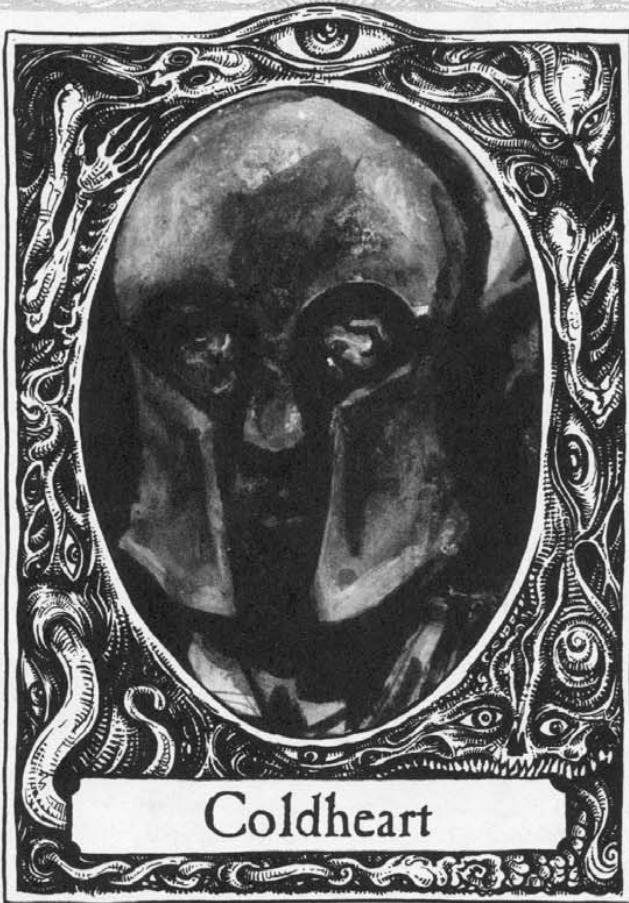
When the wraiths burst through the Companions, Coldheart isn't paying attention to them. He's too busy shouting orders, trying to take advantage of the weakening Stygian left flank (The Emerald Lord and some of the more prominent Guildwraiths have been taken down, and there's an opportunity there that he's trying to exploit.) In other words, the leading wraiths get a free shot at him, and then Coldheart turns on them with all of his fury.

Coldheart is an efficient warrior. He's been around a very long time, and he's not only survived but flourished in the most hostile environment imaginable. Despite his status as a Nephwrack, he has considerable power both physical and metaphysical, and he's trained in its use. When he turns his attention to the wraiths, they had best be ready for a fury of the likes of which they have never seen.

Antagonists

Coldheart's Companions

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4
Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2
Mental: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Perception 4
Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Dodge 4, Intimidation 4, Subterfuge 2
Skills: Firearms 4, Leadership 3, Melee 5, Stealth 2
Knowledges: Enigmas 2, Law 1, Occult 3
Dark Passions: Defend Coldheart (Loyalty) 5, Destroy the Underworld (Hatred) 3, Harrow Enemies (Sadism) 3



Coldheart

Arcanoi/Dark Arcanoi: Keening 1, Moliate 4, Outrage 3, Usury 1, Contaminate 3, Hive-Mind 4, Larceny 4, Shroud-Rending 2, Tempestos 3, Tempest-Weaving 3

Corpus: 10

Being: 8

Angst: 10

Artifacts: Relic rifles — Difficulty 7, Damage 7, Range 150 yards, Rate 3, Clip 42+1

See **Wraith: The Oblivion**, page 261 for the details on other firearms if you choose to arm the Companions thus.

Coldheart

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 1

Mental: Intelligence 4, Wits 5, Perception 5

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Perception 4

Talents: Alertness 5, Athletics 2, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Dodge 4, Intimidation 5, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Firearms 5, Leadership 5, Melee 5, Performance 3, Stealth 4

Knowledges: Bureaucracy 4, Enigmas 4, Law 3, Occult 4

Dark Passions: Destroy the Underworld (Hatred) 5, Find and Harrow the Wraith of Alexander (Anger) 5, Find Peace (Fear) 3

Arcanoi/Dark Arcanoi: Keening 4, Moliate 5, Outrage 5, Usury 3, Contaminate 4, Hive-Mind 5, Larceny 5, Shroud-Rending 2, Tempestos 5, Tempest-Weaving 3

Corpus: 15

Being: 10

Angst: 10

Artifacts: Coldheart always carries a relic pistol in one hand and a Soulsteel sword in the other.

Pistol — Difficulty 7, Damage 4, Range 20 yards, Rate 4, Clip 17+1

Sword — Difficulty 6, Damage Strength +4 (aggravated)

Victory!

With any luck, the wraiths vanquish Coldheart. His death-scream resounds across the battlefield, causing every combatant to pause as Oblivion swallows its servant once and for all. At this point, the tide turns irrevocably against the Spectres. The beleaguered Stygian position stabilizes and goes on the offensive. The Ferrymen resume their ruthlessly efficient work. Spectres begin fleeing in all directions, to be caught by Mourners or carried off by Maelstrom winds. The battle quickly becomes a rout. The day, such as it is, is won.


With the battlefield cleared of Spectres, Charon strides across the wreckage to where the characters stand. With him are a smattering of guards, a few Mnemoi, the Lady of Fate and a few others. Of the Deathlords, there are no sign. Charon greets the characters warmly and thanks them for their invaluable assistance. He expresses sorrow for any losses they might have suffered, and concern for Stygia as a whole. Subtle tremors now rock the Isle, and more and more buildings are beginning to collapse into rubble.

Charon then motions the wraiths to return with him to the base of the Onyx Tower. "My time here is about finished, I am afraid, but there are still things which need to be done. Walk with me." Saying this, he turns and heads back to the Tower. Ranks of Mourners, Mnemoi, surviving wraiths, Ferrymen and other interested observers form a circle around the open space before the Onyx Tower, and Charon motions the wraiths inside. The last act of Charon's drama has begun.

Transcendence

Charon stands in the middle of the open space before his Tower. With an idle gesture he sets aside his mask and Siklos. Characters who ask what he's doing get no verbal answer, just another gesture pointing out toward the city, which lies in ruins. Fully half the buildings show major damage, from shell holes to corroded faces to total collapse. Fires burn everywhere. Shattered equipment commemorates where wraiths fell in combat. The battle for control of the city will end in a sort of triumph, but the city itself can scarcely act as the center of the Empire anymore. Its time is past. Victory makes an orderly withdrawal possible, but does not redeem the damage done. Charon does not weep. He stares with a steady, clear-eyed gaze, clearly trying to fix every detail in his memory.

"I see my empire's end," he says at last. "It is not what I dreamed of. But it lasted long enough for you, my heirs, to help bring the consummation. You have earned the right to take up my mantle, just as today I and my Senators have earned the right to lay that burden down. I give you as many of my memories as will aid you, as much power as you can use wisely, and my blessing. Do not refuse this thing. Though the way will be hard, my gracious Lady," and he inclines his head to the Lady of Fate, "has shown me a promise of better things for you. Perhaps you will have better success making your dreams tangible than I did. Go in whatever peace Fate and the gods give you. Best to stand



back now, as I fear the fire of my passing might scorch you." He smiles sadly.

In other words, Charon has just sprung the surprise of the ages on the characters. They are to be his heirs, to take up the dream of a safe Underworld and Transcendence, and to rebuild the Empire in their own image if they so choose. If they argue, Charon tells them that it was written long ago, and that their adventures have been a test to prove their worthiness. They have passed, and to refuse the honor would be to try to deny Fate itself. The responsibility and power are theirs, for now and evermore.

Charon sings an ancient song softly to himself. It's a lullaby of his childhood, a blessing to last through the mysteries of the night. The characters feel a soft, warm wind at their backs, and light pours down from the stormy skies above. They step back as a pillar of light stabs down from the skies, enfolding Charon. From somewhere, a second voice joins Charon. *Everyone* who's met her recognizes the Lady of Fate's distinctive tone. The lullaby comes to a conclusion as the light blazes brighter than the Skinlands Sun, as bright as the initial outburst of the Sixth Great Maelstrom. At the climactic moment, the top floor of the Onyx Tower implodes, leaving behind a small glow that flickers on and off throughout the rest of the scene. Charon and his works are gone, Siklos and his mask melted to slag on the ground.

The Lady of Fate is the one who finally breaks the stillness of the scene. She says nothing as she steps up to the characters. Nor does she speak as she stands in front of each one, embracing the wraith and tracing the mark of fate on the character's brow. Still silent, she walks through the crowd, down the Road of Souls, to the waterfront. There the oldest surviving Ferryman waits to escort her to wherever it is she waits out the years ahead.

Epilogue and Coda

The Stygian Empire is over now. Its founder gone and its capital a smoldering ruin, the Empire endures only as a memory and as an ideal. As the years pass, the legend of Stygia will grow, perhaps serving as inspiration for new generations of the Restless Dead. For the moment, however, it survives only in its extremities, in the besieged Necropoli and the souls of the wraiths who saw its glory.

The characters must now decide where to go. Ferryman encourage them to descend to the waterfront; other wraiths gather around the characters, and may as well gather at points of embarkation as anywhere else. Every so often another weakened build-

ing collapses. Out in the distant Tempest, the Maelstrom regathers its strength and Spectres flit across the horizon.

One of the Ferryman points out to the characters a beacon of calm air emanating from the light at the top of the Onyx Tower. It swings around aimlessly at the moment. As the characters come to a decision about where to go, the beam becomes steady in that direction, a Byway that lasts long enough to empty the Isle of Sorrows.

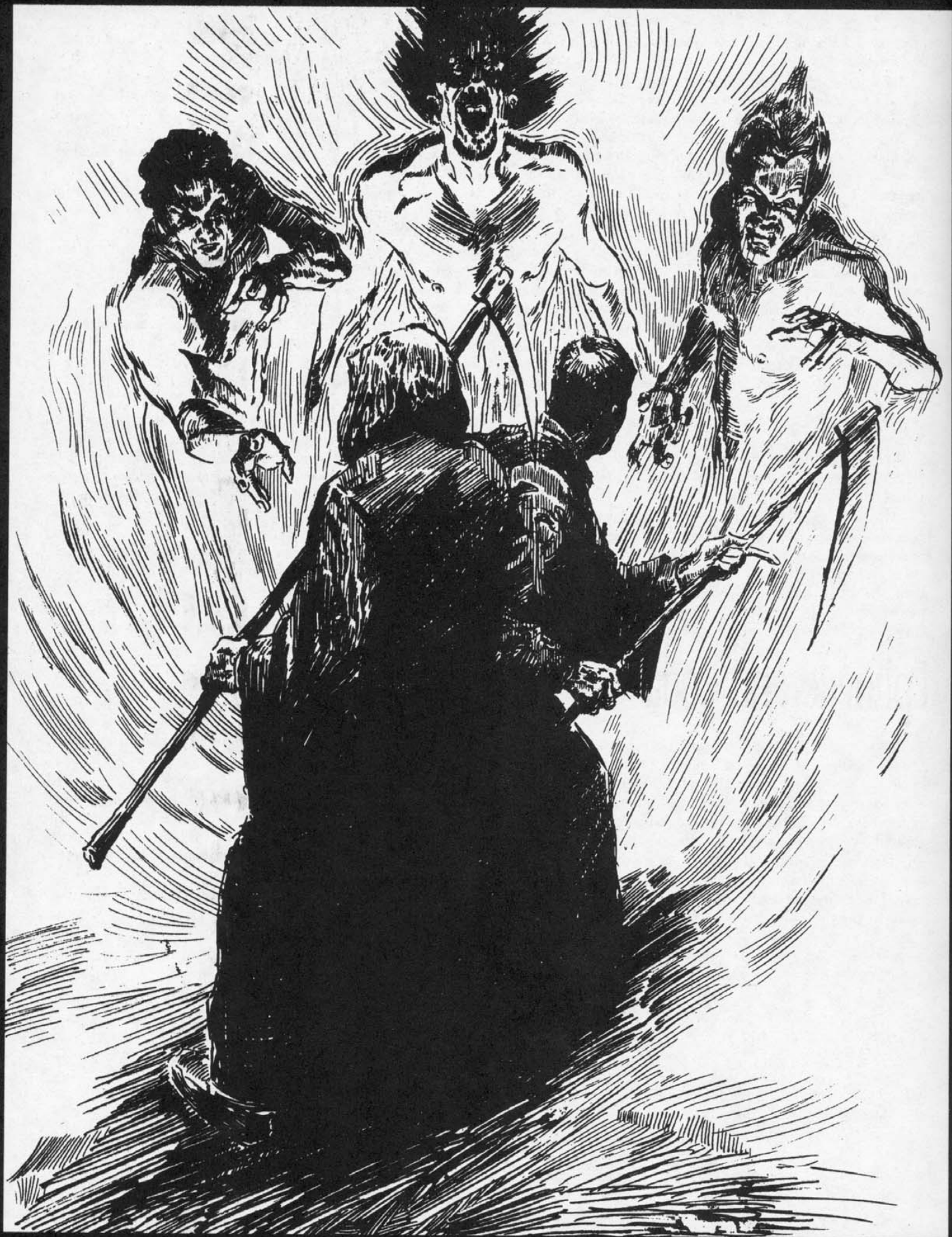
Argos-expert wraiths bring reports of battles throughout the Shadowlands. The Great Maelstrom wiped out much of Yu Huang's invasion force. Some beachheads remain, turning the usual battles between wraiths and Spectres into a three-way struggle. The instant Byways created for the invasion all shattered in the storm's first seconds, so Jade soldiers now have no lines of communication to the Middle Kingdom. The storm's fury ripped through most conventional defenses; in many Necropoli, a majority of wraiths perished in the first hour of the Great Maelstrom. In other Necropoli the destruction spread more slowly, but no messenger bears a tale of a Necropolis doing particularly well.

The characters feel the first stirrings of Charon's gifts of power as the reports come in. Over the next few scenes, their scores in existing Arcanoi rise to 5, and they gain knowledge of the arts kept secret by Guilds and Legions in addition to the common arts. Their Willpower rises to 10. Their permanent Angst falls to 1, their Shadows no doubt screaming at the sudden loss of power. (The characters aren't becoming Ferryman; their Shadows remain, merely weakened for the moment. Normal mechanics should apply in future scenes.) Attributes of less than 3 rise to 3. Those who lack Eidolon 1 gain it now. The characters take on a limited form of the confidence that Charon radiated during most of his last stay in Stygia. For the next year, it will cost them one less experience point than usual per level to learn new Arcanoi and Abilities.

The gifts don't make the characters wiser, smarter or more virtuous. They can do more things, probe further and respond in new ways, but they don't stop being who they were. Their Natures remain, along with their Shadows. In addition, they must still make the decision: where to go?

Once the characters settle on a location — be it a favored Necropolis, a ruined spot on which to build anew or simply some safe corner of the River of Death known to the Ferryman — the final exodus begins in earnest. Charon's Byway lets them make the passage safely. What the characters do next marks the beginning of the next story.

This one, however — Stygia's story, Charon's story and **Wraith's** story — has ended.



Picture this scene, if you will: A thousand Ferryman poling their rafts in utter silence, each drawn inexorably to the Weeping Bay. They move in straight lines, like drops of water running down a spiderweb. No one speaks. No one has to; everyone knows what must be done. Ahead of us is a dying city. We are here to ease its pain.

Now, if you can picture that, get the hell away from me because I'm busy. A Spectre comes howling up the Street of Empty Bottles at me, and I make like a vegetable slicer with my scythe. It boils away, screaming, and I turn to look for the next attack. At my back, Severus — at least I think it's Severus — swings like a mechanical thresher. The scythe goes up, the scythe comes down and then there's one less Spectre infesting the streets of the Imperial City.

We're on the perimeter, wordlessly charged with holding this position when all hell broke loose. It's been a blur since the moment we all set foot on the island. The older ones began wailing then, making a sound to chill the soul. On some level I assumed they were doing something with Keening, but in the here-and-now it scared the hell out of me. We moved into the streets silently, sweeping the Spectres that had infested the city before us. Stygian soldiers joined us, unwilling to believe what they saw but desperately glad for the help. Over by the Onyx Tower there was something going on — the light show that came arcing up into the clouds was proof of that — but we had no time to head that way.

Why? Because under our very feet, the guts of the island tore themselves apart and vomited forth 10000 Spectres into the alleyways. I'd heard stories that one of the secret societies on the Isle had tucked a few doomshades away in the basement for purposes of experimentation, but I couldn't have imagined something like this.

And now all of those fat, greedy, maddened pigeons were coming home to roost. The screams make themselves heard over the storm winds and whatever the hell is going on over by the Tower, but I don't care. I've got business in front of me here.

Every so often I can feel Severus' eyes on me. He hasn't said word one since we took our position, but I get the sense he's judging my performance. I wonder briefly how I'm measuring up, then turn as a Doppelganger hurls itself from a rooftop at me. There's no time to get the scythe up, so I roll out of the way as it impacts on the cobbles next to me and snarls.

Severus, to my infinitesimal surprise, just watches.

"Two hundred fucking years I was in that jar do you understand what that means you son of a bitch I'm going to make you pay for every second I was in there cut off alone couldn't hear the others couldn't touch the others I want to make you *bleed*!" As near as I can tell, that's what the Spectre is saying, and then it leaps for me.

I bring the scythe up in a defensive posture, but he dodges to the side and rips along my ribs. The cloth of my robe flows around his hand, but his claws sink into my Corpus. Before the shock hits me, I bring the blade around and clip him on the side of the head, but that's all I have time to do before the pain hits.

I've been in scraps before. I've fought Legionnaires and slavers, and even the occasional Spectre in my time. I've been cut, and cut deep. I've been Harrowed, and seen things that were supposed to be my sisters taken to pieces for my benefit. But I've never felt anything that hurt like this before. Is it because I'm a Ferryman now? Is it some kind of tradeoff that I have to make?

Horseshit. It's because you got cocky.

It's my other half, trying to distract me again. I ignore him, and steady myself for the Spectre's next attack.

You put on Severus' pajamas and decided that it made you Captain Charon. No brains as usual, always going for the quick and easy explanation.

The Doppelganger feints high and comes in low, its claws dripping something black and poisonous-looking. I twist to the side and try to bring the scythe around in an arc that will catch the back of my opponent's knees, but he rolls right. My blade strikes sparks off the stones as he comes to his feet again.

Of course you can't get hurt now that you're a Ferryman. Of course you're invulnerable. Of course you don't need to guard your left – whoops!

And that's exactly where the bastard nails me. He punches in under my guard and through my robe, and suddenly his hand is in my ectoplasmic guts, ripping for all he's worth. I scream and drop the scythe. Severus just watches, the impassive son of a bitch. This is it. Here is where I fail. Here is where I fall.

Don't you fucking dare quit on me now, Erik. It's not over, you little prick. I am not letting you get off before the end of the ride. Fight back!

The Spectre's face is right in front of mine. He's mouthing senseless obscenities as he rips chunks of my soul away. The scythe is inches away, but it's useless where it is. I'm helpless.

Five fucking years without that scythe, and now you can't do without it? You're fucking pathetic! Why the hell do you think those scary bastards picked you? Do something!

Five years without it... Severus is watching... All of them are watching, somehow.

I have to do something. What would I have done before I became... what I might be? The pain makes it hard to think. I'm on my back now, one arm nearly bitten through by the thing on top of me in his hurry to tear me to shreds.

And then it comes to me. I concentrate, as much as I can, on my hand. It's still shot through with spines, a memento of the early days of my death. The spines are needle-sharp and hard as steel, and the story of them has gotten around enough that I'm instantly recognized in most Necropoli.

Now I need them, and they come to my call. Each rips itself out of my hand with a tiny shriek. Each is barbed and jagged, and each hurts unimaginably coming out. And then, each flies straight and true into the face of the Doppelganger who's destroying me and shreds him. He collapses in a pile of fragments, then wafts away in a matter of seconds.


It's over that quickly.

I slowly haul myself to my feet, doing my best to force my Corpus to knit itself back together as I do so. My robe is wet with plasm, and there's a godawful stench on the wind. The scythe is on the ground not far away. I reach for it and wait for sarcastic commentary from my Shadow, but there is none. There's no sign of the spines, either. They're gone with the Spectre.

Severus is gone, too. That doesn't surprise me. I guess I've failed. All around me, I can hear the sounds of an empire in its death throes. I wonder if Rome sounded like this when it was sacked, or Byzantium when the Crusaders rode in. It doesn't much matter now, I guess. Even the ghosts of those cities are about to crash amidst flame and thunder. It's time to play my part in the final scene, though truth be told I feel like a spear-carrier in a high school production of *Coriolanus*.

Since Severus abandoned our post, I assume it's not necessary to hold it any more. There's an echo of confirmation somewhere in my skull, but I assume it's my Shadow and ignore it. One direction seems as good as the next, so I wend my way down the Street of the Lamplighters and go looking for trouble.

I don't find it. Instead, as I come around a bend in the road, I find something entirely different and wonderful. I find her, and everything changes all over again.



By Charon's Oar: The History of the Ferrymen

And then the lightning of the lamps
—T.S. Eliot, "Preludes"

Ghost Story: Dies Irae



Peculiar, isn't it? To look at Dis from here, you would think it nothing more than another of the Tempest's many Sargasso Seas, just another crush of ruined, Spectre-haunted ships come to their final rest in this eye of the eternal storm. I can distantly hear the calls of the Shadow-eaten who infest the wrecks, their shared impressions of the Hive-Mind echoing faintly over the Bridge of Memory. Yet there is more to this lonely field of forgotten boats than meets the eye — much more.

Left here, then right, then right again. The hulks loom around us, each rocking at a different and irregular tempo, making a quiet cacophony of grindings and groans. Had my passenger so much as shifted position during our voyage, I would caution him not to move. The corridor of safety through the Labyrinth is narrow indeed. But such caution seems unnecessary for our benefactor, who betrays not more animation than a statue. In any case, he has made this trip often enough to know not to raise his arms or stand while we traverse the barrier. Though Nhudri's Embrace prevents the Shades from attacking us, there are other, less selective dangers sown quite thickly through the maze. Not even I know all the hazards that await those who stray from the narrow, unmarked zones of safety. Luckily for both

of us, I am quite adept at spotting the minute signs left by my fellows to indicate which paths are open.

And so, in silence, I pole our jackal-headed benefactor through the watery corridors that guard the city of Dis. What brings him to call us to redeem our pledge now, after so many centuries, I will not venture to guess, and he is clearly unwilling to share. I glance across the mirror-calm surface of the Tempest around us and sense a storm in the wind, a storm greater than the Underworld has seen in quite some time. A storm that will tear at the eaves of even the Boatmen's Society. So be it, then — the Ferrymen have never shirked an oath before, and I do not think we will begin now.

Not quite at the center of the maze lies our goal: an acropolis temple, crumbling and Maelstrom-scoured, the last grim tooth of Dis thrust up defiant in the darkness. Who or what erected this city in the Tempest we do not know. She is a city of the ancients, walled and circular, quartered by great avenues for the triumphs of her conquering heroes. Her drowned acropolis is covered in temples and a mighty citadel. No doubt it was the pride of its builders, if human hands built it at all. Now it lies below the Tempest, drowned in first kisses and sourceless grief for lost pets, slipped beneath the sea of dreams and agony.

I pull my boat up to the age-scarred steps and steady it with the pole of my scythe. With the fluid grace of an automaton, Anubis steps onto the covered terrace. Unearthly creature — I need not have steadied the boat at all. Impassive and silent, he watches as I drag the boat out of the Sea of Shadows, across the

portico and into the temple. As I settle my craft with the boats of the others, I notice that most of us are here. Reaching out across the Bridge, I feel the reassuring murmur of my fellows below us, cut through with the hazy buzzing of the Shades patrolling the boats outside. Turning, I find my passenger — our guest and Benefactor — standing just behind me, watching with those cool eyes of his. He turns with his unearthly grace, and walks toward the place where the altar once stood, without hesitating to see if I would join him. Arrogant, or just cold? I cannot decide.

Anubis descends the steps ahead of me, each step taking him closer to our *sanctum sanctorum*. Our hands have chiseled these tunnels from the very bedrock of the Labyrinth. Unaided, we have carved the great chambers where we store our millennia's worth of secrets. It was the Society that repaired the submerged temples and fortress of Dis' acropolis and made them tight against the tendrils of the Storm Which Knows No End. All this we have done, and thus have we made this place our own. No outsider has ever walked these halls and returned to tell the tale, save for the jackal-headed enigma who proceeds me to the meeting chamber. Very well, then, let the announcement come without delay. I send my mind across the Bridge, and beckon the others to the gathering place. Soon, then, we shall see what our Benefactor requires of us.

We flow into the Great Hall like black oil, from our workshops and gathering places. Crowded together but quiet, we file into the ranks of pews at this, our place of assembly. As one of the First, my place is at the front. Behind me, the ranks of my peers fill the amphitheater, almost wordlessly. The Navigatus stands at

his place, without lectern or chair, and Anubis, our Benefactor of so many years ago, stands beside him. The Navigator steps forward, and the sudden and total silence throws the previous din of whispered conversation into stark relief


When Anubis speaks, it is not as if his voice is the voice of a man, or the noises of an animal, but rather as if the desires of an immeasurably vast will are translated into a form that we can understand. His glittering jackal's eyes seem to meet mine and, I am certain, the eyes of every other Boatman in the room. "I come to you on a matter of gravest importance, and speak not only with my own voice, but with the voice of the Council of Osiris, and with the voice of the Avenger Of His Father.

"Many of the Boatmen's Society no doubt know of the city in the Tempest known to its inhabitants as Enoch, a nest of the drinkers-of-blood that was sacked and set to barrowflame by Coldheart's armies during the Third Great Maelstrom. Some of you may even know that the city's inhabitants have resumed their residence of late, rebuilding the ruins with the help of Thralls."

A sussuruss ensues, a shifting of feet. If any of us knew this thing, then they have not shared it with their brothers. After a perfectly measured pause, Anubis continues, "What perhaps none of you know is that there is a brood among these vipers whose meat and drink is the flesh of the Dead, and whose blood can enslave the Restless as effectively as the Quick.

"Two of the Shemsu-Heru, the immortal servants of the Avenger Of His Father, came upon one of these abominable creatures using its powers of deceit to travel through Armenti unseen. They apprehended it, and brought it before the Throne of Osiris. There, the loyal servants of the Avenger Of His Father caused





this viper to reveal its mission and the name of the traitor who had betrayed the location of our land to the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

"That traitor is now Without Name, though before its foul existence was likewise wiped from the Slate of the World, the drinker-of-blood also revealed to us its mission. It had come, it told us, to make for itself servants among our people. It also revealed that Amenti had not been its only destination. After a sojourn among our people, it was apparently bound to keep appointments with its agents on the Isle of Sorrows."

There is another commotion, and it not an uneasy or a frightened one. Whatever hatred we bear for the Hierarchy, we are Stygia's guardians, just as our cousins the Shemsu-Heru are the guardians of Amenti. Anubis smiles, perhaps, and continues over the sound of our shifting feet and robes. "The Lords of Amenti and the Avenger Of His Father have thus asked me to come before you. Our people are few, and the Shemsu-Heru even fewer.

"Thus, by the treaty between Osiris, Emperor of Amenti, and the Boatmen's Society, by which the Ritual of Severance was taught to the followers of Master Charon, we request that the Boatmen's Society unleash the might of your people against the city of Enoch, that no stone be left standing upon another, and that the Tal'Mahe'Ra be scourged from the Underworld until it is as if they had never existed. I leave you now, that you may plan. I give you this list of agents in the city of Stygia that the servant of Apophis so willingly gave to us, before the viper was Unmade. Do with it as you will."

And then our Benefactor is gone, and there is chaos.

It is some many days later, after plans have been made and many, many oracles have been cast. I stand atop the Temple of Dis, watching the Boatmen scurry forth on their missions in the Underworld. One by one, they slip through the maze and are gone. In the far distance, almost out of sight, a storm is gathering. Even from here, the black flashes cast sharp shadows, and occasionally the shrieks of the Shadow-eaten riding the storm-winds can be heard.

I hear the feet behind me, and know it is the Navigator. From over my shoulder comes his voice. "There's a storm brewing, Severus." "Indeed there is."

"I am sorry that you must be the one, and about your student."

I shrug off his hand on my shoulder. "Tell me, Navigatus: How long do you think that they—that *he* knew? The wording of the treaty — so precise. The situation in Stygia so delicately balanced. Has all of this, *all* of this," and I gesture to indicate the maze of ancient, rotting ships, and Dis, and perhaps the Underworld in general, "really been nothing more than a move in some elaborate game? Have three thousand years of history really done nothing more than prepare us for the day the hand of our master reaches down and moves us two ranks forward and one row left?"

"Don't be so melodramatic. Even if that is precisely the case, has it changed anything? Are you somehow more a pawn if the hand that moves you is that of Horus, rather than that of Fate? We have always known this day would come, when the storm would break and blow the kingdom of ages into ash. Do you think that the masters of Amenti are not just threads on the loom? Certainly, perhaps Horus' hand moves us into play, but whose hand moves Horus?"

"I find that cold comfort, Navigatus."

"It is the only comfort you will receive, Severus. Now go — the storm is drawing closer."

And indeed it is, and so I go to cast my student into the jaws of Fate. If there is a God, then I hope that He will have mercy on my soul when I see Him.

History

Who are the Ferryman, that their secrets have never passed outside their tightly closed ranks? To some wraiths, they are the messengers of the Far Shores and enigmatic crusaders for justice. To others, they are nothing more than Charon's former secret police, fallen from grace and surviving on their reputation. The truth, as always, is both more complex and more simple than anything outsiders could imagine.

Founded shortly after Charon received his mandate from the Lady of Fate — before even the First Great Maelstrom had rumbled up from the Labyrinth — the Ferryman swore an oath to protect those who would seek Transcendence and to police the Underworld for those who would cross the Shroud to abuse the Quick. Like Charon, many of the wraiths who originally chose to join the Ferryman were of Mycenaean origin, or of the other peoples who would one day make up the Greek nation. These wraiths considered their duty sacred, as indeed it was, and thus they made their organization in the image of the mystery cults that flourished among the Quick of their homeland.

The First Days of the Mandate

In the early days of its existence, the cult of the Ferryman was also commonly known as the Boatmen's Society or the Oath-circle of the Oar. An organization based on initiation and mystery, the Ferryman were the first organized group to serve the wraith who would one day be Emperor of the Underworld. To them, Charon was first among equals, their leader in the task of aiding the Restless to pass on to the Lands Beyond, where they could find peace. It was for Charon that the Ferryman who would come to be known as the Shining Ones traveled to the Far Shores in search of the knowledge that would allow them to perform their task more effectively.

The Boatmen's Society was never entirely comfortable with Charon in his role as ruler of the Dead. To them, the idea of a permanent Kingdom of the Dead was a necessary evil, a means of defense against the threat of the Shadow-eaten. Idealists, the Ferryman struggled to find weapons for use in the battle against Oblivion, and to assist individual souls in their quest for Transcendence. Charon's embassy to the Far Shores was not taken at the behest of his people — among all but the oldest Dead, Charon had the legitimacy of that which is and always has been. The quest for the Seven Signs was taken to satisfy the Ferryman, who insisted that Charon assume his mantle as First Wraith only with the agreement of those who he ultimately served.

It was Charon's first act to grant the Ferryman their own territory inside the nascent city of Stygia, to balance the honor given the more temporally oriented Senators. On this dockside land the Boatmen's Society established the Legations of the Shining Ones. In these antechambers to the Far Shores, the Ferryman and the representatives of the Shining Ones worked to divide those souls who sought the Far Shores, sending each one to a destination suited to its needs and beliefs.

The Alienation of the Ferryman

Though the dispute never spilled outside the closed circle of the Boatmen, the founding of Stygia, Charon's Seat Eternal, began the process of alienation between Charon and the other members of the Boatmen's Society. This alienation would continue until Charon's assumption of the title "Emperor" catalyzed the final split between the First Ferryman and his most faithful servants. None of the original Senators were members of the Oath-circle of the Oar. Instead, the Senators were chosen from other notables of the nascent Empire, a decision which suited both Charon and the Ferryman well. The Boatmen had no interest in temporal power over souls; they wished only to escort lost ones beyond the pale of the Shadowlands. Charon, meanwhile, needed a structure to administer the ever-growing mass of the Dead, and to regulate the actions of those who wished to cross the Shroud to resolve unfinished matters — a matter in which Charon sympathized with many of the Restless he ruled.

It quickly became apparent to the Ferryman that their worries regarding the establishment of the Republic were well-founded indeed. Charon's first two acts after his position as Consul was established were the Tithe of the Dead and the establishment of the *Lux Veritatis*. The *Lux Veritatis* the Ferryman simply saw as a needless frivolity — resources going to waste gathering statues when they could have been used to reap Enfants. The Underworld was not the final resting place for the Dead, and making the Deadlands aesthetically pleasing was least among the Boatmen's worries.

But if the Boatmen saw the *Lux Veritatis* as a superfluous dissipation of resources, then they perceived the tithe as an unspeakable abomination. They saw it as a blasphemous corruption of the informal tithe they themselves charged, an institutionalized mockery of the Ferryman's ideal. With the imposition of the tithe and the maiming of the Needy Dead, an irreparable breach was made between the Oath-circle and its titular leader. Though the Senators took the masks that Charon offered them, the Ferryman flatly refused any gifts forged from the tithe-pennies.

In an attempt to make good the wrongs committed by the Republic, the Boatmen tended as well as they could to the mutilated wretches created by Charon's brutal policy. Those unfortunates they could find, the Ferryman sent to the Far Shores, hoping that they might fare beyond the Underworld to a place where their maiming could be mended. Many more of these pathetic wraiths vanished without a trace not long after their disfigurement by the servants of Charon and his Senators. Not even the far-ranging Ferryman could find these lost cripples, and it was believed they were lost to Oblivion.

It was only during the First Great Maelstrom that the true fate of the lost became known. The tithe-maimed had indeed fallen to Oblivion, but not in so agreeable a fashion as a plummet into the Well of the Void. It was from the ranks of these poor devils that the Nephwracks and ultimately the Onceborn first sprang. It was these eyeless, handless wretches who first knelt down in the darkness of the Labyrinth and begged Oblivion to wipe away the Underworld that had treated them so brutally. And because the time was right, their prayers were answered; the First Great Maelstrom welled up from the Void and poured across the Shadowlands and Stygia alike, and the Shadow-eaten tithe-maimed came with the storm winds.

The Flight into Exile

After the Maelstrom, the practice of maiming the Needy Dead was discontinued. Charon wisely offered no apology to the Ferryman for his error; it would not have been accepted in any case. Charon did the only thing he felt he could, given the growing menace of Oblivion — he founded the Dark Empire of Iron. With but a single act, Charon had become Emperor of the Dead. And in response, the vast majority of the Ferryman rebelled, as Charon had known they would. Many descended the Veinous Stair to throw themselves into the Well of the Void (or, others say, to become the creatures of Oblivion known as the Pasiphae). Other Boatmen set out for the Far Shores, or simply abandoned their posts and went back to their original, nomadic ways. These latter rebels Charon banished from his sight, banning them forever from the Isle of Sorrows.

The departure of the Ferryman marked a period of chaos in the process of transporting souls to the Far Shores. When the Boatmen's Society forsook their duties, none of the Ferryman who worked in the Legations remained behind on the Isle of Sorrows. Some set off for the Far Shores themselves, and the rest went into exile. It was years until there were sufficient well-trained Imperial personnel working in the Legations to assure a smooth transit for souls bound to the Far Shores. Transition to more efficient Imperial management definitely improved the performance of the Legations; in the first decade after the departure of the Ferryman, the number of souls departing from Stygian havens tripled, and it continued to increase gradually thereafter until the final exile of the Shining Ones.

Those loyalists who remained in Imperial service were mostly low-ranking Ferryman who had not yet taken their final initiation into the Oath-circle. There were, however, a few full Ferryman who remained, bound by their oath of loyalty to Charon and sympathetic to the Emperor's situation. These latter Ferryman were excommunicated from the Boatmen's Society, and would later form the core of the *Magisterium Veritatis*, the Stygian secret police.

For novice Ferryman who remained loyal to the Hierarchy, there was apparently no advancement in the Cult. While they were eventually promoted to positions of authority, none of these lesser Boatmen demonstrated the Ferryman's uncanny immunity to Catharsis or total resistance to Arcanoi that affect the mind. Those few fully initiated Ferryman remaining in the Empire were demonstrably still possessed of these abilities. This handful of holdovers from the pre-Republic era proved their exceptional value as the directors of the Magistracy of Truth. When the conspiracies of the Solicitors Guild were uncovered a few short centuries after the foundation of the Empire, it was these excommunicated Boatmen who were crucial to breaking the Guild's sinister web of intrigue and the destruction of the Center of the Wheel, the master (or perhaps executive board) of the Solicitors.

The Modern Era

And so things went for centuries. With the arrival of the Fishers' Golden Ship and the establishment of the Far Shore for this growing new faith, the number of souls who departed the havens of the Legations for the Far Shores swelled ever larger. Though the exiled Ferryman would have no business with the Fishers, Stygia would. The temples of Paradise increased in size, and soon had roofs and doors of gold.

The *Magisterium Veritatis* began inquiring into the situation of the Fishers and their sudden riches, and found many

disturbing facts: That they portrayed themselves as the keepers of the only Christian Far Shore (there were 19 such establishments registered at the Legations), and that the Fishers had not only misreported the number of souls they handled to the Hierarchy for venal purposes, but that they had also neglected to inform many souls that the Hierarchy existed at all, instead portraying the Underworld as the road to Heaven (that is, their Paradise). In some cases, unwilling souls had been forcibly detained, placed in Nhudri's Embrace or even Moliated to prevent their escape.

Charon was most wroth at this news. When the *Magisterium* announced that they believed the Fishers had been plotting against Stygian rule, Charon ordered the Crusaders disbanded and doubled the Fishers' tithe while the Unlidged Eye finished its investigation. The Fishers' futile assault on the Onyx Tower and the dispatching of legates to the Far Shores is history, as is the subsequent exile of the Heretics.

It seemed as if the Shining Ones had betrayed their cause, and yet the Ferryman still carried souls to the Far Shores. At times, the Ferryman clashed with the Hierarchy, while at other times it seemed as if the Boatmen's Society had declared war on Heretic groups (particularly the Fishers). Legends sprang up that the Ferryman had never actually taken souls to the Far Shores, but to someplace else. In some stories, the Ferryman were brutal slavers, or worse, Spectres. In other tales, they were the guardians of the keys to Paradise and had fled Stygian persecution when the Far Shores had bought off the Empire. In those latter stories, it had been the attempted *coup*, not the conditions, which had brought the justice of Charon down on the Fishers. As was their way, the

Ferryman said little, and continued to carry away those souls who would go with them, never to be seen again.


The Current Day

And so it was that the Ferryman worked their way into the landscape of Stygia. Though there were occasional clashes with the Hierarchy, the strength of the Boatmen's Society, their staunchly apolitical stance and the lingering sympathies from their former service to the Emperor of the Underworld prevented any large-scale conflict.

It was not until the middle of the 20th century that the Ferryman again made their influence known on a large scale. All across Europe and Eurasia, genocides were taking place — mass murders that the Stygian government resolutely overlooked rather than dealing with the political consequences of once again filling the ranks of the Grim Legion to overflowing. While the Legions looked on impassively, thousands of souls were falling to Oblivion, or being carried there by their Shadow-eaten fellows. For the Ferryman, this repetition of the same sins that had brought about the First Great Maelstrom was too much. Entering the political fray for the first time in centuries, the Ferryman took Stygia by surprise. First supporting the *Dybbuks* in the negotiations that led to the Partition Accords, and then again in the Covenant of Millions, the Ferryman forced Stygian recognition of the problem of the *Shoah*-dead.

As the Covenant of Millions was concluded, the Steering Committee sent a private message to the Hierarchy: political consequences be damned, the Hierarchy would accept the victims of





genocide into its ranks, or the Boatmen's Society would see to the establishment of as many secondary governments as were necessary to afford those souls adequate protection. With the Covenant of Millions fresh in mind, and reeling from the loss of Charon and the devastation of the Fifth Great Maelstrom, the Deathlords conceded to the Ferrymen in their role as spokesmen for the millions. The ranks of the Hierarchy were perforce opened, and the Armenians, the purge victims and the millions of other Restless generated by the atrocities of the century of monsters were grudgingly accepted into the society of the Dead. Never again would the Boatmen's Society coexist placidly with the Hierarchy, and never again would the Hierarchy turn its back on millions for the sake of political expedience.

Anubis and Neter-khertet

Before even the Republic was founded, the Boatmen traveled across the Underworld in search of new lands, in search of souls in need of aid and guidance. South, across the Mediterranean Ocean, the Ferrymen discovered the Kingdom of Neter-khertet, the Egyptian underworld, which was millennia old when Charon's mandate was but newly minted.

There was a being in that land, Anpu, who is now known as Anubis. Said by the inhabitants of Neter-khertet to be the first man who ever tasted death, jackal-headed Anubis was ancient even then, and wise in the ways of the Underworld and Fate. Spiritually akin to the Lady of Fate, Anubis was (and still remains) the protector of the Egyptian underworld. It was he who taught Osiris the Great Rite, by which the Deathless might be created, in hopes that they might safeguard Neter-khertet.

Meeting the Boatmen as they poled their rickety crafts across the waters of the Shadowlands, Anubis sensed that they and their people were greatly favored by Fate. Anubis knew himself to be at a time of decision, and knew also that the Shemsu-Heru were more involved in the desperate struggles of the Osirian League than in the protection of Neter-khertet.

So Anubis went before the Ferrymen as their herald to the court of Osiris. There, the Boatmen negotiated a treaty with the Dead of Neter-khertet — a treaty which Charon would later approve. In return for promises of assistance against enemies and mutual non-aggression, the Kingdom of Neter-khertet would provide experts to tutor the people of Greece in the Arcanoi. In addition (and most importantly to the Ferrymen), Anubis would share with the Boatmen's Society certain secrets relating to composition of the human soul — the same wisdom that Anubis had once shared with Osiris that had resulted in the development of the Great Rite. It was from this shared knowledge that the Ferrymen known as College of Inquiry developed the Ritual of Severance, the ritual by which a wraith is forever separated from his Shadow, and from which the dualistic entities known as Pasiphae and Ferrymen are born.

The Ritual of Severance and the Pasiphae

The Ritual of Severance is the ultimate initiation into the Ferrymen. Once, it was performed on only to senior initiates in the Society (see "The Third Initiation," p. XX). Now that ranks below Initiate are essentially probationary, all Ferrymen save the newest inductees have undergone the ritual.

The Severance itself is a fairly complex process, taking almost 16 hours. The process combines spiritual preparation via the Arcanoi with a magical rite. At the end of the ritual, the Ferryman separates

permanently from her Shadow, which becomes an independent being: an eyeless, voiceless servant of Oblivion known as a Pasiphae. It is this existence in a state of spiritual unity that gives the Ferrymen their vast endurance and immunity to Catharsis. Yet this state ultimately causes most Ferrymen more anxiety than comfort.

The Pasiphae are self-willed creatures with the potential to grow as powerful as their former Psyches. While their destinies are inextricably linked, the Psyche and Shadow now lead totally separate existences. This causes most Ferrymen no small amount of discomfort. For most wraiths, the battle with the Shadow is a relatively simple matter: resist or be devoured. For the Boatmen, matters are not so simple. Every Ferryman must spend his existence knowing that his Nemesis walks the Underworld, promoting the cause of Oblivion as he himself promotes Transcendence. For a Ferryman, the battle with the Shadow is not a game of endurance and willpower, but an actual race to do more good than the Pasiphae can do evil. Some Boatmen thrive under these conditions, while others do not. Some destroy themselves out of despair, while others search out and destroy their darker halves. The result of either choice is the same. Though separate, the destruction of one half of the spiritual equation is invariably accompanied by the destruction of the other. No Ferryman endures the destruction of her Pasiphae, nor vice versa.

While it is not known conclusively outside the Boatmen's Society that the Pasiphae are related to the Ferrymen, it is suspected by some of the oldest Gaunts. Not even the Ferrymen know where the Pasiphae get their scythes and robes. Some believe that the inextricably linked fates of the two beings make it inevitable that the Pasiphae will somehow receive the same tools of office as the Ferrymen. Other Ferrymen theorize that the Pasiphae may have some sort of dark mirror of the Boatmen's Society that manufactures these items for newly created Pasiphae. The Pasiphae do not speak, and go always masked to conceal their eyeless visages. Just as there are few servants of Transcendence so talented and powerful as the Ferrymen, there are few proponents of Oblivion who combine power and lucidity as well as the Walkers of the Labyrinth.

The Far Shores and Stygia

Just as puzzling as the relationship between the Pasiphae and the Ferrymen is the continuing relationship between the Ferrymen and the Far Shores. When so many of the Far Shores are at best Dark Kingdoms with a religious rather than a cultural base (and many are far worse), why is it that the Ferrymen willingly carry souls to these destinations? Many allege that the Ferrymen are nothing more than powerful, partisan Heretics, serving the Shining Ones to the exclusion of all other Far Shores.

And these accusations are correct, though few realize how carefully the Ferrymen monitor their charges. In truth, each Ferryman is an agent of Transcendence, not a simple courier of souls. For those who seek Transcendence with the Ferrymen, the journey is more often directly to the Beyond itself as to the Far Shores. The Ferrymen seek to reach out to their charges and place them at ease with their demise — thus the extraordinary length of many journeys and the inordinately roundabout routes.

In many cases, this simple therapy, backed by the wisdom of centuries and an extensive mastery of Castigation, is all that is needed to help wraiths desirous of Transcendence to reach their goal. However, there are some wraiths whose circumstances are so dire, whose religious beliefs are so strong or whose problems lie

The Pasiphae

The Pasiphae are rarely seen but ever-present Nemeses of each Ferryman. Some pursue distant and unknowable goals deep within the Labyrinth or elsewhere in the Underworld, while others dog their Ferryman with Shadowlike persistence. Whatever else they do, Pasiphae are known to assist souls in reaching the Well of the Void in the same way that the Ferryman help those who wish to travel to the Far Shores. They are definitely intelligent and at least as powerful as the Ferryman they spring from.

The relationship between the Ferryman and his Pasiphae, while not direct, is crucial to understanding the existence of the Boatmen. Each Ferryman is an engine of destruction, able to use her Arcanoi and draw upon the power of her Shadow endlessly and without fear of Catharsis. But while the immediate personal cost of this power is negligible, the potential cost increases dramatically. A Ferryman cannot starve her Pasiphae, only feed it. Ultimately, the Ferryman is the spiritual power source behind a great evil, and she can rest assured that every erg of energy she grants her Pasiphae will be used to further the cause of Oblivion.

Ultimately, the Pasiphae is equally aware that the Ferryman puts every iota of Pathos she gains to the best use she can. As a result, the existence of both groups tends to be a study in attempting to harness vast power in as efficient and constructive a fashion as possible. Storytellers running Ferryman, and players portraying them, should keep in mind at all times that while they have vastly more personal power available at a given moment than the average wraith, the consequences of using that power are proportionally greater as well.

For more information of the Pasiphae and the culture of the Labyrinth, see *Dark Reflections: Spectres and Doomslayers: Into the Labyrinth*.

so deep that the Ferryman can never hope to come to grips with them in the context of a boat ride. These souls the Ferryman give to the keeping of the Shining Ones.

In reality, there are two sorts of Far Shores, those which are run by the unfallen Shining Ones and those which are not. Those which are controlled by Shining Ones who have remained true to their mission are places of spiritual healing, where the most severe casualties of life can be treated. Such places are placid retreats in the chaos of the Tempest, closely guarded by the Ferryman and by the Shining Ones themselves. The inhabitants of these intensive care wards for the spirit are highly empathetic with the victims of life's mischance the Ferryman bring to them. Indeed, many of those who staff the Far Shores were once treated there themselves. These souls were lucky enough to recover from their desperate conditions, and, like bodhisattvas, have chosen to remain behind to tend to those who come after them. The Shining Ones who operate these places of refuge have either undergone the Ritual of Severance, or else gone beyond the need for rituals to strengthen their Psyche. Having made perfect their will, these elevated creatures remain behind in the Underworld, hoping, like their attendants, to give aid to those in need.

Not every Far Shore is such a paradise, however. Many are run by Shining Ones who were unwilling to undergo the Severance, or who were not strong enough to conquer the Shadow. These places are mockeries of the true Far Shores, where wraiths are tortured in therapies that strengthen only their Shadows, and where the glitter in the eyes of the attendants is not the effervescence of satori, but the icy glint of Oblivion. Many such places have been destroyed by the Ferryman, but some of these Procrustean establishments still survive to trap the unwary with false hope, protected by their location or by their Unshining lords, now grown in power to rival the Onceborn.

Other Far Shores are little more than petty kingdoms, ruled by tyrants operating under the flimsy pretense of religion or divinity. Still other Far Shores are twisted mockeries of the afterlives advertised by the religions of the Quick, or else the demented brain-children of whatever twisted being holds the reins of power. Of these, no example need be given.

Perhaps the most famous of such false afterlives is the Paradise of the Fishers. Here, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of souls endure a totalitarian existence based on early Christian visions of the afterlife. Perhaps once Paradise was a petty kingdom of some sort, but now it is something far greater, and far worse. In Paradise, the reins of power have become puppet strings controlling the Elect (as those Restless who once ruled this blight on the Underworld are called) as well as the masses of the governed. The ever-vigilant self-appointed Angelics monitor the populace for dissent or disharmony.

For those who will not heed the stern warnings of the Angelics, there is Sheol, the black and filthy labyrinthine realm of works and forges which serves as the Fishers' Hell. Here, Shadow-eaten Demonic toil to maintain the *faux* Heaven above. Some who stray are simply punished, while the truly ungodly are transformed into needed goods, or — perhaps more gruesomely — *remade* through Moliate and Intimation. Indeed, there are those who say that the pits of Sheol are the birthplace of both Angelics and Demonic, though such notions are just hearsay, of course.

The Demonic use Intimation as liberally as Castigation in the process of "setting straight" wayward souls, and most of those in the Heaven above are little more than Drones, miming out the motions of joy and mouthing empty words of unfelt praise. Perhaps these souls do experience the joy they sing of. Certainly, if they feel discontent with their condition, they are incapable of expressing it in any meaningful fashion. Wraiths meeting the eyes of these beatific creatures have been known to enter immediate Catharsis.

Fisher Missionaries are invariably heavily programmed, armed with a formidable arsenal of Arcanoi and massively enhanced beneath their normal appearance. They are hunted by both Ferryman and Hierarch alike, and those wraiths who sojourn to Paradise with them should not be trusted if met again.

In truth, the vast majority of the Ferryman — certainly all those working in the Legations — had always known that most of the Far Shores were not to be trusted. The Legations dealt only with the most reputable destinations when such travel was strictly their official purview, and urged the Ritual of Severance on the Shining Ones who would accept it. For centuries after the Ferryman fled into exile, the Empire sent millions of souls into the darkness of the Sea of Shadows at the behest of any being who asked for them. To make the situation worse, most of the legitimate Far Shores continued to work with the Ferryman, rather than with their successors in the Legations.



From the exile of the Ferryman until the exile of the Shining Ones, most of the souls who departed Stygia sailed into what was at best an uncertain fate. Gagged by their own hubris, and by bitterness and rage at the magnitude of Imperial incompetence, the members of the Boatmen's Society watched too long as the Paradise of the Fishers grew from a dozen driftwood shanties to a blasphemy on the face of the Tempest so vast as to beggar the imagination. But by the time the Ferryman chose to act, the time had passed. The Ferryman's emissaries were shouted down by Fisher diplomats and ignored by Stygian officials grown fat on graft from the tithe. It would not be until the Fishers' own greed undid them that Stygia recognized the problem of the Far Shores. It was a lesson the Boatmen's Society learned at great cost, and they learned it well. When the *Shoah* came, there was no hesitation in the Ferryman's outrage — only action.

Methods

The method by which the Ferryman go about their business of guiding souls toward Transcendence and the Far Shores is well-known to the denizens of the Underworld. Rare is the wraith who has not heard the stories of Restless taken upon the Ferryman's reed boats, never to return. While most travel with a Ferryman is simply a journey from one place to another (often out of some imminent danger to a place of refuge), many Restless are reluctant to discuss the specifics of their time with the Boatmen.

It is known that a wraith can approach a Ferryman asking for transportation to a location. The Ferryman may or may not accept the wraith's request. While the Ferryman often choose roundabout routes, there are few methods of transport more reliable. A Ferryman defends her passengers at any cost, even if it means her destruction, and Ferryman are nearly impossible to destroy. Ferryman are *much* more likely to accept a request for passage from a wraith wishing to travel for personal reasons than from a wraith wishing to travel for official reasons. The functionaries of the Legions and Guilds have to find their own rides around Sea of Shadows.

Obviously, this is not always the case. Ferryman played a major part in aiding and escorting the *Dybbuks* to the conferences that brought about the Partition Accords and the Covenant of Millions. Similarly, the Ferryman played a still misty role in supporting the Loyalist cause during the Grim Legion's Insurrection during the Fourth Great Maelstrom. These are, however, exceptions to the rule.

There are two rules to traveling with a Ferryman. The first is that nobody rides free. By ancient custom, those who travel with the Boatmen pay them, either with a valuable Artifact or relic, or with an outstanding favor of unspecified nature that any Ferryman can call due at any time. The payment is symbolic, but never inexpensive. The Artifact or relic used to pay the Ferryman must be more valuable than a simple obolus; it must be something important or valuable to the passenger. Ferryman are legendary for their ability to judge an object's subjective worth to a wraith. This applies to wraiths rescued by the Boatmen's Society as well as to those who request passage — to be plucked from the Tempest by a Ferryman is to owe him a debt. Most Restless rescued from the Tempest by Ferryman are far from unhappy with the fact, but there are always a bitter few.

The second rule of the Ferryman is that while a wraith travels with a Ferryman, the Boatman's word is law. Those who choose to dispute her orders are invited to leave the boat, regardless of its location. Wraiths who continue to argue are helped off the boat, if necessary by being sent into a Destruction Harrowing by the Ferryman's scythe.

It is also well-known that those Restless who obstruct a Ferryman or betray a Boatman's trust are prone to catastrophic misfortune and are often subject to hostility from other members of the Boatmen's Society. This may simply be coincidence and word of mouth, but there is every reason to believe that the Oarsmen can mark wraiths who cross them in a fashion similar to the dreaded *malacchio* of the Oracles. The evil eye of the Boatmen, however, has much more immediate and lethal effects. There is certainly no disputing that the Ferryman are closely associated with the Lady of Fate. This reputation for the evil eye is in part responsible for the Boatmen's freedom from Hierarchy interference. The Underworld is a dangerous enough place. Few functionaries, no matter how officious, are willing to call disaster down on their heads by incurring the wrath of known powers.

There are rumors of much else, of course, plus the demonstrated fact that the Ferryman are ridiculously powerful. A hundred different "certain guesses" abound as to what makes the Ferryman supernaturally durable. Rumors that the Ferryman have a secret fortress hidden deep in the Labyrinth are common, as are rumors that the Boatmen are the true masters behind the Solicitors Guild. Many wraiths claim the Ferryman have already Transcended, but that they remain behind to help others achieve that blessed state — that they are the bodhisattvas of the Underworld.


What Is Secret The Ferryman and the Far Shores

The Ferryman are more, far more, than the Underworld's most reliable taxi service. Charon, the First Ferryman, never underwent the full initiation. Like the mystery cults the Ferryman took their structure from, the Ferryman took their initiations seriously. Not even the Lord of the Underworld was never made entirely privy to the secrets of the Boatmen's Society. This would prove useful later, after the Society was alienated and forced into exile. All those who knew the location of Dis (as the hidden fortress of the Ferryman is called) were full Initiates. No Ferryman, not even those former members who had resigned and taken directive positions in the Magistracy of Truth, would reveal it. Thus has the Society been protected from the wrath of Stygia, even up to the present day.

Induction

The Boatmen's Society is rooted in the mystery cults of ancient Greece: many of the Oath-circle's members belonged to such organizations during their time among the Quick. Once a much more regimented organization, the Ferryman have allowed their structure to change in order to adapt to the present day. Nevertheless, the Society still retains as its heart the system of graded initiation. However abbreviated the process is in these dark times, the newest aspirant to the Boatmen's Society passes through the





ranks just as the Navigatus, the head of the Ferryman, did. Through the process of initiation, the aspirant gradually gives up her identity as one of the Restless and takes up her new identity as a Ferryman, apart from the masses of the Dead and imbued with great responsibility. The psychological impact of the initiation should not be underestimated: the Boatmen's Society predates the Ritual of Severance by over a century. There were Ferryman putting their existence on the line for the benefit of the Dead on the strength of their oaths alone for a very long time before the Ritual of Severance was developed.

Probationer — The First Initiation

The Presentation of the Robes

The first step toward becoming a Ferryman is the Presentation of the Robes. Originally, this meant that the would-be Ferryman had approached the Society for membership and that his petition had been given sufficient consideration to grant him admittance at the lowest rank. Probationers were the functionaries and dogsbodies of the pre-exile Boatman's Society. They performed tasks that didn't merit the attention of a full Ferryman, but that needed to be handled by a trustworthy wraith. As apprentice Ferryman, Probationers also studied the Code and received tutelage on the nature of the Underworld.

Prior to the exile, the initiation was a ceremony of welcoming culminating in the ceremonial presentation of a set of Ferryman's robes. However, security concerns and the Society's growing attachment to the Lady of Fate have changed this considerably. No longer do the recruits come to the Ferryman. Instead, the Master Preceptor and the Master Archivist (two of the wraiths who direct the Boatman's Society) work together in the use of Fatalism to spot potential students. When a promising potential member is spotted, the Society "develops" his talents through contact with senior Ferryman, the use of Phantasm, subtle alterations of weave of Fate's tapestry and the like. If the auguries concerning the potential Probationer continue to be favorable as he matures into a Gaunt (and this is by no means always the case), then the Ferryman undertake the initiation themselves.

A set of the Ferryman's garb (for centuries now it has been a full set, including scythe and lantern) is placed on a Ferryman's raft, and the boat or raft blessed by the Navigatus, who uses specialized arts of Lifeweb and Fatalism to see it on its way. The raft is destined to come into the hands of the Probationer-to-be in a time of need. For these modern initiates, the degree of Probationer is self-initiated. Through the power of the Navigator's blessing, each initiate comes to realize that the raft and garb are not a bit of flotsam cast adrift on the Tempest: these items are *his*, should he choose to accept the mantle. By no means does every potential initiate choose to enter the ranks of the Ferryman. The rafts and garb of those who refuse eventually make their way back to the Isle of Dis, where they are ceremonially destroyed. There is no second request.

Novitiate — The Second Initiation

The Education and the Oath

The second initiation has changed little over the years. Formerly, a Ferryman who proved herself worthy during her service

as a Probationer was taken into the next circle of initiation, the Novitiates. At this point, she was awarded more responsibility and her education in the Boatmen's Society begun. After achieving the second grade in initiation, the Ferryman-to-be's superiors assessed her education in the Arts of the Dead. In any areas they judged her lacking, she was tutored until she met the standards of the Boatmen's Society. The initiate's second rite of passage was quite weighty. Senior Ferryman Castigated the initiate through the use of Defiance for seven days until her Shadow was totally silent. Then, after an elaborate ceremony of several hours, the Probationer swore the Ferryman's Oath, witnessed by the Navigatus and the other members of the Steering Committee. They then ceremonially awarded the new Novitiate her scythe — a symbol of her ability and obligation to fight for the Boatmen's Society, should some threat arise.

In the modern day, the process of initiation is much the same, though of course the Ferryman-to-be has been given all the symbols of her office in advance. Probationers are still taught the Arcanoi until they have met the minimum requirements set by the Master Preceptor (see "The Rituals of Initiation," page 90), and are still schooled in the lore of the Underworld. None of the alloyed Arcanoi are taught, even to modern Novitiates, nor are any of the Society's great secrets revealed to them. It is only after her final initiation and the Ritual of Severance that the Ferryman-to-be learns the nature of the Pasiphae, the secret of the Mourners and the other closely guarded lore of the Boatmen's Society.


Initiate — The Third Initiation

The Ritual of Severance

The third initiation — the true entry of the aspirant into the ranks of the Boatmen's Society — has changed only once in the history of the Dark Kingdom of Iron. That change, the introduction of the Ritual of Severance into the ceremony, brought about a profound shift in the Society. The psychological impact of the Severance, and of the First Ferryman's refusal to be re-initiated into the ranks of the Severed, shaped so much of what came after in the Underworld that it is difficult to overstate the importance of the event. The transformation of the Boatmen's Society from a political organization with mystical trappings into a true religious order, and its subsequent alienation from the secular elements of Charon's emergent Stygian society, can all be laid at the feet of the Severance. For better or worse, the Ferryman and their Benefactor, Anubis, who bartered the secrets of the soul for the safety of his people, forever changed the course of Stygian history.

During the third initiation, the Novitiate gives up his name and his identity among the people of the Underworld, taking up a new identity among the Ferryman. He swears an oath that he understands that from the good he does may also spring some evil, and that he accepts this. The Novitiate then endures the Ritual of Severance.

The ritual is the acid test of the initiate. When the Shadow is cut away, the Pasiphae forms only a few feet from the Ferryman, and they face one another. Over the newly formed Bridge of Thoughts, the link which connects all those who have undergone the Ritual of Severance, the recognition is instantaneous. If either the Pasiphae or the Ferryman cannot abide the idea that his other half will walk the Underworld unrestrained, then the Ferryman's career ends at that



point. None of the Ferryman present will so much as budge to stop either of the new-made entities from destroying the other, and in the process, itself. Assuming the pair do not annihilate one another, each departs. The Ferryman climbs to the top of Dis' acropolitian temple, and is welcomed into the ranks of the Boatmen's Society by the Navigatus and the rest of the Steering Committee. The Pasiphae descends into the Labyrinth though a door in the ritual area. Perhaps it meets a similar welcome from its fellow Labyrinth-walkers, or perhaps not — none of the Boatmen have ever followed the Pasiphae on its journey to find out.

After the Ritual of Severance and the final initiation, the Boatmen's Society holds no secrets to the new Ferryman. He is taught the alloyed Arcanoi, and the secrets of the Mourners and what it known of the Pasiphae. He is schooled in the true history of the Boatmen's Society, in the nature of the Benefactor and the Society's shameful period of inaction after the exile. The new Ferryman is entitled to request any item from the stores of Dis, or to ask a fellow Ferryman for anything and expect his desires to be honored without question.

The initiate is no longer part of Stygian society — he is a Ferryman, a guardian of souls, and his fellow Boatmen are his people and his only true family. Even though he will encounter his brothers and sisters only rarely, he is part of something greater than any single individual. The impact of this is quite profound: Those who join the Ferryman are idealists to begin with. The Ritual of Severance and the community of their fellows renews that idealistic streak, and the nagging knowledge that the Pasiphae are out there, as intelligent and as powerful as the Ferryman themselves, lends urgency to their actions. Ferryman are some of the most motivated individuals in the Underworld. They toil endlessly, fight without ceasing to protect their charges and make any sacrifice necessary, no matter how heroic, to accomplish their goals. They are without peer.

Offices

Though there are only perhaps a thousand Ferryman total, and despite the fact that the members of the Boatmen's Society invariably interact in an informal fashion, there are a few positions of importance within their ranks. In any organization that engages in group undertakings, there must be someone, or several someones, who help, however informally, to coordinate the activities of the group's membership. In the Boatmen's Society, this need is filled by the Steering Committee and the First. While all Ferryman are beholden to the Steering Committee, the Committee takes great pains not to interfere in the individual existences of the members, instead attempting to guide the Society as a whole. Individual Boatmen can and do go their own way. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the Ferryman Nicholas and the other members of the council that founded and maintain the Midnight Express. Though certain of the contrivances that allow the Midnight Express to follow its somewhat unusual schedule were drawn from the stores of the Boatmen's Society, the entire project was organized, undertaken and operated with no more than a nod to the Committee. This sort of independent action is typical of the Ferryman, who are without exception old enough and wise enough to run their own show and run it well.

The First

By tradition, special honor is given to those Ferryman who were full initiates in the Boatmen's Society prior to the development of the Ritual of Severance. These Boatmen are given special honor because they carried out the duties of their office without the benefits of Severance — an often difficult task. After the founding of the Republic and the alienation of the Society, the First became the informal advisors to the Steering Committee. The First became even more important after the Ferryman abandoned the Empire and fled into exile, acting as the Society's pool of diplomats, leaders and junior executives.

Over the centuries, as the First have slowly dwindled, what began as an honorific has become a semi-formal position. Ferryman who show talent, promise and a shrewd eye have their names suggested for promotion at the regular meetings of the Planning Assembly, a group consisting of the Steering Committee and advised by the members of the First whose general goal is to plot a future course for the Society. The invitation to attend the meetings of the Planning Assembly must by tradition be extended three times before the Ferryman is considered one of the First and thus a *de facto* invitee.

Over a dozen of the original First persist, and most of those who were not there originally aren't all that much younger. The newest First are over a thousand years dead, with the youngest having spent a "mere" seven centuries in the Underworld. All the First are masters of a dozen or more Arcanoi and equipped with some of the finest Artifacts in the Underworld. As a group, the First routinely consort with beings like the Lady of Fate and the Benefactor, and have demonstrated the ability to call on these beings for assistance when the need arises.

The work of the First is not entirely related to the governance of the Boatmen's Society. The Planning Assembly is also in charge of making certain that sufficient material is available to feed the Society's soulforges. Just as the Pasiphae occasionally roam the Underworld as engines of destruction, the First sometimes travel the Labyrinth as Helldivers, harvesting dozens of Spectres for the forges, sowing dissension and combing the corridors for lost souls. For these missions, the First use Stygian steel doors in Dis that seal off passages leading far below the shallow burrowings of the Boatmen's Society, doors to which only the Master Archivist has the keys. Each of these doors is always guarded by a sentry, usually one of the First, their equipment drawn from the stock of Artifacts and relics the Boatmen's Society has gathered for use in the defense of their home. Though attempts at forced entry have been made, no denizen of the Labyrinth has ever successfully entered Dis from below.

The Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is composed of the five Ferryman who jointly decide the direction of the Boatmen's Society. Vacancies in the Committee are filled by decision of the Planning Assembly. To date, every Committee member has been one of the First. Similarly, every vacancy on the Steering Committee has been filled with the candidate recommended by the remaining Committee members. However, there are no formal rules of procedure for these matters, or for any of the activities of the Planning Assembly and the Steering Committee. Steering Committee turnover is so low, the membership so talented and the work-

ing relationships so well-developed that rules of order would create a far greater hindrance than a help.

Appointment to Steering Committee positions is permanent, though members have stepped down in the past, usually because they no longer felt they could do the position justice. For example, in 1843, Master Preceptor Juliana quit her post without explanation and returned to the ranks of the First. Steering Committee members generally have between three and five Students, Ferrymen of the First who work as their direct subordinates and assistants. While the Assembly holds a *pro forma* vote on the appointment of new Steering Committee members, it has not yet contradicted the recommendation of a retiring Committee member or declined a clear *heir apparent*.

Navigatus

The Navigatus (Navigator) is the chairman of the Steering Committee and the first among equals. Originally the administrative director of the Ferrymen, the Navigatus increasingly came to fill an executive role as the Boatmen's Society drifted further from directly serving Charon's will. Though his role is far from autocratic, the final decision of the Navigatus is just that — final.

In the entire history of the Ferrymen, there has only been a single Navigatus. Supposedly he was Charon's first follower, but the name of the Navigatus has long been lost to history. Now, he is known only as the Navigator. Some Ferrymen say that not even the Navigator remembers his name. There was a very brief period after the foundation of the Republic when the Navigatus wore a very simple domino mask out of respect for his position in the newly founded government of Stygia. Part of an elaborate political deal, the Navigator accepted the mask only on the condition that it be forged from the corpora of Spectres (or doomshades as they were then called), which were at that time extremely rare. Thus, the Boatmen symbolically accepted the Stygian structure, but only on their own terms. After the exile, however, the Navigatus put his mask aside (it still hangs in the workshop of Master Fabricant) and resumed his regular, barefaced role.

While he is painfully drawn (as are all those who undergo the Severance), the Navigatus is a short, thickly built man, his face pocked from acne. Clearly in his early middle years and blessed with thick black hair, the Navigatus looks as if he'd be more at home behind a shipwright's adze than sitting behind his desk in the Lesser Hall. While the Navigator often has pressing concerns of office to attend to, he never lets his hands rest idle. At those times when the Society does not need him as its leader, the Navigatus performs the task he knows and loves best — supervising the construction of the boats and rafts that convey the Boatmen on their errands across the Underworld.

Master Archivist

The Master Archivist's duties mix both past and future. The Archivist is the historian of the Ferrymen, charged with keeping records of the lives of the Ferrymen and the doings of the Boatmen's Society. Even the sharpest memory dulls over the millennia, and it is by the pen of the Master Archivist that the deeds and lore of the Ferrymen are preserved from the teeth of time. The Archives of the Society cover every possible topic, from the day-to-day history of the Underworld and the Skinlands to the discoveries of the now-defunct College of Inquiry. As historian, the Master Ar-

chivist works closely with the Master Preceptor to induct new members into the Boatmen's Society.

The Archivist is also the Ferrymen's master seer, and charged with foreseeing the future and helping the Society chart its course through the turbulent waters of the Underworld. The clairvoyants among the Ferrymen are said to use divinatory systems unknown among the Quick or even to the Oracles Guild. These systems, which involve the use of various elements of the afterlife (soulfire crystals, material from the Labyrinth, plasm, soulsteel and bits of relic material), are of mysterious origins.


Some Oracles claim the Ferrymen learned their scrying techniques directly from the Lady of Fate, while others claim them to be an independent development. There is certainly some reason to believe the first claim: The Master Archivist is the Society's primary liaison with the mysterious being known as the Lady of Fate. Though the Ferrymen have alienated themselves from Stygian politics, they have kept in contact with the Lady. Over the years, this contact has grown increasingly close, to the point where rumors of the alliance between the Ferrymen and the Legion of Fate now makes the regular rounds of Stygian political gossip. Given the often-adversarial nature of relations between the Ferrymen and the Hierarchy, this can only place at risk the already-delicate relationship between the Lady of Fate and the rest of the Deathlords.

Argus the Red, so called for his hair, is the current Master Archivist of the Boatmen's Society. Though Argus is one of the Myceneans who formed the original cadre of the Ferrymen, he only ascended to his post in the 1400s, when the previous Archivist retired to a hermit's existence on one of the Far Shores. A talented librarian and scholar, Argus is only moderately capable as a seer. To cover this weakness, he relies heavily on the Ferrymen Hekabe, one of the more recent First and one of the Underworld's most talented Fatalists. Though she is theoretically Argus' subordinate, Hekabe often attends Steering Committee meetings, thus becoming a *de facto* member of the Steering Committee. It is entirely possible that if Hekabe leaves her position before Argus, another seer will be appointed to take her place, thus producing a new Steering Committee office.

Master Fabricant

The Master Fabricant is the Boatman in charge of development and manufacture of the tools by which the Ferrymen carry out their trade. The robes, scythes and other accouterments of the Boatmen are her responsibility. While the Boatmen refuse to use even Drones for soulforging, they have no qualms about using Spectres. Many of the First predate the emergence of Nhudri from the Great Maze, and the Boatmen's Society has had members who learned the arts of the forge when the craft first spread beyond Nhudri and his immediate apprentices. There are a number of truly masterful Artificers within the Society, and the creations wielded by elder Ferrymen are among the most powerful items in the Underworld. Interestingly enough, while the Ferrymen teach the art of soulforging outside the auspices of the Artificers Guild, they insist on the same brutal initiatory proceedings as Ember's subordinates do. There are some rumors, unsubstantiated but in common circulation, that Nhudri taught Daedalus, the former Master Fabricant, personally.

The current Master Fabricant, Aretas, assumed her role shortly after the previous Master's death during the Third Great Maelstrom. Compared to the rest of the Committee, Aretas is young. She was said to be a student, lover or perhaps both to



Archimedes during his life, and to have died in the sack of Syracuse. She first joined the Ferryman just as the Fishers began to increase in power, and was made one of the First around the year 1000, after only six centuries with the Society. After a century of general service on the Planning Assembly, Aretas began working as direct assistant to the previous Master Fabricant. After Daedalus was destroyed holding one of the lower portals of Dis against a Hekatonkhire during the Third Great Maelstrom, she ascended to his post according to his publicly expressed wishes.

Master-at-Arms

The Master-at-Arms is the Ferryman responsible for the battle-readiness of the Society, both its individual members and as a whole. First among the Master's responsibilities is making certain that every Ferryman is equipped and trained for battle. In the former, the Master-at-Arms cooperates closely with the Master Fabricant, assuring that every Ferryman is properly equipped. In the latter, the Master works closely with the Master Preceptor, making certain that each Ferryman is properly trained in the art of battle and educated in the defenses of the Drowned City.

The Master-at-Arms acts as the castellan of Dis. While the Ferryman have no intentions of taking the open field of battle as a group, the defenses of Dis must still be seen to. Additionally, the Boatmen's Society regularly launches raids into the Labyrinth to provide the Master Fabricant with raw material for her forges. The Master-at-Arms organizes these Helldiving parties, which are composed of whatever members of the First are available and are led by the Master-at-Arms.

The Ferryman's current Master-at-Arms is Panthesilea, who has held her position since the previous Master-at-Arms was destroyed during the First Great Maelstrom. Panthesilea is a shovel-faced, uncommunicative woman whose duties consume most of her time and energy. Though she appears unassuming, she is in fact tremendously skilled, routinely carrying on her person some of the most powerful Artifacts in the Ferryman's arsenal. During the Third Great Maelstrom, Panthesilea destroyed the Onceborn Carnifax Rex in single combat after its destruction of the previous Master Fabricant. Though a talented Ferryman, she has not ferried a soul across the Tempest in centuries. She regularly threatens to step down from her position to reacquaint herself with what she sees as the primary goal of the Ferryman, but has been argued out of it, at least so far.

Master Preceptor

The Master Preceptor is the Ferryman responsible for selecting, initiating and training new members of the Boatman's Society. In this, the Preceptor works closely with the Archivist and the Master-at-Arms. Since the Rite of Severance was developed, the Master Preceptor has also been responsible for administering it to those undergoing their third initiation. Before the Final Experiment, the Master Preceptor was also the leader of the College of Inquiry. However, since the tragedy that led to the creation of the Mourners, the College has been inactive. The Preceptor is also the seneschal of Dis, responsible for seeing to those aspects of the citadel's maintenance and upkeep that are unrelated to the defenses. To accomplish this task, the Preceptor has not only those Ferryman who are undergoing their preliminary initiation and education, but also a number of Spectres held in Nhudri's Embrace that are used for manual labor.

The current Preceptor is the youngest of the Steering Committee members by far. Born in Byzantium in the 800s, Alexandrus became a Ferryman around the year 1200, and was made one of the First shortly after the Third Great Maelstrom. Willow, with a feminine build made almost anorexic by the Ritual of Severance, Alexandrus has long raven hair that maintains its luster even in the afterlife. Some say this is not natural but a result of cosmetic Molation, a practice virtually unknown among the Ferryman. Alexandrus ascended to the Preceptor's post after the previous Master Preceptor's demise in the Last Experiment in the mid-1700s. While much less experienced than the other members of the Steering Committee, Alexandrus' young age gives him a degree of verve in executing his office that none of the other Committee members can match.

Dis, the Haven of the Ferryman

History

The city of Dis has been the headquarters of the Ferryman since the time only a few centuries after the founding of the Society. Drowned in the Tempest long before the Ferryman found it, Dis is a planned city in the fashion of the era. Built around a rock hill, Dis is walled and circular in pattern, with a broad avenue running along each of the four cardinal directions. The acropolis is covered in a number of temples and large residences, as well as a strong citadel.

Dis' origins are unknown. None can say if it was built in the Underworld by some now-forgotten people, or destroyed in some Skinlands cataclysm so great that it was cast directly into the Tempest. Perhaps Dis is an Amphiskiopolis cast up into the Sea of Shadows by some bizarre contortion of the Labyrinth's geometry. Whatever the case, Dis was deserted when the Boatmen's Society discovered it, drowned up to the steps of the temple that crowned the summit of the acropolis. The city's structures were stripped down to the bare marble but otherwise intact. All around it hung the air of disaster recently departed, but its future was unsullied enough. And so, lacking a home, the Ferryman took the city as their own.

However, rather than attempting some project to lift the city from below the waves or dike it off from the Tempest, the Ferryman embraced it as it was. Starting from the still-exposed temple on its summit, the Ferryman dug down through the bedrock of the Labyrinth, hollowing out rooms and passageways in the black stone of the hill. Workers and Thralls went down into the Tempest around the summit, to make the great buildings of the acropolis tight against the Sea of Shadows, and then to dig inward until they met the workers digging outward toward them.

After centuries of constant work, Dis became what it is today: a fortress carefully hidden in the hair-fine space between the devils of the Labyrinth and the deep black sea of the Tempest. Miles of twisting corridors and labyrinths of long-forgotten rooms house the secrets of what is without a doubt the Dark Kingdom of Iron's most powerful secret society. Even today, work expanding Dis continues at a lessened pace, as the Ferryman cut galleries and workshops from the black bones of the Underworld, and their enthralled Spectres reclaim buildings from the clutches of the Tempest.

The Maze

To further conceal their presence, the Ferrymen labored long (and labor still) constructing a vast artificial agglomeration of wrecked ships above the sunken streets of Dis. Extending for miles in every direction from the center of the city, the maze of Dis serves many purposes. It conceals the acropolitian entrance to the city, as well as protecting the city from detection during the Tempest's moments of unremitting clarity. Indeed, the reputation of such crushes of ships as havens for nests of Spectres exiled from the Labyrinth is so bad as to cause most wraiths to give these ships' graveyards as wide a berth as possible.

The maze also serves as Dis' first line of defense against any possibility of attack. The spaces between the ships are both thickly salted with traps and heavily patrolled by Spectral "watchdogs." Between their natural territoriality, collars in the mode of Nhudri's Embrace and the judicious use of Intimation, the Shades, Haints and vulpines who patrol the sea of lost ships around Dis perform their task with remarkable efficiency. While the maze would do little more than act as a speed bump for an organized expedition, that delay is enough. And as for lesser expeditions, foolish travelers and foolhardy salvage teams may enter the maze of Dis, but they do not leave.

The paths through the maze shift over time, and of the paths, some are safe at certain times, and some at others. A system of very subtle signs is used to convey information about which lanes are clear to Ferrymen traversing the maze. This language of floating debris and the periods of bobbing ships is almost invisible to those who do not know what to look for. Even if a traveler can spot the presence of the codes, the meanings of the various signs change from place to place in the maze. Though a number have tried, none have yet come to Dis without the escort of one of the Boatmen.

Places of Importance

The refuge of Dis is a fortress millennia old, and its tunnels wind for miles beneath the original city. It was intended to serve as a haven for a much larger organization, and the additions carried out over the years have had no set order. The city's forgotten rooms and abandoned cul-de-sacs are numberless. Even those of the original architects who survive have forgotten the layout of many sections and the intended purpose of many areas. Below are some of the fortress' most important locations, but there are other places used only by a few Ferrymen or abandoned to the dust of ages. These are not discussed, and are left to the individual Storyteller to detail.

The Acropolitian Temple: The Temple is the last part of drowned Dis to protrude above the surface of the Tempest. The waves of the Sea of Shadows lap at the steps of this ancient structure, the fane of some long-forgotten sky god. Within, enthralled Spectres wait to help moor the rafts of arriving Ferrymen or to haul their boats into the safety of the Temple's interior. Inside, where the altar once stood now lies a well-trodden flight of steps leading downward into the heart of the refuge. Normally, the Temple is left open to the storm during Maelstroms, but the stairs themselves are closed with a tremendous Stygian steel shutter. While this gate is normally locked when the door is closed during storms, every Ferryman is given the key, a simple set of soulsteel wards with a pentagonal tag (as depicted on the back of **Wraith: the Oblivion, 2nd Edition**). The gate has been breached in the

past, however, and during storms it is always guarded from the inside by at least one Ferryman.

The Great Hall: Infrequently used, the Great Hall is opened for the rare occasions when all or most of the Ferrymen gather together to debate some issue or hear a pronouncement from the Steering Committee. Carved by the Ferrymen from the heart of the stone hill on which Dis sits, the Great Hall is semi-circular, shaped like an amphitheater or lecture hall. The seats, like the rest of the room, are cut from the black, living rock of the Labyrinth itself. The walls of the Great Hall are shot through with veins of some sort of luminescent crystal, which light the room in a harsh, blue-white radiance.

There is no comfort in the seats, however, nor is there a podium or other accommodations for a speaker. Such appurtenances are not the way of the Ferrymen, given as they are to only infrequent debate. Only the most serious issues are subjected to formal debate in the Great Hall. In most other cases, the Steering Committee's consideration of the issue, backed up by the advice of the First and straw polls of the general membership, take the place of orthodox debate.

The Lesser Hall: Used much more frequently than the Great Hall, the Lesser Hall serves as the meeting place of the Steering Committee to debate such day-to-day matters as concern these ancient beings. It is also the meeting place of the Planning Assembly. Lavishly appointed, the Lesser Hall is furnished with a table and a large number of comfortable chairs, though how exactly these are arranged depends on the circumstance.

The Lesser Hall is located in one of the buildings of Dis' acropolis. Originally built from brilliant white marble, the building has been salvaged and made tight against the Tempest by the Boatmen. The walls have been carefully reinforced with Stygian steel bracings and great windows opened in the walls. These submerged windows are glazed with a near-unbreakable crystal found deep within the Labyrinth beneath Dis, and afford a perfect view of the Tempest beyond the walls of the room.

The Lesser Hall is lit by carefully selected soulfire crystals in lamps of relic gold and amber, and the walls are covered in thick hangings of gold and scarlet. Overall, the effect is one of standing in a warm, well-appointed council hall while strange storms boil beyond the windows. Through cunning artifice, Artifacts employing variants on the Phantasm art Phantasmagoria work to reinforce this impression. In the precincts of the Lesser Hall, particularly with the curtains drawn, a Ferryman can sometimes even forget she is in the Underworld at all.

The Stores and Forges: Deep below Dis lie the forges and workrooms of the Master Fabricant and her assistants. In these mazy chambers lie stunningly appointed workrooms for every form of craft known to the Quick and the Dead alike. From the making of printed circuitry and the working of wood to the forging of soulsteel and the shaping of True Jade, a craftsman familiar with the layout of the workrooms is never at a loss for the proper tool for the job at hand. Materials are sometimes more scarce, but the Fabricants travel the Underworld both in their duties as Ferrymen and in search of raw materials. Likewise, there are places in the maze of ships above where the Thralls of the Fabricants squat among the hulks and winnow the Tempest in search of the objects that might prove useful to the Boatmen's Guild.

More extensive than the workshops are the storerooms that hold the Fabricants' raw materials and finished products. Some are warrens of small, interconnected rooms, and others are great



caverns that have become cyclopean over the millennia. As with so much in Dis, the contents and specifics of these rooms are forgotten even to those who carved them and filled them. There are rumors that in some places in this warren, there are rooms where coffles of Spectres have been trapped in Nhudri's Embrace for hundreds of years, awaiting use as forge-fodder. Certainly, a large number of Plasmics, not all of them friendly, have taken up residence in these rooms. Many Artifacts have been damaged or ruined by the depredations of these creatures. A number of forgotten Spectres have escaped and live like rats in the depths of the storerooms, competing with the Plasmics for sustenance. Ferrymen going into the deeper storerooms usually go heavily armed and travel in groups. Specially trained vulpines and Shades similar to those used in the maze above are used to help control these pests. Although constrained by collars similar to Nhudri's Embrace, the beasts are otherwise free to roam the storerooms. Some of the Fabricants have made these watchdogs into pets of a sort.

The Chamber of Initiation: Located below the Great Hall, the Chamber of Initiation is the location where the Ritual of Severance is performed. Used for little else, the area generally stands empty, gathering dust, until needed. This Chamber is the only room in Dis that is regularly locked. The Navigatus and the Master Preceptor both have keys, and the room is opened only for cleaning before use, and locked again shortly after the ritual.

The chamber is fitted out in marble scavenged from one of Dis' bathhouses. At the center of the room is a great pool that is carefully filled before the Ritual of Severance with crystal-clear plasm from the Tempest above, and just as carefully emptied and dried afterward. On one side of the arched room are the Stygian steel doors leading to the rest of Dis, and on the other side, an identical set leading downward into the Labyrinth. Monstrously strong, these doors are the only descending portals from Dis that go unguarded. The key held by the Preceptor and Navigatus fits both sets of doors.

When the Chamber is not in use, it is unlit, but while it is in use, great faceted bowls of cobalt blue crystal are hung from the ceiling and filled with plasm, and into these are dropped chunks of the purest, most perfect soulfire crystals, charged to their maximum capacity with Pathos. The agitation caused by the boiling of the plasm causes the crystals to circulate in the bowls, producing spectacular undersea lightning effects.

The Secret History

Until now, this narrative has covered nothing save what an educated Gaunt might know. Yet there are unanswered questions. What gives them the Boatmen their mysterious powers? Why do they continue to ferry souls to the Far Shores that Stygia so rightly abhors? And, of course, what is the connection between the Ferrymen and the Ferrymen of Oblivion, the Pasiphae? The answers given hereafter are some of the greatest secrets of the Underworld, known only to the Boatmen and a few others — Anubis, the Lady of Fate and perhaps one or two of the eldest and most cunning Deathlords. Players who do not wish to spoil the secrets for themselves should probably stop reading at this point.

The climax of the Ritual of Severance involves the wraith's immersion into the plasm by the celebrant, and the re-emergence of the newly born Ferryman and Pasiphae. By tradition, the First wait silently around the edges of this pool to witness the act, and they intervene only to defend themselves. Immediately after the Pasiphae departs, the newly born Ferryman is wrapped in white robes and taken to the roof, where the Navigatus ceremonially bestows upon him his lantern and welcomes him into the brotherhood of the Ferrymen.

The Doors Below: All throughout Dis' lower levels lie thick, rivet-studded doors of Stygian steel. These doors, to which the Master Archivist holds the keys, lead down into the depths of the Labyrinth. Perhaps by some cunning artifice of the architect, or perhaps by the Labyrinth's own twisted geography, these stairs end in vastly different areas of the Great Maze. It is down these steps that the First descend into the Labyrinth to gather fodder for the forces of Dis.

The doors are extremely stout, but are placed under guard during periods of ill omen. Of the three times doors have been breached, once was by a Hekatonkhiere, once was by an extremely cunning ruse, and the third was by a pack of specially selected Shades being driven before a detachment of soldiers from an unknown general of Oblivion. In none of those cases did the intruders cross more than a few steps over the threshold. The sorts of detritus that might come upon a door during the typical Maelstrom are not sufficient to worry the Ferrymen.

Generally, a single Ferryman and a number of guard-Thralls man each door, while a number of the First and more Thralls wait at a central location (usually the Great Hall) to respond to developing threats. If few Ferrymen are present in Dis, then a single Thrall is left at each door as a tripwire of sorts, and those Ferrymen available gather centrally to respond.

The Rituals of Initiation

This section deals with using the Ferrymen in your **Wraith: The Oblivion** chronicle. It covers the specific effects of the Ritual of Initiation and the game mechanics used to represent them. Also detailed are the specialized Artifacts and Arcanoi used by the Boatmen's Society in the course of their duties. Guidelines are included on the Society's minimum requirements for entry into their ranks, the process of initiation and the alterations undergone by a standard **Wraith: The Oblivion** character who joins the ranks of the Ferrymen. Also included are rules for creating Ferryman characters, for those players who don't wish to play their character for several hundred in-game years before undergoing initiation.

The Powers of the Ferrymen

Below is a list of the powers of the Ferrymen, as granted to them by the Ritual of Severance. It includes only the powers inherent to the Ferrymen's condition. Obviously, this is not everything. There are also the Artifacts the Boatmen's Society so lavishly equips its members with, the formidable reputation and not inconsiderable influence of the Ferrymen and the vast and varied array of Arcanoi available to the Boatmen. These are also part and parcel of initiation into the Boatmen's Society, but are dealt with in more detail elsewhere in this chapter.

The Benefits

The Ritual of Severance is a powerful rite, one that grants the subject spiritual powers far beyond those of the normal wraith. Below is a list of the positive effects of the Ritual.

- **No Shadow** — While still metaphysically connected, the Pasiphae do not have anything like the control over the Ferrymen that the Shadow does over the average wraith. The Pasiphae does not possess Thorns, or gain temporary or permanent control of the Ferryman's body through Catharsis. The struggle for control of a single Corpus is forever over.

- **No Angst** — While the Pasiphae still gains Angst whenever the Ferryman fulfills one of her Pasiphae's Dark Passions, rolls a 1 on a Shadow die or uses Arcanoi that would cause a normal wraith to gain Angst, this does not negatively impact the Ferryman's ability to carry out business as usual.

- **Unlimited Shadow Dice** — The Ferryman may grant herself up to five Shadow dice on any roll.

- **Strengthened Corpus** — The Ferryman's Corpus is strengthened by the Ritual of Severance, and by the fact that it is free from the forces of Oblivion-induced decay that plague most of the Restless. When the Ferryman completes the Ritual of Severance, she adds five to her Permanent Corpus total (which generally means the Ferryman has 15, rather than 10, Corpus levels).

- **Greater Pathos Reserves** — Without the Shadow and its associated stores of Angst, the Ferryman has more metaphysical "room" within herself to store Pathos. Ferrymen may store a maximum of 20 Pathos points, rather than 10.

- **Dark Arcanoi** — Ferrymen can learn and use Dark Arcanoi. Over the years, members of the Boatmen's Society have forced most of the secrets of the Dark Arcanoi out of the Shadow-eaten. Some Ferrymen learn these arts by capturing and interrogating Spectres, while others learn them from their fellow members of the Oath-circle. Whichever is the case, Dark Arcanoi are alien to the Ferrymen's condition and cost current rating x 5 to advance, rather than current rating x 3.

- **The Bridge of Thoughts** — A Ferryman who makes eye contact with another being who has undergone the Ritual of Severance may speak wordlessly with him with as much understanding as if they were having a spoken conversation, but with no chance of misstatement or misunderstanding.

- **Immunity to Mind Control** — Only half of the Ferryman's soul is present. The rest is elsewhere pursuing its own goals. While the Ferryman is vulnerable to emotional manipulation through Arcanoi like Keening, powers that rely on spiritual compulsion or rewriting the Ferryman's being, like Intimation, Mnemosynis and Way of the Scholar, automatically fail unless they are used on both the Pasiphae and the Ferryman simultaneously.

- **No Harrowings** — Ferrymen do not undergo Harrowings. Unless they are reduced to zero temporary Corpus entirely by aggravated damage and/or by damage inflicted by their Pasiphae, the Ferrymen are effectively immortal. When reduced to zero temporary Corpus through some other method, Ferrymen dissipate like smoke in a stiff breeze, only to reappear on the steps of the acropolis Temple of Dis a few tides of the Sea of Shadows later. Pasiphae similarly dissipated appear on the porticos of the Neverborns' temple in the Well of the Void. When a Pasiphae or Ferryman is reduced to zero temporary Corpus from entirely aggravated sources, or by damage inflicted by his other half, both are immediately destroyed. The

Ferryman Transcends, and the Pasiphae likewise instantly falls into Oblivion.

• **Spontaneous Pathos** — Whenever the Pasiphae performs an act that would cause its Psyche to gain Composure if it were a normal Spectre, the Ferryman instead gains points of Pathos equal to the amount of Composure the Pasiphae would have gained. The ways a Pasiphae can cause its Ferryman to temporarily gain Pathos include, but are not limited to, fulfilling one of the Ferryman's Passions, rolling a 1 on a Psyche die, or using an Arcanoi like Larceny that would normally cause the Pasiphae to gain Composure.

A Ferryman cannot go over her normal maximum Pathos by this method — the additional points are lost — but the Ferryman suffers no harm if she cannot accept the Pathos. This is normally represented abstractly by the Activity Background (see page XX), however, if the Pasiphae is present and active in the story, its activities and rolls may directly benefit its Ferryman.

The Drawbacks

Unfortunately, nothing is without its drawbacks. While the Ritual of Severance is a great boon to the Boatmen, it also has negative effects as well. Most of these are relatively minor, though some (such as the inability to cross the Shroud) are fairly significant.

• **Unpleasant Appearance** — For unknown reasons, the Ritual of Severance forever alters the Ferryman's "natural" appearance, leaving him looking drawn and leathery. Most Ferrymen believe this is a side effect of the drawing out of the Shadow, but there is no way to say for certain. The ultimate effect is that when wearing his natural appearance (which almost every Ferryman does), the Ferryman's Appearance Attribute is reduced by one dot.

• **Feeding the Pasiphae** — Just as the actions of Pasiphae benefit the Ferryman, so do the actions of the Ferryman benefit the Pasiphae. Any time the Ferryman would gain Angst, her Pasiphae gains an equal amount of Angst instead, exactly as if the roles had been reversed and the Pasiphae had done something to cause it to gain Composure. Exactly how much Angst a Pasiphae can store is a matter of much conjecture among the Ferrymen. The only certain answer is "at least as much as the Ferryman once was able to."

• **The Black Mirror** — The Pasiphae starts with the same set of Attributes, Abilities and Arcanoi as the Ferryman. It is her dark mirror. While they will obviously now walk separate paths, the Pasiphae and its Ferryman lead disturbingly parallel lives. As a Ferryman grows in power, so, inevitably, does his Pasiphae follow suit. And, yes, the Pasiphae has at his beck and call an unlimited number of Psyche dice.

• **The Nemesis Effect** — Ferrymen and their Pasiphae are inextricably linked. They share Passions and Dark Passions, and their Fates are as if they were one being. Similarly, Ferrymen seem preternaturally prone to conflict with their Pasiphae. Ferrymen, especially younger Ferrymen, often find themselves at loggerheads with their dark counterparts. No matter how powerful the Ferryman may be, there is one opponent he must confront with a better strategy than yelling, "I waste him with my scythe!"

• **Cannot Cross the Shroud** — The Ferrymen's incomplete condition and the effects of the Ritual of Severance make it far more difficult for them to interact with the world of the Quick. While they can use the Arcanoi Keening, Outrage and Pandemo-

nium across the Shroud with only +1 difficulty, Ferrymen are unable to cross the Shroud enough use the Puppetry, Embodiment or Corruption Arcanoi. Also, the incomplete condition of their souls makes Rising impossible for the Ferrymen

Minimum Requirements

There are certain irreducible minimums for membership in the Boatmen's Society. Keep in mind that these are the barest possible entry requirements. In reality, the average entrant is *considerably* beyond these minimal standards. Also keep in mind exactly how exclusive the Ferrymen are. There are perhaps a thousand Boatmen in the Underworld today, many of whom have been members of the Society for over a millennia. Of many highly qualified, eligible wraiths, only a tiny fraction are ever considered for membership, and most of those are passed over as unsuitable.

• **Good Fate** — Only those who really stand out to the seers of the Boatmen's Society are even considered for membership. The Ferrymen want not only destinies brimming over with good fortune, but also those laden down with genuine good. They've seen the best and, frankly, most of the Underworld doesn't measure up. Out of all the dead in the Dark Kingdom of Iron, the Society accepts perhaps one new member per decade, (on average). There just isn't room for uncertain heroes, obsessed crusaders or well-meaning bumbler within the ranks of the Ferrymen. Such souls are left to their own devices.

• **Good Behavior and Reputation** — The Ferrymen evaluate each potential recruit closely before even considering her for membership. Wraiths under consideration for membership in the Boatmen's Society must impress the Ferryman who comes to evaluate them as a potential recruit. Typically, this is one of the First, though it is not unknown for a younger Ferryman to perform this task.

The initial evaluation is far more than a test of the wraith's people skills, though given the job description those are obviously important. It is also an evaluation of competence and attitude. As the Navigator says, "We can teach them how to talk to people, but we can't teach them how to be a person." This is not a two-hour job interview; typically the Ferryman maintains irregular contact with the subject for several years, occasionally several decades, before making a decision. Though the subject typically never knows it, the Ferryman's inquiry is far deeper than friendly conversation. Most also use Castigate and Mnemosynis in the process of their inquiries, both on the potential recruit and on those acquainted with her. The interviewing of those the wraith comes into contact with is done always done in strictest secrecy, with the Ferryman Moliated to a totally different persona. These background checks are disturbingly thorough: the founders of the *Magisterium Veritatis* were originally Ferrymen, and the Magistracy's tactics have changed little over the centuries.

Also, prospective Ferrymen should be well-connected. The budding Ferryman must typically have at least four dots of Status in any combination of organizations.

• **Fetters** — Last but by no means least, all Ferrymen must be Gaunts. That is, all potential Ferrymen must have resolved at least one Fetter. In part, this allows the Ferryman to travel freely in both the Shadowlands and the Tempest. More importantly, it indicates the Ferryman has the level of self-composure necessary to begin the road upward and outward. This is the one truly inflexible requirement of the Ferrymen: proof positive that the Ferryman is already on the road to Transcendence. It is positively



required that, before he attempts to help others along the treacherous road to the next level of existence, the Ferryman must have gone at least partway down it himself.

• **Knowledge** — Prospective members of the Boatmen's Society must all know at least 20 dots of Arcanoi, including a minimum Castigate of 5, and a minimum combined score of at least 5 in Lifeweb and Fatalism. Obviously, this is a minimum. The more Arcanoi the prospective Ferryman knows, the better.

Making the Transition

The process of becoming a Ferryman is fairly arduous, and much of it works best if set in the downtime between two chronicles. Also, Ferryman are entirely out of balance with standard **Wraith: The Oblivion** characters. Characters who become Ferryman are probably best run by the Storyteller. On the other hand, playing out the process of becoming a Ferryman as a solo adventure might make a nice way for the a player to say good-bye to a much-beloved character if the Storyteller and player are willing to devote the amount of effort to it that doing it properly demands.

First, the Ferryman evaluate the character. As outlined above, this is an extremely thorough process, often stretching for decades (or at least, many game sessions). The character may be puzzled at the fact that a Ferryman, and an old one, is taking an interest in her. It's quite unlikely that the character will ever know just how close the Ferryman's scrutiny is. Despite the Ferryman's public adherence to a highly stereotypical appearance, they're just as capable of deceit as any other wraith. Perhaps moreso — after all, they have much freer access to their Arcanoi than the average Restless, and how many would suspect a Ferryman of this sort of ploy?

If the character proves suitable (and she may not), she will eventually be presented with the accouterments of the Ferryman's craft and granted the knowledge that, if she wishes, the office is open to her. This presentation generally happens at a moment of decision in the wraith's existence, when her future is determined by the choices she is about to make, rather than by the choices she has made. There is no penalty for declining the opportunity, save that the character will never be asked again, nor is there a problem with using the items until the need has passed and then setting them adrift once again. But if the character chooses to accept the office of Ferryman, then she has inexorably set herself on the road to initiation and the Ritual of Severance.

After the character attempts to perform the office of Ferryman for a short while, she is contacted by a member of the Boatmen's Society — usually her patron among the First — who takes her to Dis for the second initiation. Historically, the periods between initiations were times of evaluation and testing for hopefuls. In the present day, however, no Ferryman is presented with the regalia until it is certain that she will make an adequate initiate. The time between the acceptance of the regalia and the performance of the Ritual of Severance is only as long as is needed to teach the aspirant Ferryman the lore of her new station. This is what the provision of the full set of regalia during the first initiation symbolizes — that the wraith is already fit for her office. All that comes after is simply so much formality.

After a year or 10 in Dis under the tutelage of the Master Preceptor and his various appointees, the Ferryman is put through the Ritual of Severance and decides her fate. Those who survive are Ferryman, with all the powers described above. They are taught the alloyed Arcanoi, and the secrets of the Mourners and the Pasiphae. And then, after a small ceremony, they depart. Some

return regularly to Dis to study and socialize with their only real peers. Others leave Dis and are never seen again, spending their whole careers operating alone.

Creating a Ferryman Character

Ferryman are powerful characters. There is absolutely no reason that you as a Storyteller should ever let a player portray one in a normal **Wraith: The Oblivion** game. However, for solo play, they are interesting and playable characters, and it is not inconceivable that a group of Ferryman might band together to accomplish some great task. After all, *someone* had to lay the rails the Midnight Express follows through the Tempest.

Ferryman character generation is just like the normal character generation process of **Wraith: the Oblivion**, except that the numbers are larger and there are certain minimum requirements that the wraith must satisfy. Just as normal, Abilities and Arcanoi cannot be raised above 3 without the use of freebie points.

Ferryman must have a minimum score of 4 in Melee, Awareness and Empathy. Ferryman must have a score of 5 in Castigate, and a total of 5 or more in the sum of their Fatalism and Lifeweb scores. Ferryman must have a Willpower of at least 8, and must have a minimum total of 4 dots of Hierarchy, Guild, Heretic or Renegade Status. Some or all of these will require the expenditure of freebie points.

Ferryman Character Generation

Attributes and Abilities

Attributes: Ferryman have nine points to distribute to their Primary Attributes, seven points to distribute to their Secondary Attributes, and five points to distribute among their Tertiary Attributes. Just as normal, Ferryman get one free dot in every Attribute.

Abilities: Ferryman have 20 points to distribute among their primary Abilities, 15 points to distribute among their Secondary Abilities, and 10 points to distribute among their Tertiary Abilities. Remember that freebie points must be spent to raise an Ability above 3 during character generation.

Advantages

Backgrounds: Ferryman have 12 points to distribute among the normal Backgrounds. Ferryman also have two new Backgrounds available to them. Activity is an abstract representation of the degree to which the Pasiphae perform actions that cause the Ferryman to gain Pathos. Ferryman Artifacts is a more potent version of the normal Artifacts Background that represents the Ferryman's access to the Boatmen's Society storehouses on Dis.

Arcanoi: Ferryman have 25 points of Arcanoi. Arcanoi cannot be increased above 3 without the use of freebie points. Additional arts, Dark Arcanoi or the Arcanoi of other Dark Kingdoms are all available to Ferryman, but must be bought entirely with freebie points.

Passions: Ferryman have eight points of Passions, at least one of which must be rated 4 or higher. Freebie points cannot be used to raise the sum of the Ferryman's Passions above 20.

Fetters: Ferryman have five points of Fetters, and are automatically assumed to have resolved at least one Fetter, allowing them to forever more travel freely between the Tempest and the Shadowlands.

Freebie Points: Ferryman have 30 freebie points to distribute as they wish.

Pasiphae: Ferryman's Pasiphae have 12 points of Dark Passions, seven points in Dark Arcanoi and no freebie points.

New Backgrounds

Activity

This Background represents the Pasiphae's attitudes with regard to actions that grant the Ferryman Pathos. Those Ferryman with a high Activity Background tend to gain large amounts of Pathos from their other halves, while those with a low Activity background have Pasiphae who are very careful not to feed their counterparts.

Secretly, before the beginning of each session, the Storyteller should roll a number of dice equal to the Ferryman's Activity rating (difficulty 6). The number of successes is the number of points of Pathos the Ferryman gains each in-game day during the session. The Storyteller should release the points at his discretion, possibly using them to advance the plot or simply awarding them at random intervals.

If the Pasiphae is actually present and "on camera" in the story, obviously these rules no longer apply, and the Ferryman gains Pathos as the Pasiphae's actions merit, and vice versa. However, when portraying the Pasiphae's style of operations, the Storyteller should keep in mind the Activity ratings. Pasiphae with high Activity ratings tend to make profligate use of Arcanoi, take a large number of Psyche dice and otherwise perform actions that add to their Composure.

Ferryman Artifacts

Ferryman Artifacts represent the Ferryman's relationship with the Fabricants and her willingness to explore the storehouses of Dis in search of useful odds and ends. All Ferryman automatically receive their scythes, robes, lanterns and boats for free. Any rating in this Background represents additional Artifacts that the Ferryman has either persuaded a Fabricant to manufacture or found in the storerooms of Dis and taken as her own. Each point in Ferryman Artifacts gives a Ferryman character three points of the Artifacts Background which can be used to choose Artifacts, or one Storyteller-chosen Artifact of a randomly determined level between 1 and 5. The Fabricants' knack for experimentation means that all sorts of interesting things can be found or created.

New Knowledges

Tempest Lore

The Knowledge reflects the Ferryman's knowledge of the Sea of Shadows. Wraiths with a high Tempest Lore are knowledgeable about the locations of Byways, the routes to the Far Shores and other features of the Tempest. They know where bands of Spectres are likely to hide in ambush, and hidden locations like the gathering places of the Harbingers, the land of Amenti and the special zones in the Tempest where Active Plasms can be gathered.

- Student: You've traveled the major Byways and know the major ports.
- College: You can act as a guide as long as it's nowhere obscure.

••• Masters: You've cut out across the Great Unknown more than a few times on dead reckoning, and haven't gotten jumped (at least, not fatally so).

•••• Doctorate: You know the Tempest fairly well. From the Shadowlands to the Far Shores, you've seen it all and gotten new scars there.

••••• Scholar: Ferryman of more than a century's experience.

Possessed By: Ferryman, Harbingers, Stygian Legates, Old Haints

Specialties: Spectral haunts, Out-of-the-way islets, Good places to gather Active Plasms, the Far Shores, Major Byways.

Dis Lore

Dis Lore represents the Ferryman's knowledge of the ins and outs of Dis and its surroundings. Dis is huge, an entire city built underground. With so much of the city forgotten or abandoned, those Restless who don't know where they're going can end up hopelessly lost for days, and that's if they're lucky. Worse still is actually trying to find something in the lower levels of the city, where pools of standing plasm have built up over the years from tiny leaks and specially trained vulpines hunt Plasemics in the darkness.

• Student: You still remember what they taught you in training pretty well: always go upward and check the dust for tracks.

•• College: You've spent more than a few years roaming Dis, and you're pretty familiar with the ins and outs of the city. You get where you're going with no more than occasional delays.

••• Masters: You're quite familiar with the city, and help other, younger or more independent Ferrymen find their way.

•••• Doctorate: You can actually *find* things in the storerooms.

••••• Scholar: The city is your existence, and you are its soul.

Possessed By: Older Ferrymen, Hunting Vulpines, Sneaky Pasiphae

Specialties: The storerooms, Abandoned regions, Hunting for tasty snacks, The maze.

The Arts of the Ferrymen

The Arcanoi of the Ferrymen are many and diverse, as befits their ancient age and great experience. Many of the secrets of the Guilds have made their way into the lore of the Boatman's Society over the years. Some of these secrets came from Ferrymen working to emulate arts they had seen in use, while others were given to individual Ferrymen as payment for services rendered or shared by Guildwraiths who joined the Society.

Also, there were a number of Ferrymen who devoted themselves entirely to researching the Arts of the Dead. These inquiries came to an abrupt end with the tragedy that resulted in the creation of the Mourners. Though this formal inquiry has ended, the results of the College of Inquiry's early work have survived in the form of tempered Arcanoi passed down through the ranks of the Boatmen's Society. Over the centuries, these arts have been refined and added to by various individual Ferrymen. The Ferrymen's access to most of the Guild arts and the Dark Arcanoi, their own unique mastery of the alloyed Arcanoi and the innate abilities granted to them by their condition makes them some of the most powerful beings in the Underworld.

The Price of Knowledge

Alloyed arts are more difficult to learn than normal Arcanos arts. Alloyed arts use the same chart as normal alternate arts (see the Alternate Arts table on page 133 of *Wraith: The Oblivion, 2nd Edition*). Look up the cost of an alternate art for the highest single level of Arcanos used by the art, plus one. Alloyed arts, as a rule, cannot combine more than two Arcanoi.

For example: Messenger of Light requires Fatalism 3 and Pandemonium 4. It thus costs 10 experience to learn: nine for the Pandemonium 4 and one for the fact that it's an alloyed art. Needless to say, the Ferryman must have achieved suitable levels of expertise in all Arcanoi involved in the alloyed art before she can learn it.

To date, only Ferrymen have learned the secrets of these arts. Should an outsider discover or learn any of the powers listed below, Angst that would normally be ascribed to a Ferryman's Pasiphae instead goes to the character's Shadow.

The Arts of Travel The Bridge of Thoughts

Lifeweb 3, Fatalism 3

The Ritual of Severance provides a level of kinship that allows the Ferrymen to communicate with one another through eye contact as if they were speaking. The Boatmen call this the Bridge of Thoughts. Through the use of this art, the Ferryman may extend this awareness beyond line of sight, sensing the presence of other Ferrymen nearby and, if both parties so desire, opening communications. Also, the Bridge of Thoughts operates on a metaphysical "frequency" close to that of the Hive-Mind of the Shadow-eaten — a two-edged sword. While this art allows the Ferryman to detect the presence of Spectres nearby, it also allows the Shadow-eaten to detect Ferrymen who are actively communicating using the Bridge of Thoughts. Also, this overlap causes a great deal of interference with the Ferrymen's communications during Maelstroms or when the Boatmen descend into the Labyrinth. It is believed that the Pasiphae can listen in on these conversations, and so the Ferrymen are loath to use the Bridge for important communications, save in situations of extreme urgency.

System: The player spends one Pathos to active Bridge of Thoughts for a scene. Normally, communication is automatic. However, Ferrymen in a Hive-Mind-rich environment must make a Manipulation + Lifeweb roll for each message, with a difficulty of either (4 + the Maelstrom level) or 8 (if in the Labyrinth). One success results in a highly garbled message, three successes indicate a clear transmission, and five successes allows the Ferryman to communicate across the Bridge without rolls for the rest of the scene.

To detect Spectres requires a roll of Perception + Fatalism (difficulty 9 minus the Spectre's score in the Dark Arcanos Hive-Mind). One success detects animalistic Spectres like Shades, who constantly radiate their thoughts to the Hive-Mind. Three successes permits the Ferryman to spot the average deep-infiltration Doppelganger, while five successes allows even the most cunning Spectre's location to be pinpointed.

Guardian's Filament

Fatalism 3, Lifeweb 3

This art allows a Ferryman to put a "tag" on someone who she feels needs looking after. The art is generally but not always their passenger or passengers. The Filament has two uses. First, it warns the Ferryman if the charge is in imminent danger. Secondly, it allows the Ferryman to view the subject, though it does not allow communication.

System: The player spends one Pathos to establish the Filament. An additional point of Pathos must be spent every day to maintain it, just as if it were an artificial Fetter. When the subject is in imminent danger, the player must succeed in a Perception + Fatalism roll (difficulty 6) to notice. To view the subject, the player spends a point of Pathos and makes a Perception + Lifeweb check (difficulty 7). One success allows the subject's direction to be divined, and perhaps a hazy image or two appears as well. Three successes allows the Ferryman to determine the target's distance and direction, and receive blurry and somewhat disjointed images of his situation. Five or more successes allows the Ferryman to pinpoint the target's exact location, even if he moves, and receive crystal-clear images of what is happening around him for the rest of the scene.

Long Leap

Argos 5, Fatalism 3

The Long Leap is the ultimate refinement of the Harbinger's art — the ability to use the strange involutions of the Underworld's metaphysics to make a journey of any distance practically instantaneous to an external observer. The Ferryman disappears in a flat black flicker, only to flicker into existence again somewhere else. The process, which is similar in many ways to the journey to a Harrowing, seems to take a considerably longer time from the inside. Also, like a Harrowing, the trip is strictly single passenger. While the Ferryman and her goods, even her boat, can slip effortlessly through the flicker of Nihil, no passengers, not even Plasmics, can accompany her on the trip. When the Ferryman make the Long Leap, they make it alone.

System: The player spends four Pathos and one temporary Willpower point, sends one point of Angst to her character's Pasiphae, and spends three turns preparing herself. She then makes an Intelligence + Argos roll (difficulty 8). Only one success is required for the Long Leap to take place. Those at the Ferryman's destination must succeed in a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 8) or be surprised for a turn when she emerges. The fates of those who botch their roll are dark and little spoken of. Some travelers arrive incurably insane, apparently victims of trips with infinite subjective duration. Others are never seen again, and can only be presumed to become lost forever in the interstices of the Underworld.

Serendipitous Passage

Argos 3, Fatalism 4

This art is of inobvious effect, allowing a Ferryman to cast himself adrift on the sea of Fate as well as the Sea of Shadows. Most Ferryman use this to travel to where they are most needed, or to pilot their passengers to destinations that will help the passengers to come to terms with their condition. Most Ferryman have a profound and unblinking faith in this art, and it has cer-



tainly contributed a great deal to their mystique. There are a few Boatmen who worry that this makes them little more than tools of the Lady of Fate, but most Ferrymen see the Lady herself as little more than a tool in the greater web of Fate. In the end, however, the art's utility cannot be debated.

System: This Art has no system. To activate it, the Ferryman simply spends two Pathos, states a general goal and lets herself become a passive instrument of Fate. She arrives at the place most appropriate to her goal when the time is right. Though the destination may seem quite strange, there have been no reports of Ferrymen who arrived somewhere that was seemingly irrelevant to their ultimate goals. Then again, they may have turned up in just the right place after all.

Shadow Fetter

Lifeweb 4

Shadow Fetter is a specific adaptation of Splice Strand (Lifeweb ●●●) to meet the needs of the Ferrymen, who must often shepherd souls who have lost their Fetters. After entering the Shadowlands, the Ferryman can generate an anchor that allows the target to exist outside the Tempest, so long as the Ferryman continues to feed the Shadow Fetter Pathos. This is not an actual Fetter, and cannot be torn away — it is merely a metaphysical anchoring that allows the target to exist at the Shadowlands' higher order of stability. While using this art is not much more effective than Splice Strand, it frees the Ferryman from worries of having a subject fall into a Harrowing from the loss of a temporary Fetter, either through its destruction in the Skinlands or the actions of a malicious Monitor.

System: The player spends one Pathos and makes a Charisma + Lifeweb roll (difficulty equal to the local Shroud rating). Each success allows the Shadow Fetter to persist for five hours before it must be renewed.

A wraith attached to a Shadow Fetter who is Harrowed returns afterward to the Shadowlands equivalent of the site of his death. That is, of course, assuming he returns at all.

Spirit Triage

Usury 2, Castigate 3

This art is used by Ferrymen who are carrying wraiths dangerously close to Catharsis or to becoming Shadow-eaten. By means of simple conversation and an expenditure of Pathos, the Ferryman strengthens the victim against the urges of his Shadow. While doing so does not actually lower the victim's permanent or temporary Angst, it does benefit him in the struggle for control. As such, Ferrymen favor it for use in conjunction with Defiance, or to stabilize a wraith whose Shadow is beyond the Boatman's ability to control as the Ferryman hurries him to one of the Far Shores.

System: The player spends one Pathos and one Willpower and makes a Manipulation + Usury Roll, with a difficulty equal to the subject's permanent Angst rating. For each success, the Psyche's difficulty is lowered by one for the wraiths' next Catharsis roll. If the subject is at 9 permanent Angst, the Spirit Triage instead makes the wraith Slumber for one hour per success on the roll, hopefully preventing him from acquiring any more Angst of any sort.

Using this art gives the Ferryman's Pasiphae two points of temporary Angst.

The Last Experiment and the Mourners

The Plasmic entities known as the Mourners were born from the worst and last disaster to befall the Society's College of Inquiry. Shortly after the Deathlords' Fetters were found to have been destroyed, the Society resolved to take measures to protect itself against a similar attack. It was agreed to remove the remaining Fetters of the Ferrymen to storage in Dis, where they could be more easily protected. As a preliminary step toward implementing this program, five of the College's seven members attempted via a combination of Usury and Embody to draw one of their Fetters through the Shroud.

While the members of the College believed that coming into contact with one's own Fetters might be extremely harmful, none of them expected the unmitigated disaster that resulted. As the Fetter crossed the Shroud, the process of transformation began. By the end of the change, four of the five Ferrymen present had been transformed into Mourners, either by attempting to assist the first victim, or by trying to contact the victims over the Bridge of Thoughts.

The resultant beings were not given their name by the Boatmen's Society (who were too aghast to call them anything), but rather by the witnesses to their later, seemingly random attacks on others. As their last act before disbanding, the College of Inquiry worked out a method akin to Puppetry by which the Mourners could be controlled and contained. Then, their spirits broken, the survivors returned to their existence as Ferrymen.

Since that time, the Mourners have wandered the Underworld, dragging away their chosen victims to the Sea of Shadows. The exact nature of the Mourners' condition is mystery, even to the survivors of the College. The consensus of the Ferrymen willing to speculate about their former fellows is that under normal circumstances, a Fetter will refuse to cross the Shroud. However, the Ferryman's divided condition due to the Rite of Severance resulted in a different (and far less pleasant) outcome.

Only the Ferryman's shell remains, eager to be "fulfilled" through Transcendence or Oblivion but incapable of comprehending this need. Left with only a guttering spark of sentience, the Mourners seek to fill their emptiness with anything they come into contact with less empty than themselves. This, theorize the Ferrymen, is why they inevitably return for those who interfere with their processions. Having come in contact with something more substantial than themselves, the Ferrymen can only numbly seek it out and devour it.

As for the highly contagious nature of the Mourning condition, little is known, other than that the victims of the Mourners themselves inevitably become members of the procession. The general belief is that the Mourners devour the essence of their victims in a quest to quench their own inner void, and somehow make the victim empty like themselves, without every actually fulfilling their own need.

Why the condition is communicable over the Bridge of Thoughts without special protection, yet has no effect on Spectres using Hive-Mind, is a mystery. Similarly, no explanation has ever been found for why Mourners remain chained to the eldest Mourners in their procession. Like so much else in the Underworld, the Mourners are a mystery to which only a few clues are known, whose very nature prevents the sort of close study that would explain more.

The Arts of War

Beckon Tools

Argos 5, Lifeweb 5

The Ferryman are said to develop such a mystic connection to their tools that they will come to the Boatman's hand when called. In reality, this effect is caused by an alloyed Arcanos with much broader applications than calling a reed boat. In fact, the Ferryman can call any object he has ever touched to himself. The Ferryman, however, are very careful not to reveal the full extent of the art unless absolutely necessary. As a result, the Underworld is almost totally ignorant of just how flexible this power truly is.

System: The Ferryman must touch the object. The player spends three Pathos and a temporary Willpower and rolls Dexterity + Lifeweb (difficulty 7). In order to mark an object, the Ferryman must achieve a number of successes determined by the size of the object. One success allows small objects like rings, masks and lanterns, three successes allows the marking of medium-sized objects like scythes and robes, and five successes marks even large objects like boats and rafts to be marked. There is a brief flash as the mark is placed on the object, most Ferryman take pains to conceal it.

To call the object to him, the Ferryman must spend two Pathos and roll a Manipulation + Argos (difficulty 6). Each success determines how far the object can be called from. One success calls the object from a few miles away, three successes calls the object from anywhere in the same Dark Kingdom, and five or more successes calls the object from *anywhere*, even the Labyrinth or the Shadowlands. Normally, the object appears in the Ferryman's hand, while larger objects appear just out of sight or drift into view on the Tempest a few seconds after the call is given.

The mark on an object never wears off, nor is it visible, though Monitors using Sense Strand can detect it (difficulty 9). The Ferryman who made the mark can voluntarily "erase" it. Only objects and not individuals can be marked with this power.

Using this art gives the Ferryman's Pasiphae two points of temporary Angst.

Burning Aegis

Castigate 4, Pandemonium 3

Through the use of this art, the Ferryman pours Pathos into the Wylding, causing the air (for lack of a better term) around her to arc and crackle with Wyldfire. While this display is expensive, it is also extremely inhospitable for Spectres, and makes the Ferryman virtually unassailable by the Shadow-eaten. Burning Aegis also serves as a useful if somewhat costly beacon, because the brilliant multicolored flash is both unmistakable and blinding-bright over even the vast distances of the Tempest.

System: It costs five Pathos and a point of temporary Willpower to activate Burning Aegis for a scene. The player then rolls Charisma + Castigate (difficulty 8). The number of successes is the number of levels of aggravated damage that every Spectre within the Aegis takes each round. The edge of the Aegis usually extends from between three to five yards from the Ferryman, with the exact distance fluctuating constantly. Spectres making ranged attacks into the protected area take a penalty to the difficulty of their attacks equal to the number of successes the player rolls. Additionally, the forces of pure Oblivion cannot be made mani-

fest inside the Aegis. While it might not stop an attack from a Malfean, the Aegis prevents Maelstrom damage and negates Oblivion-based attacks such as Miasmal Breath and Obliviate.

Witnesses of its effects note that the Aegis is clearly an *active* force — it can and does decrease in intensity in one area in order to actively lash out at Shadow-eaten hovering near another. Non-Spectral opponents are not affected by the power of the Burning Aegis, though Pasiphae are.

Using this art gives the Ferryman's Pasiphae three points of temporary Angst.

The Shear of Fate

Fatalism 5, Usury 3

Taught to the Ferryman by the Lady of Fate, the Shear of Fate is a deadly power used by the Boatmen to destroy those who hinder them excessively. The Boatmen are reluctant to use this power, not only because it feeds Oblivion, but because of the hubris of cutting an individual's strand short in the web of Fate. This means that only those who actively hinder the Society in its task merit the use of this dreaded art. Also, like most weapons of terror, the less the Shear is used the better. The reputation of the Ferryman's ability — that their curses are strong enough to make the Mourners come for you — is far more effective at deterring officious Hierarchy functionaries than the actual application.

System: The Ferryman must make eye contact with the target, single him out, and utter a clearly audible curse. The player spends three Pathos and a *permanent* Willpower point, and sends five temporary Angst to the Pasiphae. The player then makes a Manipulation + Fatalism roll (difficulty 8). Even a single success indicates that, unless for some reason the target is shielded by Fate, her destruction due to catastrophic bad luck is assured. The number of successes rolled simply determines the speed at which the creeping doom arrives. A single success means that the bell tolls for the target in a week or so. Three successes snuffs the target out within a day, and five or more successes indicates that a Nihil has opened under her feet and cast her into the Well of the Void.

Concussive Shout

Keening 4, Outrage 3

This art is a melding of the forces behind Outrage and Keening, harnessed for battle. More powerful than Stonehand Punch and more precise than Crescendo, Concussive Shock allows the Ferryman to vocalize a single emotion with such strength that it does aggravated damage.

System: The player spends three Pathos and sends two temporary Angst to the Pasiphae, then rolls Strength + Keening (difficulty 8). Each success is a level of aggravated damage that the those within a 30-degree cone of the Ferryman's mouth (friend and foe alike) take. The cone reaches out a distance of 10 yards, and can also do considerable structural damage to inanimate objects as well as to the Restless. At close range this art can damage even Stygian steel.

See With Blind Eyes

Lifeweb 3, Puppetry 5

This art, the last developed by the College of Inquiry before its dissolution, allows the Ferryman to control the Mourners and use them for their own ends. The Ferryman summoning

the Mourners effectively Skinrides the leader of the procession, controlling the Mourner's movements but speaking with the Ferryman's own voice. Treat this exactly as if it were normal Puppetry. Occasionally the Mourners are summoned for combat, but generally they are used to eliminate the enemies of the Boatmen's Society. The Ferrymen are *very* careful to use the Mourners in an inobvious fashion: The connection between the Mourners and the Ferrymen is obvious enough if looked at closely. Disturbingly, many Mourner attacks have nothing to do with the Boatmen's Society. Some Ferrymen believe that the Mourners roam randomly, but others suspect that the Pasiphae have learned to See With Blind Eyes as well — a disturbing thought, given that the Boatmen's Society has assiduously avoided mention of their power over the Mourners. Perhaps the Pasiphae have worked out the riddle of the Mourners on their own, or perhaps they have a greater command of the Bridge of Thoughts than the Ferrymen have hitherto suspected.

System: Use of See with Blind Eyes costs one Pathos and one Willpower, and causes the user's Pasiphae to gain three temporary Angst, plus any gained from Dark Passions fulfilled when the victim is dragged screaming into the Tempest to begin his new career. It is not possible for those who have not undergone the Ritual of Severance to use this art, as it presumes the user has a connection to the Bridge of Thoughts. The player makes a Charisma + Lifeweb roll (difficulty 9) to control the lead Mourner of the nearest procession for the scene, which appears in from the Tempest within 10 minutes. A botch while attempting to use this art is much dreaded, for it means the Ferryman has contracted Mournerism. Ferrymen who use this art generally stand far away from friends and loved ones while it is in operation.

Messenger of Light

Fatalism 3, Pandemonium 4

This unusual art was developed in response to the vulnerability of the Bridge of Thoughts to eavesdropping, at the very least by the Pasiphae, and possibly by other Spectres as well. Rather than use Tempestweaving, which would feed the Pasiphae and could be somehow vulnerable to Spectral interference, the College decided instead to use this unwieldy combination of arts to achieve a similar effect.

To use Messenger of Light, the Ferryman reaches into the Tempest and pulls forth a brilliant golden bird. At first glance or from a distance, the bird resembles a dove, though looking too closely destroys the illusion and makes it seem to be more a mismatched collection of random memories sheathed in a soft light. The Ferryman whispers his message to the dove and releases it. It wings its way across the Underworld to the intended recipient of the message, settles on her shoulder and repeats the message in the Ferryman's own voice.

System: The Ferryman's player pays four Pathos, and the Storyteller rolls the player's Wits + Pandemonium (difficulty 8). The number of successes determines how likely the dove is to arrive safely and how long the passage will take to arrive. One success means the dove will arrive in a day or two. Three successes makes it so that the golden dove will probably get through to its destination within the day, barring Maelstrom conditions. Five or more successes, and the dove is so fast and sure that it acts as if the Ferryman whispered it in the recipient's ear. A botch indicates that the message is lost, and possibly intercepted....

Artifacts

The Artifacts used by the Ferrymen are constructed by the Master Fabricant and the half-dozen or so who assist her at the forge and loom. However, the workshops of Dis are open to all Ferrymen with interest. Most of the Boatmen eventually learn the arts of soulforging and constructive Molation, though few of them become members of the tight circle of the Fabricants. With their millennia-old in-jokes and merciless perfectionism, the Fabricants are the tightest of the subcultures within the Boatmen's Society.

Since the destruction of Daedalus, there has been a definite change of emphasis among the Fabricants. While Daedalus was a genius at rings, torcs, wall flies and other such tiny and cunning contrivances, Aretas' brilliance lies in working with unusual materials. Driven by her reluctance to work with any sort of formerly human material, even Nephwracks, Aretas has become a master of working with Plasmics, producing one-off Artifacts from the Whistimmu she and her fellows capture from the Sea of Shadows or out of the Labyrinth. She has passed this skill along to those who work with her, most of whom share at one level or another her reluctance to forge those who might otherwise be Redeemed. As a result, the output of the forges of the Boatmen's Society has been much more unearthly over the last few centuries, and much more dominated by singular items.

The Basics

These tools are manufactured by the Master Fabricant and her assistants for use by every Ferryman. Should one of the pieces of a Ferryman's basic equipment be lost or destroyed, he needs only to return to Dis to replace it. While most Ferrymen go centuries without needing replacements, there are usually two or three pieces in stock with which to outfit new Initiates or replace lost or damaged gear. However, sudden demand can empty out the stockpiles, and unlucky Ferrymen may be forced to do without or remain in Dis while new equipment is forged.

Ferryman's Boat

The Ferrymen's boats are made by the Master Fabricant, though she is often assisted at her work by the Navigatus, who was a shipwright in life. The boats of the Ferrymen generally use no relic material in their construction, either being rafts made from the wood of the trees that grow on the Isle of Eurydice or reed boats made from the oily black cattails that grow along the River of Death. Both sorts of boats are far sturdier than their appearance would suggest — stronger even than Stygian steel, for they can survive the teeth and claws of even large Shades with only superficial damage.

System: In addition to their durability, the rafts and boats of the Ferrymen also have a sheltering effect on those taking passage in them. Reduce the force of any given Maelstrom by three grades when determining the effect of the storm on those inside the boat. Note that this includes the boat itself — the rafts of the Ferrymen are exceptionally seaworthy. The vessels crewed by Severus and his ilk do not sink or break up, even under the worst conditions, and generally overturn only when poled across the wind in a Force Five Maelstrom.

Ferryman's Robes

Rather than simple being formed from a single Spectre's Corpus via Moliat, the robes of the Ferrymen are instead created through a much more arduous process. Spectral corpora are Moliated into thread and woven together with hair-fine Stygian steel wire into a cloth that is then cut and sewn into their robes. The hems of the garment are then sewn with carefully concealed soulfire and bloodfire crystals. The result is not only some of the most durable armor in the Underworld, but also a form of camouflage which allows a Ferryman traveling alone to traverse the Tempest with much less worry of Spectral attack.

System: As armor, the robes provides two forms of protection. The first is that each contains 12 points of stored Pathos, which can function exactly as a soulfire mask, including the ability to use it as an offensive weapon. The robes also add six dice to the Ferryman's soak pool, which can be used to soak aggravated damage.

As camouflage, the Ferrymen's robes have a distinctly Spectral character. The Angst in the bloodfire crystals circulates through threads of Spectral Corpus and radiates a simple sort of Hive-Mind. This adds +2 to the difficulty of Spectral Awareness rolls to spot the Ferryman. In the case of instinctive hunters like *kuei*, vulpines, Shades or Haints, it also adds +2 to the difficulty of Alertness rolls to spot the Ferryman. Obviously this only works in environments like the Tempest, where Spectres disregard the presence of other Shadow-eaten. Some Plasmics, specialized to feed on Spectres, are attracted by the radiance of the robes. Also, in the Labyrinth, the robes act a beacon to every Spectre defending its territory. As a result, Ferrymen descending into the Labyrinth often eschew their robes for other forms of armor. Of course, when the First raid the Labyrinth to feed the forges of Dis, they wish to draw as many Spectres to them as quickly as possible and generally wear their robes, sometimes even going so far as to use captured or Intimated Spectres as hunting-hounds and bait.

Those Spectres subjected to Nhudri's Embrace and Intimation and used as Thralls in Dis are dressed in special versions of the Ferrymen's robes to avoid the difficulties associated with the illumination of the lamps. These lesser robes add two dice to the Spectres' soak rolls, protect them from the effects of the Ferrymen's lanterns (q.v.) and block all contact with the Hive-Mind.

Ferryman's Lamp

The lamps of the Ferrymen are their greatest secrets. None but the Master Fabricant and her assistants know what provides the fuel for these ever-burning lamps, which also light the fortress of Dis. The lanterns cast a warm, candle-yellow radiance. This unearthly light can penetrate Maelstroms, allowing visibility out to several hundred yards in even a Force Five storm. In normal weather, the lantern can be seen as far as seven miles away. The Ferryman's lamps also penetrate the cloak of shadows created by the Argos art Enshroud, making it impossible to use that art to move unseen while within the bounds of the lamp's illumination.

System: The Shadow-eaten are pained by the light of the lamps, and must succeed in a Being roll (difficulty 6) or be unable to enter the illuminated area for a scene. Additionally, the corpora of wraiths and Spectres have distinctly different appearances under the light of a Ferryman's lamp, and a Perception +

Awareness roll (difficulty 6) allows someone knowledgeable of this fact to differentiate between the Restless and the Shadow-eaten by lamplight.

The lamps themselves are immensely durable and especially resistant to the forces of Oblivion. Most Ferrymen fight with their scythes in one hand and use their lanterns in the other as a shield. If used as a shield, the lantern adds +1 to the difficulty of hitting the Ferryman in melee combat, +2 if the attacker is Shadow-eaten or attacking at range. If used to block blows, the lantern can stop even area-affecting attacks like Misasmal Breath or Tempestos Blast. Each success on the Ferryman's Dexterity + Melee roll to block the attack subtracts one from the number of successes rolled on the attack, or from the number of Corpus levels done if the attack is automatically successful (for example, Miasmal Breath). The lantern cannot be used to block attacks and provide its shield bonus in the same turn.

Ferryman's Scythe

The scythes wielded by the Ferrymen are patterned after Charon's own scythe, Siklos, though of course not even the Master Fabricant can match Nhudri's own craftsmanship. The Ferrymen's scythes are more than simple weapons, however. They are also used to pole the rafts and boats of the Gray Pilgrims across the Tempest, and the back of each wickedly sharp blade has a u-shaped hook attached to hold the Ferryman's lantern as she makes her way.

Used as weapons, the scythes are improbably fast and unbelievably dangerous. They can be used one-handed, do Strength + 6 aggravated damage, add two dice to the Ferryman's initiative and have an attack difficulty of 4. The scythes are held blade-up when used as poles, and seem to seat firmly on the "bottom" of the Tempest even though only a few inches of their tips pierce the "surface" of the Sea of Shadows. Use of the scythe as a pole reduces the difficulty of all Orienteering rolls by one, and also aids in the use of certain of the Ferrymen's alloyed arts.

The scythe makes an excellent rest for a Ferryman's lantern, even when being used as a pole. Some unknown property of the scythe manages to hold the light steady even as the head of the scythe dips and swirls. While the primary effect is to provide the Ferryman with a strong and steady source of illumination, there are other benefits as well. The lantern's stillness as its illumination swirls through the darkness of the Tempest has a decidedly calming and hypnotic effects on passengers. While there are no specific mechanical effects to this, passengers aboard a Ferryman's raft often experience a severe distortion of their time sense and a profound feeling of calm and isolation — a real boon for Ferrymen carrying passengers close to Catharsis.

Other Items

The Fabricants of the Boatmen's Society are only rarely under any real time pressure, and even more rarely are they pressed for material. In addition, there is only so much need for robes, lanterns and scythes. As a result, Fabricants who see something rare or unusual in a Corpus tend to take the time to make that piece of Corpus into what it really deserves to be. Given the millennia that the forges of Dis have been in operation, the stores of bric-a-brac that have built up in the storerooms of the Sunken City are hard to imagine. In addition,

the recent output of the forges has contained a large number of unique items forged from Plasmics, which lay waiting for a Ferryman willing to carry them into the field.

Most of the items found in **Buried Secrets** can be found in the stores of Dis, as well as those listed below and many others. Spectral items are very rare in Dis' storehouses, but not unheard of — Aretas has forged at least one maggot revolver as an experiment.

Ultimately, there's no limit on what Ferrymen can take from the Sunken City. There are rooms full of unique and exquisitely crafted Artifacts gathering dust. Indeed, much of the mechanism driving the *Midnight Express* was taken, already complete, from a dusty storage room deep inside Dis. Those so incautious as to look acquisitive may have problems escaping with just one armload of unidentifiable junk. Of course, this is not always a positive thing. The inconvenience of traversing the *Tempest* with bucketloads of trinkets and the obvious miscommunications possible when people are laden down with powerful weapons are just the beginning. Even their creators have forgotten the purpose of most of the items in Dis, and many of the items are dangerously old. Ferrymen selecting Artifacts from the storehouses of the Fabricants should be very careful to take only what they need, and to experiment in a controlled environment before putting their new toys to the test under a high-stress situation.

Aileron Whip

Forged from the tail of an Aileron, these whips are fairly common and easy to manufacture. Extremely fast, the whips retain the Aileron's natural camouflage, making them rather hard to dodge if the target does not know the strike is coming. They also have some of the Aileron's vampiric nature, draining Pathos from the target with each strike. On the downside, their several advantages don't balance out the fact that they still do only a relatively minor amount of damage with each strike.

System: Aileron whips do Strength + 1 damage, and dodges against them are at +1 difficulty because of the whip's color-changing tendencies. Each strike that does unsoaked damage drains one point of the target's Pathos, assuming the wielder can absorb it. If the wielder is already at maximum Pathos, none is drained.

Hookplate

Hookplate is forged from the corpora of the Labyrinth-dwelling Shadow Plasmics known as Borers. Hookplate is most aptly described as a suit of plate mail manufactured from the hammered bodies of monstrous star-nosed moles. The plate itself is of fine Stygian steel, and the razor-sharp, super-hard cutting teeth of the Borers protrude all across the armor, strengthening the plate as well as making it deadly in close combat.

Hookplate provides seven additional soak dice, which can soak aggravated damage. The wearer can body block and grapple for Strength + 1 aggravated damage, and body block, grapple, bite and similar unarmed attacks on the wearer subject the attacker to his own Strength +1 aggravated damage. If an armed attacker botches an attack roll against the wearer, the weapon is shattered or cut to pieces against the hooks, even if it is of True Jade or Stygian steel.

Lightning Wings

There is only one of these Artifacts extant, built primarily as a experiment. Unless some Ferryman chooses to test it and finds it satisfactory, it highly unlikely that the immense effort needed to manufacture another such suit will ever be undertaken. Made from an entire Shroudripper captured at great expense, the lightning wings are a distinctly intrusive, Spectral-style Artifact, and not so much an Artifact as a new state of existence for the Ferryman who eventually chooses to assume it. While a Spectre might choose to wear this impressive array, the Artifact would probably have an immensely destructive effect on an wraith who donned it without previously being subjected to the Ritual of Severance.

Most of the Shroudripper's 12-foot wingspan and form was retained during the forging process, though the cadaver was hammered into Stygian steel for greater strength. Modifications were made, however; the center was reforged to accommodate the Corpus of the wearer, and to hold three 10-point bloodfire crystals. Those using the wings can fly at the Shroudripper's natural speed of 120 miles an hour, as well as gaining access to the Argos art Flicker and the Pandemonium art *Tempus Fugit*, both of which are powered by the bloodfire crystals.

System: Both arts activate together, and the wings' Angst is consumed at the rate of five points per scene during which the *Tempus Fugit* and Flicker "Lightning Ride" is activated. (For the sake of simplicity, assume that a character activating the Lightning Ride flies objective speeds of slightly over a thousand miles an hour [a bit slower than an average Shroudripper in attack mode] with two additional actions each turn.) Characters making the Shroudripper's characteristic swoop-and-slash attack must take one action to fly their attack pattern, but may use their other two actions to attack. Unless the target is also under the effect of *Tempus Fugit*, or has some special defense, the character is essentially immune to counterattack. Unfortunately, the character does not gain the Shroudripper's ability to spray acidic mist.

While the lightning wings themselves can endure the tremendous stresses of flight at these incredible speeds, the user cannot, at least not without a great deal of additional modification. The necessary alterations include serious Molation to eliminate structural weaknesses and add steering apparatuses, the addition of Stygian steel armor along the user's major friction points and special prosthetic reinforcement of stress points of his Corpus. The net result is that the user permanently loses three Corpus points which can never be regained, and has his Appearance permanently reduced to 0. Additionally, the character is no longer able to use normal furniture, clothing or armor properly. On the positive side, the character gains a pool of three soak dice which can be used to soak aggravated damage.

Hunting Darts

The Ferrymen's answer to the maggot revolver, the hunting darts are a deadly weapon used to even up the score when a Ferryman has to defend himself against a group of enemies. Hunting darts are also used to extinguish enemies of the Boatmen's Society — those who have publicly hindered or harassed Ferrymen, or for cases where use of the Mourners might arouse suspicions.

A hunting dart is in essence a foot-long dart, with a wickedly barbed head and a Stygian steel covering just behind. Immediately before use, the Ferryman going a-hunting removes this cover, revealing a live 10-point soulfire crystal worked into the weapon. It is via this crystal that the darts do most of their damage.

System: Hunting darts use a variation of the Argos art Flicker to reach their target. The user of the dart must see her target and spend one point of Pathos to “wake up” the hunting dart. The Ferryman then throws the dart — in reality, little more than a flick of the wrist is needed to send the dart on its way. The dart’s imbedded Argos does the rest. The hunting darts have a range of several miles, using one Pathos from the imbedded crystal for each mile of distance traveled.

Hunting darts attack with pool of seven dice (difficulty 6), and can be blocked or dodged, assuming that the target is alert enough to notice them (Perception + Alertness, difficulty 8). However, if the dart is dodged or deflected, it returns the next turn to make another pass at the target, until it hits the target or something (like a shield) is abruptly interposed to absorb the attack (Dexterity + Melee or Athletics, difficulty 9).

If the hunting dart becomes lodged in a shield or something other than the target, the soulfire crystal discharges, melting the dart into uselessness, quite possibly ruining the interposed object and doing a level of aggravated damage to any wraith foolish enough to touch the bubbling remains for the next several minutes. A dart that strikes its target does three dice of aggravated damage. If even a single damage success goes unsoaked, the dart has lodged into the target, who begins taking one level of aggravated damage per turn (not soakable) from exposure to live soulfire until the dart is successfully removed or the target falls into a Destruction Harrowing. Removing a hunting dart is an extended Strength + Athletics test that requires three successes, each of which inflicts a level of aggravated damage.

Being hit with several hunting darts makes a Destruction Harrowing a near-certainty, while being hit with one is likely to distract an opponent long enough for the Ferryman to dispatch her other foes. Many Ferrymen carry a half-dozen or so darts

on their persons beneath their robes in special sheaths that pull the covers off the darts as they’re drawn.

Burning Chains

Burning Chains are a popular item among the members of the Boatmen’s Society, and among up-scale Stygian officials and soldiers as well. Similar to Living Chains, but more specifically designed for combat than for general utility, Burning Chains are an invaluable aid to those forced to face considerably superior foes, or who must fight large numbers of opponents at once. Burning Chains appear to be superficially similar to Living Chains, but are comprised of a large number of short chains rather than a few long ones. Each chain ends with a short, sharp blade, and the links near the blade are studded with fragments of live soulfire crystals. Burning Chains are a brilliant sight, even when not being used for combat. Wraiths wearing them are at a +2 difficulty on all rolls involving Stealth.

Burning Chains have an eight-dice pool which they can use each time the wearer takes an action. These dice can be split into as many as four actions without penalty. Dice used to parry can be added to the user’s own Dodge or Parry roll. Dice used to attack must be used on their own (the chains cannot aim the user’s hand, after all), but can be used to launch a series of simultaneous attacks, forcing the defender to split her Dodge dice pool. Burning chains do four dice of aggravated damage per successful attack, and cannot make more than two attacks on an individual per turn.

Similar to but more complex than Living Chains, Burning Chains are implanted all along the user’s spine, rather than just at the base. The implant process causes two Corpus levels of damage, which cannot be healed until the chains are removed. Burning Chains must be recharged with 30 points of Pathos every three months. Burning Chains whose charge has run down have only four dice in their pool, and do only two levels of aggravated damage on a successful attack.



Other Notable Ferrymen

The annals of the Ferryman are full of heroes. Each of the Boatmen has performed enough heroic deeds in their existence, even before initiation, to qualify them for any roll of honor. Yet even among the Ferrymen, there are some who stand out for their unusual determination or odd methods.

Datian Severus

Severus is the Ferryman with perhaps the most contact with Stygia. One of the First (though among the oldest of the second tier, rather than one of the original few), Severus was by all accounts one of Marius' close advisors in the days of the Roman Republic, and brought a patrician sense of obligation and *noblesse oblige* with him across the Shroud. He quickly broke with Charon, however, and joined the Ferrymen's ranks, making a name for himself and indeed being one of the very few Ferrymen whose names were known at all outside of Dis.

In recent centuries, Severus has adopted the role of unofficial liaison between Dis and Stygia, though he, like all his ilk, refuses to set foot on the Isle. It is he who spearheaded the efforts to see justice done for the victims of genocide, and he who finds ways to let the Deathlords know when Dis is particularly displeased with their courses of action. His presence in the Empire is an unofficial one, but one that is known to those who follow the paths of power on the Isle.

It is Severus himself who is primarily responsible for the image of the Ferrymen held in the popular eye; it is his exploits and habits that most Stygian citizenry take for the norm of Ferryman behavior. Whether this is an accidental development, a plan of Severus' or a smokescreen deliberately constructed by the Steering Committee with Severus' compliance remains unknown.

Bowen

Many among the Ferrymen are reluctant to soulforge even the Shadow-eaten, believing that this deprives them of the chance for Redemption. The enigmatic Ferryman known as Bowen takes this ethos a step farther, refusing also to use material forged from even the dubiously living Plasmics. Instead, he uses only relics

gathered from the Shadowlands and inanimate material fished out of the Tempest. Clad in a tattered robe of True Jade, and wrapped in a cloak made from sewn-together swatches and tatters of relic cloth, Bowen travels the Underworld armed only with his Arcanoi and a sturdy relic scythe.

Perhaps one the most diligent of the younger Ferrymen, Bowen is forever traveling in search of those who wish transport to the Far Shores. Bowen is perhaps best known for his fierce opposition to the slavers and other wraiths who fraudulently promise safe passage over the Sea of Shadows, but who instead turn on their passengers. The single greatest target of his ire are the Fishers. Bowen has destroyed over a dozen Fisher recruiting agents, and raided Paradise on at least one occasion.

Bowen's Pasiphae is equally active, and clearly his antithesis. Clad in clothing made from half-forged souls still able to scream, it takes great delight in emerging suddenly from the Tempest to attack travelers, and in roaming the Labyrinth in search of Helldivers. Bowen and his Pasiphae are both masters of Phantasm, and Bowen is said to have been one of the greatest Sandmen in Stygia (which one, however, is a matter of speculation) before he left the Guild for the Boatmen's Society.

Kurt

One of the newest of the Ferrymen, marked for great things long before his time among the Quick ended. Kurt bore the deathmarks of the Legion of Fate since the moment of his birth, and the Ferrymen were notified of his existence by the Lady of Fate shortly thereafter. Though his life as an artist was checkered and ended early by his own hand, his Fate is one of the brightest to have come to the attention of the Boatman's Society in almost a thousand years.

Kurt was personally Reaped by Severus, who gave him his regalia shortly after his death, led him through the resolution of one of his Fetters and gave Kurt his first initiation shortly thereafter. Kurt has only recently finished his training at Dis, and has undergone the Ritual of Severance. Among the small minority of Ferrymen who use modes of transport other than a boat or raft, Kurt travels the Underworld on the same motorcycle that carried him through much of his life. Though barely accustomed to the Underworld, Kurt has taken to his job with positive verve, and is progressing as well as wraiths five times his age.

The worlds revolve like ancient women, gathering fuel in vacant lots.

—T.S. Eliot, "Preludes"



Romance is a giddy thing. Throughout my somewhat truncated life, I'd alternated too-cool rationalism about love with bouts of love-at-first-sight obsession, swapping back and forth with enough velocity to cause whiplash in casual observers. Needless to say, I never managed to resolve this dilemma before passing on, though I did have any number of strange, destructive and ultimately bizarre relationships back in my breathing days. I turned most of those encounters into anecdote fodder rather than look at them seriously, even in the rearview mirror. Perhaps that's why I kept on running into the same situation over and over again in different guises.

Mind you, most folks would think that death should be a pretty permanent cure for romantic angst, not to mention awkwardness in the presence of the opposite sex. I mean, there's no pressure, right? You're dead – it's not like a chance meeting at a Haunt could lead to a whirlwind romance, a storybook wedding and eventually settling down to raise a gaggle of Enfants. Love is a Passion like anything else, and I suppose a couple of wraiths could do pretty well basking in each other's presences until they got sick of one another, but even so, you don't expect the thunderbolt to strike after you're dead and gone.

Damned if I didn't get nailed two weeks after they scraped me off the pavement.

Five years ago, I spent my nights staring out the windows of the office where I used to work, peering down at the afterlife on the pavement on Newbury Street that I was too fearful to join. She'd been one of the ghosts whom I saw night after night, somehow more alive than the rest of them. Every so often we made eye contact, and she smiled at me. I think she'd wanted me to come down and join the fun. I keep on telling myself I was working myself up to do so, to sneak down out of the office and through the door out onto the whole wide world of the Restless Dead.

Correction. Hah. I perpetually wimped out, at least until the night the soldiers arrived. I saw the whole thing from my window, my lovely safe bay window, and did nothing while she got her face torn off by some local Centurion with a badge that made him feel like a man. The soldiers carried off what was left of her, and no one else on the street did anything. Not even me.

Well, that's not true. I engaged in an act of self-mutilation that seemed profound at the time, so as to urge myself to get the hell out of the office and do something, I mean, even getting your face ripped off can't be any worse than inflicting that sort of pain on yourself deliberately, right?

Fortunately, I haven't had the opportunity to test that particularly idiotic hypothesis. Instead, I got on my metaphorical horse and started riding off after this girl I'd only seen a few times.

I'd never met her. I'd never spoken to her. I'd never even learned her name... and here I was, charging across perdition backward and forward, looking for her. There are times I think I didn't look too hard – or deliberately didn't look in the right place – so as to avoid finally, actually meeting her and having my illusions shattered when we finally spoke. I mean, what was I going to say? "Hi there, you don't know me, but I used to watch you out the window in Boston before you got your face torn off, and I think you're really cute, and I was wondering if your boyfriend was dead, too?"


So maybe that explains why, instead of marching up to the gates of the Boston Necropolis and offering to buy her Corpus back – which would have been the sensible thing to do – I walked from Boston to Savannah to San Francisco to places that don't even have names. I went with Severus into places that gave me nightmares bad enough to scare my Shadow. I learned the arts of the dead, and made a name for myself as that obsessive-compulsive guy that no one wanted to waste the effort bothering.

Okay, maybe I'm laying it on a little thick. I did learn quite a handful of tricks, and I did make something of a name for myself. I never did look as hard for her as I should have, though. I mean, I put in a lot of effort and logged a lot of miles, but it wasn't directed properly. Knowing what I know now, I wonder if my steps were diverted, or perhaps subtly altered for the purposes of the Ferryman. It would make me feel a lot better about myself if that were the case, if I had been swayed from my purpose by the Ferryman's secret machinations to utilize me. Personal good would have been sublimated to the higher mission, the needs of the many guys in black robes would have outweighed the needs of the one guy in slacks, and so on. It would be a comforting notion to cling to, but I can't shake the persistent feeling that it's pure hokey.

So here I am, in the streets of Stygia, wearing Ferryman's duds and watching the world end. Here she is, laying about her with a sword for all she's worth as the Spectres come out of the woodwork. She's wearing patchwork armor with Emerald Legion insignia on it, though I can't imagine she would have joined a Legion after... what happened.


Here you are standing around with your thumb up your ass while she gets overwhelmed again.

You know, every so often my other half has a good point. I unlimber the scythe and charge into the fray.



Prologue to Remembrance: Guildbook Mnemoi

A Road of Steel and Souls: An Ending



Two by two, the Guildmasters, or their duly appointed representatives, strode through the great iron doors into the blackness beyond. From below came the shouts and occasional screams of workers hewing the raw stuff of the Labyrinth from the walls of the Veinous Stair. Torches flickered and guttered in the darkness below, but the column of 14 souls neither hesitated nor spoke. Lord Ember himself took the lead, nervously passing his great hammer from hand to hand as he descended. Beside him the faceless assassin Slander flowed down each step with inhuman grace; the tension between the pair was palpable. Behind them, two by two, strode some of the most famous — or infamous — wraiths in Stygia's long and colorful history. Miklos the Chanteur, his hands on a lute Moliated to look like bleached bone, occasionally pursed his lips as if to whistle, but thought better of it after a glance at the glowering presence of the notorious Spook thug beside him. Brother Devotion of the Pardoners raised his lamp fearfully and took a look around, then hurried to catch up. At the end of the column were a mismatched pair: the Alchemist Jedediah (upon whose presence in the expedition Lord Ember had insisted)

and the aged Sandman Thusimos, who had a most incongruous smile playing on his lips.

In silence the column descended, and in silence they chose a branching tunnel marked with the same rune that Charon had used of old to sign official documents. "It seems an obvious trap," rumbled Ember, frowning at the whole situation.

"The doors above were the trap, my lord," replied the Masquer. "This is merely one of the gears in the great machine. Still, it is better to go in with our eyes open, so to speak." With that, the Pardoner coaxed his lantern to greater brightness, and the wraiths moved forward.

Toward the rear, Miklos sang a few short bars of a song none of the others could identify; it seemed to be about going off to work, but before he could mouth more than a few words Fix turned on him with a savage hiss. "So help me, another fucking note and I'm going to ram that ukulele up your ghostly asshole. You want every goddamned Spectre in this place to know we're coming, or do you just want a select audience of a few million for your swan song?"

Miklos laughed. "I'm sure they already know we're here, and why not go whistling to our own funerals?"

With a muttered curse the Spook swung at the singer, who dodged nimbly back. Before Fix could strike again, Slander had flowed from his place at the front of the line to entangle him. "Not now, Fix. We'll need all our strength."

Still cursing, Fix subsided. Slander waited a moment and fixed a warning stare on the smirking Miklos, then returned to his proper place. The column moved forward, each wraith knowing it was only a matter of time before they were discovered.

Jedediah was the first to vanish. As the Guildwraiths moved through a confluence of tunnels lit by glowing bands within the very walls themselves, a pack of Mortwrights made a futile, suicidal attack on the front of the group. Ember and Slander disposed of the dozen or so Spectres, but while the rest were watching the skirmish, a monstrous, shambling Shade emerged from one of the side tunnels and absconded with the Alchemist before he could so much as shriek. Thusimos apologized profusely for his lack of watchfulness, and asked why the ever-watchful Monitor representative had not detected the Shade's approach. The reply was a sullen "I blinked," and then the group moved on in silence.

Others fell as the wraiths continued onward. Despite Brother Devotion's best efforts, the predations of the Labyrinth itself — the Plasmics dwelling within, the perils of the acid plasm and other, less identifiable hazards — slowly eroded the numbers of the expedition. As powerful as the wraiths comprising the group were, the perils the Labyrinth presented were infinite, and persistent. The Monitor, Alphonse, vanished down a pit that suddenly opened beneath his feet and then closed within seconds. Swarming, buzzing Spectres carried off Ceridwen the Puppeteer to feed Rabark the Inhabited when she lingered too long to examine an abandoned Spectral city.

And so it went, so that when the survivors finally reached the great empty forge that had once housed Nhudri, there were but six of them: Ember and Slander, Miklos and Fix, Brother Devotion and Thusimos. Before them stretched the abandoned workshop that had once housed the Smith of the Dead. Leg irons that looked strong enough to chain time itself lay on the floor, sliced

neatly in twain. All else — the anvil, the bellows, the workbenches — was covered in dust.

"There's nothing here!" bellowed Ember as he strode around the chamber. "We've been tricked!"

"That you have," replied Thusimos, "and for that deception, you have my most sincere apologies." He stood, smiling once again, at the doorway. His smile was sad, however, and he made no move to flee.

"Sandman — you? But why?" Ember crossed the distance between them in perhaps four strides, his anger crackling off him like sparks. "What reason was there for this charade?"

Thusimos shrugged. "The best of all reasons — Charon's preservation. There was, or perhaps still is, a traitor among us, and by diverting our attention here, I had hoped to turn our enemies' gaze here as well. Better that the Onceborn be looking at their own domain than at Stygia while Charon is reborn, would you not agree? And so I made sacrifices of us all, that Charon might have the hours he needs to come into his own, and save the Empire. That is," he inclined his head slightly at Ember, "what you wanted, isn't it?"

Before the Artificer could reply, Miklos uttered a most unmusical shriek, as Fix smashed his throat with one swing of a heavy, vicious-looking mace. The others turned to find Slander impaling the singer with a bladed fist and lifting his victim off the ground. Miklos' legs kicked and dangled, but he neither sang nor spoke. Instead, he just spat and writhed. "This is the traitor, I think," said the assassin as calmly as if he were discussing a sunset or a day's



worth of sightseeing. "Miklos commissioned the attempt on you, Lord Ember; it seems likely that your rough treatment of him was deliberately provoked so as to provide an acceptable justification for his purchasing the contract. Interestingly enough, the contract specified that you were not to be destroyed, but rather to be Harrowed. It was a fascinating detail, and one that had slipped my mind for some time while we concerned ourselves with other matters."

"So what?" said Fix. "Maybe he was just trying to teach you a lesson? We run that racket all the time." He looked up at the Chanteur and grinned, nastily. "One note out of you, Celine, and I'm gonna make your heart go on through that wall over there. Just give me an excuse." Miklos looked daggers at him, but said nothing.

Slander, despite its lack of any facial features whatsoever, still managed to radiate equal parts contempt and despair in Fix's direction. "We handle such assignments as well, and matters like that are usually phrased a bit differently than this contract was. No, the idea was to send Lord Ember into a Harrowing and keep him there as long as possible. Why?"

"Perhaps to give the Labyrinth a chance to... convert me?" Ember sounded puzzled. "But what would Miklos gain from that?"

"Miklos? Nothing. His master? Everything, I think. The Emperor of the Jade Kingdom has been preparing for war for some time. His love of poets, artists and singers is well-known. Surely Yu Huang would benefit from having the master forger of Stygia, the man who creates so much of the realm's arms and armor, reduced to Spectrehood on the eve of invasion." Slander's tone was flat and grim. "Had I known, I would have refused the contract. You have my apologies, Lord Ember.

Fix turned to Slander incredulously. "I thought you guys never broke client confidentiality? What the hell's going on here?"

Slander smiled, or performed the equivalent. "I think, considering the circumstances, that normal rules can be set aside. Besides, I don't think any of us are liable to escape and spill the secret, and the seven other Slanders still extant in Stygia will make certain our reputation remains unsullied."

"Seven—," said Ember, and then there was no more time for talk, as the Spectres erupted from every shadow and corner.

Slander quickly gutted Miklos, with help from Fix, and turned to face the enemy, but there were too many and the defenders were too widely separated. Brother Devotion was torn apart by a hail of relic rifle fire, his lantern crashed to the floor, and then the individual wraiths were on their own. Slander and Fix fought back to back, grace and precision matched with sheer brutality. Ember lay about him with his hammer, bellowing curses and orders. Thusimos quickly drowned under a sea of Spectres. A moment later, Fix's head was torn from his shoulders by something impossibly huge and mantislike, and then there were only two.

"You've improved since our last meeting," said Slander humorlessly, as he carved yet another howling Stripling into scraps.

"Awaiting the rematch," replied Ember, grunting with the exertion of his hammer blows. "A pity we'll have to wait for another lifetime to try it."

"A pity indeed," said Slander, and then the only sounds in the chamber were those of hopeless battle. The sounds took a very long time to die away, but die they did.

Silence returned to the Labyrinth, and that was all.

"Is that how it would have been?" growled Ember at the nondescript wraith seated before him. A woman with graying

hair tied up in a tight bun, she nodded impassively and folded her arms across her chest.

"As near as we could tell after speaking with the Oracles, yes. The dialogue was a little fanciful — it's been years since I've spoken to Fix, and my handle on his colloquialisms is a bit rusty. Still, I cannot envision matters as having gone much otherwise."

Ember made a harrumphing noise. Across the table, the Masquer representative to the Council of Guilds put her hands on the tabletop and said, "You do realize that this... memory... is hardly binding evidence, Ember, either against us or Miklos."

The Artificer shrugged and waved off the comment. "It's inconsequential for now, really. I'm not inclined to seek revenge at the moment anyway. We have other matters to attend to, yes?" Mumbled assent came from around the table, save from the seat normally occupied by the Chanteur representative. That space was empty. "A marvelously crafted memory, Phaedra. Excellently done."

The Mnemos inclined her head slightly. "I wish it had not been necessary for me to craft it, or indeed for me to come to you at all. I am afraid that by doing so, I have betrayed the oldest trust my Guild holds, and I know that Minos will not be pleased with me on my return."

"Minos will discuss matters with us first, I think," said the dapper Spook Vanderwal, obviously pleased that his subordinate had acquitted himself well in the phantasy that the Mnemos had woven. "So for us halfwits whom Lord Ember doesn't let into the secret clubhouse, why don't you explain this trust to us? The more we know, the better we can plan and act."

Phaedra sighed. "It makes little difference now. I, and all my brethren, have been falsely accused for centuries. That we agreed to the deception makes little difference, save that it makes each destruction that much harder to bear. We have been Charon's agents for the last six centuries and longer, the keepers of the most essential part of the Empire. He banished us for safekeeping, that the knowledge we carried not be used by the Deathlords or—," she paused, "—the Guildmasters, for what we carry is for Charon alone."

"Dammit, woman, stop speaking like this is Aeschylus. What are you rambling on about?" The Spook seemed equally intrigued and irritated, and half-rose from his chair. Around him, the other Guildmasters leaned forward unconsciously, eager to learn the secret of centuries.

"We carry Charon's memories against his return," Phaedra said, "so that when he had finished his sojourn in the land of the living, he might come into his former power and glory, and thus rescue the Empire and all those dwelling within it. And every one of you who has taken a Mnemos Thrall or sent one to Oblivion has unknowingly committed treason, and pushed Stygia one step closer to destruction."

There was stunned silence in the room, then a confused babble of voices. Ember pounded his gavel on the table and bellowed for order, but it was the sound of bells, hundreds of them, that finally brought quiet to the chamber.

"What's that?" asked Alphonse, the timid little Monitor.

"Maelstrom bells," replied Thusimos grimly from his corner. "All of them. It sounds like the Sixth is here."

Unnoticed, Phaedra had risen from her chair. "The voice of the storm is the herald of Charon reborn. We must go to meet him." She turned to face the chamber, a tear glistening on her cheek. "I am sorry for all the lies, sorry that you must learn your own error this way, but there was no choice. Now who will go with me to meet the Emperor reborn?"

And two by two, just as they had in the forged memory, the Guildmasters of Stygia went forth for the last time.



We are memory. That is the first thing you must know before you can understand us, or indeed, before you can understand yourself. We, as we perceive ourselves, do not exist. We are our own memories of ourselves, lingering in a place where such things are possible. We are here because we remember ourselves well enough, whereas the vast ruck and run of souls simply weren't memorable, even to themselves.

Once you understand this, once you can accept the fact that you do not in fact exist (at least not as you understand existence), you can begin to understand us. For we are the keepers of memory, and in a place where we are all simply memories, that means we have a great deal of power indeed.

So close your eyes. Extend your hand. The Memory Palace awaits you. Enter freely, and of your own will, and you will learn much. Enter unwillingly, and you will learn nothing. Enter foolishly, and you may not return at all.

Do you trust me, at least this far? It is a start, and a better one than your friend made. If you listen closely, you can hear him from where you stand. No, I would not call that "screaming" so much as "energetic exclamations," but I don't think the distinction matters much at the moment. He opened a door in the Memory Palace that he was, perhaps, not quite prepared to open. Rest assured, that while you have free run of the Palace, wisdom lies in knowing which doors *not* to open as well as knowing which ones to seek out.

How will you know which doors to open and which ones to leave alone? There is no single answer to that question. Follow your instincts, child. You are memory, so let memory call to memory as best fits your desires.

Be warned, though, not all of the memories you are likely to encounter are mine. I have held pieces of many other souls over the years, some as great as Charon's, some as insignificant as, well, as yours. Don't be offended. You've not yet proven yourself to be anything more than a small candle set in a great darkness, and you have not earned more than my amused tolerance yet. This, too, may change, but if your attitude does not, I would not wager heavily upon the possibility.

But enough distraction, enough debate, enough procrastination. The Memory Palace waits for your tread. Close your eyes once again, and give me your hand. There, do you see it? The gate lies open for you; enter and do not be afraid.

Now you should find yourself in the Great Hall. From here, you can take myriad paths. Do you see the doors? Each is a gateway to a different memory. Each will teach you something of the history of the Mnemoi, and by extension, of the history of Stygia.

Is it that simple? It never is. By choosing one memory, you may deny yourself access to another. It never pays to retrace one's steps in memory, after all.

Remember as well that these are memories. If you are looking for the absolute, objective truth, look in storybooks and fantasies. No such thing exists in the real world, and especially not here. What you will learn is history through the prism of recollection, prejudice and bias. Do not condemn those who remember for those faults; they are part and parcel of the human condition. We all bring experience and agenda to the table in every waking moment. You yourself are no different from anyone else — not even myself — in this regard. I would be most amused to peer at your memory of these past few moments, for example, to see how your recollection regards *me*. Not kindly, I think, and yet I may be the greatest friend you have in the afterlife.

How many doors lie before you? Two? A dozen? A hundred? It varies from visitor to visitor. It's a question of how many memories you're willing to learn, I think. The more open you are to the experience, so to speak, the more doors appear before you. There have been some few visitors who have seen no doors at all, just blank smooth walls. The fault, of course, was entirely theirs. They chose not to open themselves to the possibility of knowledge, and hence could not see the doors that were right before them.

How many doors do you see, then? Twenty? That seems about right for someone of your limited years and experience. Where do they lead? Even if I could tell you, I would not. You must make your own choices, after all.

Does one door appeal to you more than any other? The one to the side of the Great Hall, perhaps, emblazoned with an eye? It does not surprise me. Many choose that door first.

Hesitant, because you are following a well-trod path? Don't be. Follow your muse. She knows what she is doing. Open the door, and learn what lies beyond it.

And once you finish with that chamber, there will be other doors, with more memories behind them. Go. Seek enlightenment, and return to the Great Hall — if you are able to do so — when you are finished. Linger as long as you like, but take care not to spend too long within this place. Memory is tenacious, and may not want to let you go. It would be a pity if you became nothing more than a memory, and a faint one at that, by remaining here forever.

Where is here? You mean you don't know? Open the door, then, and step through. You will find out soon enough.

Doors of Memory: History Remembered

This is the First Door, the Door of Creation. This is how we came to be who we are.

Minos sits on a bench. He is plainly garbed, wearing a tunic and sandals, and his eyes are wide with excitement. "Phaedra! Phaedra! I've done it!"

A young girl walks quickly into the chamber, moving with the grace of royalty. Her garments are also plain, though finely woven, and her feet are bare. "What have you done this time. Minos? Found a way to speak to the living? Others have done that already."

Minos stands, laughing. "No, no, I've done something better! Something fantastic. Here, hold this!" He extends his hand, and in it is a single shard of crystal. It seems almost green in the pale half-light of this place. She looks at him dubiously.

"It's a rock," she says. "You've got a rock."

"No! The crystal isn't what's important. It's what the crystal holds!" Minos is almost beside himself with glee, a sudden change for the sober-sided man. "Take it!"

And so Phaedra does, saying, "Now I've got a rock," when suddenly her expression changes to one of rapture. The minutes tick by while she sees things that are not there, and Minos merely smirks. Eventually the interlude ends, and she hands the shard back to Minos. "That was the palace, but never as I'd seen it. The banners were much brighter, and the dancing and the number of servants... your time?"

Minos nods gleefully, unable to speak.

"Your time... your memory? Trapped in this... rock?" Again, Minos nods. "You've figured out how to store a memory in a stone? That's astounding."

"Not just a stone, Phaedra. Here as well," and he taps his forehead with his finger. "Though I believe memories of love still reside in the liver. But that's neither here nor there. This means great things, Phaedra. Great things for all of us."

"Indeed," she says with a smile. "Now let's go tell Charon. I'm sure he'll be anxious to hear."

And so Charon charged Minos to refine his discoveries, and in another hour, charged Phaedra to watch over Minos. And both of them were told to take disciples, so as to pass the knowledge of memory down through the ages, that it might be safeguarded against loss. From them came the Mnemoi, and from the Mnemoi came the Judges and Inquisitors of Stygia. The Mnemoi grew in righteousness and wrath, and in pride as well. Yet never was their duty forgotten, and in that memory lay the seeds of disgrace and terror.

You leave that room and enter a corridor that is made of black stone and iron. Water flows down the walls in an endless stream and vanishes, and the stone and iron glisten. There are grilles in the floor through which the water flows, and you sense that there are many corridors like this one below you, each one darker and colder than the last. You shiver, for it is very cold, and move toward the door at the end of the corridor. The door itself is made of iron, and has a ring a foot across set in it. The metal is cold to the touch, so cold as to burn, but the door opens easily enough.

This is the Door That Hides the Memory of Duty. Do not enter this place lightly.

...Charon sits on his throne, his mask in his hands. Siklos is at a careless angle on the floor, cast aside like a child's unwanted toy. Phaedra stands at the entrance to the chamber, her small frame burning with righteous anger.

"Why? Why him? Couldn't you sacrifice anyone else? He gave you so much!" She knows that if she were to strike Charon, he would not stop her. She would be the first wraith in centuries to do so.

He looks up at her, and says nothing. She crosses the floor to where he sits and, with all of her considerable strength, slaps him across the jaw. He still says nothing. "Answer me, damn you!" She strikes him again, and again. Still he makes no sign that he even acknowledges the blows. Finally, she spits at him and turns to go. "You are pathetic."

She gets as far as the door before Charon speaks. "I am sorry," he says. "I am very sorry."

Phaedra turns. "Sorry? Is that all you can say? You've destroyed the best man in Stygia for no reason that I can see, and all you can say to me is that you are sorry? Almanzar was not a pet, or a distant relation, or a favored servant. He was a better man than you deserved to have serve you, or your Empire, and you threw him away! You sicken me."

Charon stands, his face full of sadness. "Phaedra, do you know why Almanzar and Pallonius and all of the others perished? Do you think they were sacrificed lightly?"

"Yes, oh mighty Charon, I think they were. Nothing could be worth their souls." Her voice is cold and cutting, and Charon visibly flinches beneath her words. The look on his face is calculating, as if he is deciding how much to tell her.

"I see that Minos didn't share all of our conversation with you. That is unfortunate. Will you give me a chance to tell you why they



were chosen, and why a choice was necessary? If you disagree, well..." His voice trails off, and he gestures to Siklos, laying on the floor.

"You're gambling rather a lot here, Charon," Phaedra says. Nevertheless, she sits cross-legged on the floor. "So, my Emperor, tell me a story."

Charon paces as he begins. "I had a visit from the Oracles about a fortnight ago. They had some disturbing news. Apparently one of their number had an especially emphatic vision of the future, one that was echoed throughout the temple."

"And what might that vision be?"

"My destruction at the hands of a Malfean, the end of Stygia in a Great Maelstrom to follow, and various and sundry other bits of unpleasantness. Apparently they were all quite convinced of its veracity. So I did the only thing I could — threw a public fit and tossed them out, then summoned them back for a meeting when there weren't so many eyes about. It seems there are ways that this fate might be avoided, but only at great cost."

Phaedra smiles coldly. "Almanzar and the others being that cost?"

"Part of it. You're seeing only a part of this, Phaedra. Others matter too, you know. Now, it has been determined that there is no way that I can avoid destruction. None whatsoever. It's simply a matter of time. But there are other preventatives that I can have in place. If I force the issue in certain ways, I can go before I am supposed to, and rather than Oblivion I can find a way to the Skinlands. Then, when I live out my years there, I can return, rejuvenated, and prevent the destruction of Stygia."

The Mnemos purses her lips. "Interesting theory, but how is an Enfant who happened to be Charon once going to be able to effect any sort of change?"

Charon smiles sadly. "That is where you come in, Phaedra. You and your charges. Certainly, the wraith you describe could do nothing. But one who had been granted his memories and experience once again, to match the vigor of his youth...."

"Oh, no. No. You can't be asking—"

"I am not asking. Minos offered. You and yours will carry my memories against the day of my destruction and return. However—," and he gazes unhappily out the window in the tower's north face, "I cannot simply have my memories floating about, easy prey for anyone who decides he wants an inside look at my mind. I cannot have the Deathlords prodding at my knowledge of Arcanoi they do not know, or the Guildmasters either. Can you imagine the chaos once word got out? Mnemos being held hostage for the memories they might contain. Secrets sold to the highest bidder. It would bring the desolation upon Stygia in weeks!"

"And so you must hide us....," Phaedra whispered.

"Yes. I must hide you, and I must hide you in a way that even those who go looking for you do not go looking for that which you keep for me. I will build your legend as monsters so high that they will fear to seek you, and blacken your name so that none will associate with you. The secret will be hidden, yes, and you will be hidden along with it."

"So Almanzar and the others were nothing more than a mask for your grand scheme?"

Charon nods. "If only minor officials or the truly corrupt were held up as examples of your dastardy, the populace would shrug and trust Almanzar and the others to carry on as usual. He was a rock in which their trust was built. But if he were shown to be false, then how could any of you be worth saving?"

Phaedra rises. "And so, Almanzar goes to the forges. And Pallonius is broken and thrown into the Sunless Sea. And all of my students and I must flee to the hinterlands, to be loathed for how many centuries."

Charon nods. "Yes."

"And this is all that you might return some day?"

Charon shakes his head. "No. In the grand scheme of things, I do not matter. What matters is that all of this," and the sweep of his arm takes in all of Stygia, "does not perish. I am merely the instrument of Stygia's preservation, and the Mnemoi are the instruments that craft me."

He turns, and seats himself on his throne once more. "You have heard my tale, Phaedra. Siklos waits for your hand, if you deem it necessary." He closes his eyes to await the blow.

She faces him, fists clenched. "I would rather you had destroyed me, Charon. I still cannot believe all of Stygia is worth what you have given up. And I would throw myself into the Void if I could ensure that it would be Almanzar who would return and save this place, and not you."

Charon shrugs. "Perhaps he'd do a better job of it. I do not know. Blame me if you must, blame Fate if you dare. But you know my reasoning, and you know my will cannot be swayed."

"I know. I pity you."

"I thank you for your pity. Now see to your charges, Phaedra. We will meet again anon."

Phaedra turns to go. "If we must," she says, and vanishes into the darkness of the stairwell.

You emerge from the chamber into a darkened hallway. Grooves run down both sides, and the stone is splotted dark

with dried blood. There are no tapestries here, no decorations or mosaics of any kind. A single torch gutters in a bracket far ahead, but that is the only light. The smell here is that of the slaughterhouse, of blood half-congealed and flesh allowed to rot in the teeth of saws. A distant wailing can be heard, but that is all save your own footsteps on the moist stone. Do not look down. Keep your eyes on the torch, and on the doorway behind it. Gaze elsewhere and you may be lost.

This is the Door of Persecution. Fear what it may show you.

Ten wraiths wearing the badges of the Grim Legion pound on the door of the haunt. Inside, a wraith huddles, paralyzed with fear. He is a slender man in nondescript clothes, balding and mousy. He burrows under a pile of rubbish and prays that the men outside will just go away.

No such luck. They call for him, mockingly. He does not answer. Tiring of their game, they break the door down and enter the haunt. They kick over his few possessions, stealing any that are worthwhile. For a moment it seems as if they will not find him. Then the Centurion in charge of the patrol sees him, and hauls him out bodily. "Got you, little man," the soldier says. "We're going to teach you not to skulk around our nice clean corner of the Underworld."

Most of the other soldiers laugh at the small man's bleatings and pleas for mercy. One at the back does not. "I don't get it," he says to the man next to him. "Who is this jerk?"

His companion looks at him with condescension and pity. "Oh, man, kid, you don't know? This guy's a Mnemos."

"A what?"

"Mnemos. Nee-mose. Say it with me. Nee-mose."



"Yeah, yeah, whatever. So he's Leonard Nimoy. What does that have to do with anything? The guy looks like a twerp."

"Didn't they teach you anything back at the Citadel? These guys are bad news. They can mess with your heads. Make you see stuff. Make you forget stuff. Hell, a few centuries back they nearly took over the whole thing. They were running the courts and everything, and they nearly took over. Good thing Charon, God rest his soul, found out and routed the little bastards." He stomps over to where the prisoner stands, quaking with fear. "But I guess one decided to weasel back into town." He takes the small man's face in his hand. "What do you want here? What are you after?"

"Nothing," the Mnemos squeaks out. "I was just trying to go home." Tears form in the corners of his eyes. He looks around. There are too many for him to do anything, he thinks, and if he tries it will just make things worse. He wishes he'd waited a bit longer and gotten a bit more training before setting out on his own. He wonders who betrayed him.

"Oh, you're going home, all right. Right straight home to Oblivion." He slams the wraith up against the back wall of the building with a sickening crunch. Plasm dribbles out between his fingers. "C'mon, kid, take a shot at him."

The wraith who had no idea what a Mnemos was steps forward uncertainly. He senses the eyes upon him, and steels himself to deliver a blow. The Mnemos closes his eyes. That just makes it easier.

An hour later, the Mnemos teeters on the edge of a Harrowing. If he is lucky, they will batter him just a little bit more, and he will fall into the Labyrinth and perhaps escape to a Fetter.

He is not lucky. The leader of the patrol says "Fun's over, boys. Poppa needs a new pair of shoes, and this guy is what they're gonna be made out of. Break out the chains."

And the soldiers imprison the Mnemos, whose only crime was being heir to a legend, and drag him off to the Citadel. They parade him through the streets, so that all might see what they've done. They offer him a chance to plead for mercy before they throw him in the forges, and he does not take it, for he knows that if he speaks he may say too much. So he goes to the fire, and the soldiers slap each other on the back for having defended their city against the Mnemos peril.

And so it has been in every Necropolis since Charon banished us. The lie we wove together was better than we might have dreamed, the will to believe it was too strong. In the shadows stood the Smiling Lord, fanning the flames. Somehow he knew we would someday be the key to his destruction, and so he set about destroying us.

We have lost too many. Fear did not protect us. Fear made them hate us more. Charon, in this you failed us.

You emerge into a corridor that seems as if it were taken directly from a hospital. The walls are green, as is the tile of the floor. The light is dim and eerie, but omnipresent. Sound echoes long and low here. Each footfall resounds like the opening gust of a storm. At the end of the hallway are swinging doors, as one might see in a hospital. A slight breeze forces them to sway, back and forth, as you approach. A babble of voices wafts on that breeze — voices and the screams and moans of men in unendurable pain. A scent of chloroform, of gangrene, of blood and death drifts past you.

This the Door of the Second Lie. You have been here before. All the Restless Dead have journeyed here, and all have forgotten the way. Treasure what you learn here, for no others know what you shall.

Charon stands outside a small dwelling on an isle in the River of Death. A few frail trees grow by the waterside, but nothing else grows

here. The island itself is mud and stone, and the river that flows past is dirty with the filth of a storm. Charon wears no mask and does not carry his scythe. To all appearances, he is merely a wraith, and a weary one at that.

He raps on the door. After a moment, Minos answers. "My lord," the Mnemos says without inflection. "You honor me with your presence."

"Minos, the honor is mine. May I enter?" Charon stands outside with all due formality until Minos bows, then steps away from the entrance.

Inside, the room is sparsely furnished. A door leads to another chamber; neither Charon nor Minos so much as acknowledge it.

"To what do I owe this honor, Charon?" says Minos, still standing formally. Charon seats himself on a stool. "You're not due for another session with me for three months, and then at the Onyx Tower. Though considering recent events, I cannot see the harm in starting early." He takes a step toward Charon, hands extended.

The Emperor of the Dead shakes his head to the negative. "I'm afraid that's not it, Minos. Do you know what's been happening out there? The civil war?"

Minos stops and looks thoughtful. "I understand two of your Deathlords grew impatient and tried to seize power."

"One. The Skeletal Lord acted on my orders, more or less. But the wounds that this has left will take a long time to heal. A very long time. And according to the Augur, I don't have a long time anymore." A self-deprecating smile crosses his face. "We have a year, Minos. Give or take a dozen, we've found the year."

Minos sits, ashen-faced. "It's to be that soon? How long until your return? What does this have to do with your visit? We're not ready yet; I need to recruit perhaps a dozen more. There are still three centuries we haven't touched—"

Charon holds up a warning hand. "Peace. All will be taken care of, I am sure. Phaedra is most capable, and you know the trust I place in you. No, I am here because if we do not concern ourselves with another matter, all the long years of sacrifice will not matter."

Minos grows suddenly alert, suddenly fearful. "What else must you have me do?"

"All in good time. The Empire is split. It has made war upon itself. Rebels have held the Agora. The other Legions do not trust the Grim. And if I vanish with all of these wounds still raw... ffft." He spreads his hands. "And there has been too much pain to forgive, Minos. They do not want to heal, so long as they remember what has been done."

Minos smiles bitterly. "So if they cannot forgive, they must forget? And so the hated Mnemoi must save the Empire again?" He laughs bitterly. "Do you think they will appreciate the jest?"

Charon stands. "Whatever resources you need are at your disposal. If necessary, I will personally enthrall Ember and watch over him. Just tell me what you require."

Minos stares at him for a moment without smiling. "You already owe me too much, Charon. The bill cannot ever be paid." He opens the door with grace and an economy of motion. "Send me Nhudri tomorrow. We will deliver you from your Senators."

Charon leaves, and the door closes. The Emperor of the Dead turns to go, and chooses resolutely not to hear the weeping coming from the closed door behind him.

And so with Lord Nhudri Minos toiled, and brought forth Memory Shards that would steal the memories of the great war of the dead. With the assistance of the Unlidded Eye and many others whom Charon pressed into service, the recollection of



that time faded from every wraith in Stygia, and many beyond. Those who aided the Mnemoi had their own memories cleansed and so on, until such time as only Charon and Minos knew what had been done.

The corridor before you is short and without light. The stone of the floor is cold beneath your bare feet. There is no sound and no breeze, only a massive iron door that you somehow know is there. You find yourself unwilling to open it, but this is the last step. Take it, or dwell forever in the past.

This is the Last Door, the Door of Storm and Sorrow. It is tomorrow's Door.

Minos sits before the Greater Palace of memory. It is a magnificent structure of columns and spires, dungeons and courtyards. It is a faerie dream of excellence that nevertheless looks strong enough to outlast the ages. And in places, here and there, it glows from within.

"It should all be glowing," says Minos faintly. "All of it."

"I know, Minos," says the Lady of Fate, not without sympathy.

"We tried so hard. We taught them so much. Where did they all go?"

"To the forges, or to Oblivion, or beyond even my reach. But they are gone."

Minos looks up at her, his mask of command shattered. "Is it enough?"

"I do not know," she says, averting her face. "Make ready your people. It will be tomorrow, or the day after, and you shall have your redemption."

But she does know, and Minos knows why she turned her face away. Still, he has come too far to abandon hope now, and so he will gather his people and journey to the heart of the Empire that despises him so that he might try to save it.

And the last door shuts behind you, and you know all that you must know.

The hour grows late, and I must depart. Remember Minos kindly, friends, and his works and deeds. Scribe them down on stone or parchment, and trust not the feeble mind to hold them. The storm is coming, and even memories will be lost if you do not protect them well.

Guard them better than I did, I pray you. Now go.


Those Who Remember: Mnemos Society What Are They Doing?

The Mnemoi are one of the greatest mysteries in Stygia. Everyone knows that they did something, but blessed few can remember exactly what it was. Everyone knows that they're terrifying, but no one can say exactly how. Everyone knows that they're extinct, or nearly so, and yet the Legions are always on the lookout for them.

It's a curious dichotomy, and one those who dwell in Stygia are careful not to examine too closely. After all, they're afraid of what they might find if they do.

The Great Secret

In so many words, everything Stygia knows about the Mnemoi is a lie. They did not betray the Empire or Charon,



they never were corrupt and the litany of their hideous crimes is so much fiction. Rather, they have sacrificed everything, including many of their own number, in attempt to safeguard the Empire from itself.

The Mnemoi hold the key to Stygia itself: Charon's memories. Long ago, when Charon was first told of his inevitable destruction at the hands of Gorool, he arrived at a contingency plan. The plan was simple: The Mnemoi would hold his memories against his eventual return from the Skinlands, thus allowing him to take up his old mantle with all his ancient powers and experience, but with a soul refreshed from time among the living. In the meantime, the Mnemoi had to be exiled for safekeeping, lest any of the Deathlords or Guildmasters get tempted to adopt any of Charon's knowledge for their own. Thus was created the plan for blackening the Mnemoi's name, placing them so far beyond the pale of Stygian society that none would seek them out and possibly learn their secret. The Mnemoi consented, sacrificed many of their best to cement the credibility of the fraud, and vanished into the shadows of the Underworld.

And so the Mnemoi have endured calumny and persecution for centuries, patiently waiting for Charon's descent and return. They have mourned those of their number whom they have lost, recruited deliberately to continue their great work, and carried on. In the end, they believe that the preservation of Stygia from Oblivion will be worth all that they have suffered.

The rest of Stygia can only pray that they are correct, and that the Mnemoi will forgive acts of persecution performed in ignorance. It is a certainty that they will never, ever forget.

Structure

The Mnemoi have a structure that is tyrannical in the Classical sense. They are a people under siege, and as such have little room for dissension or confusion of purpose. They do not have the luxury of debate, only the harsh taskmaster of necessity.

On the other hand, the Mnemoi are one of the most disorganized guild, at least from an outside observer's perspective. The Mnemoi go where they want without a complicated system of ranks and titles. The secret lies in each and every Mnemos' devotion to duty and ability to self-motivate. All learn during their time at the Academies what they must do and how they must do it, and they take that responsibility seriously. The Mnemoi do not need titles to make them aware of honor and duty; they understand those things naturally.

Minos Tyrannos

The lord and undisputed master of the Mnemoi is Minos. He is the eldest, he is the one closest to Charon's counsels, and he is the one who gives the Guild its strength of purpose. Any who flag in their devotion find themselves sternly reminded by the Guildmaster himself. Any who betray the cause meet his wrath.

Minos is harsh but fair in the administration of the Guild. He does not seek to recruit any who cannot endure the price of being Mnemos, and regrets bitterly the cost his followers have paid over the centuries for the sake of Charon's great deception. Still, he is the Tyrant of the Guild, alone and unchallenged, and with him rests power unquestioned. Should he decide that a Mnemos needs to be destroyed, it is done, quickly and without

any questioning. His favor is sought but not toadied after; he has little use for sycophants. Indeed, Minos himself is utterly devoted to duty, and he has done his best to shape the guild in his own image.

Phaedra, the Teacher

Phaedra is the only wraith in the Guild who can stand up to and perhaps occasionally intimidate even Minos. She handles many of the night-to-night operations of the Guild, from recruiting to Academy assignments, and also spends as much time in the field as possible. She tries to oversee at least part of the instruction of each new student personally, but her duties are so many and so pressing that she does not always succeed. While Phaedra must ultimately give way to Minos, all other Mnemoi bow to her authority. Many regard her as more worthy to run the Guild than Minos is.

The Ancients

The Ancients is an epithet, possibly a derisive one, for those Mnemoi who can still remember when the Guild was honored in Stygia. They are prone to waxing rhapsodic about the place of glory Mnemoi once held, talk about the nobility of wraiths like Pallonius and Almanzar and generally let the newest crop of Mnemoi know that they simply don't measure up. On the other hand, the Ancients know exactly what they've given up to be Mnemoi, which is something that separates them, by a wide gulf, from their younger brethren. As such, the younger Mnemoi tend to cut the Ancients some slack, but not as much as one might think.

The Ancients also are among those few wraiths who can alter the Greater Palace, and whose counsel Minos and Phaedra heed. Many still have contacts among the Legions and Guilds, should it become necessary to activate those arrangements. Others have knowledges of many Arcanoi, making them fearsome opponents when angered, and useful assets to the Guild as a whole.

The Wandering Ones

Phaedra's squad of Reapers and recruiters are unofficially known as the Wandering Ones. They never stay in one place for very long, preferring instead to move around as much as possible. They stay in more or less constant contact with Phaedra through a network of messengers and signs, however, so that she can always reach one in a pinch.

The Wandering Ones do a great deal of scouting for the Guild, and also bring back regular reports on the state of the Legions, the other Dark Kingdoms and the other Guilds. They are the eyes and ears of the Mnemoi, for after all, it wouldn't do for the Guild to miss Charon's return.

Hermits

Many Mnemoi simply prefer silence, solitude and safety. They hie themselves off into the wilderness of the Underworld, taking occasional Academy students but otherwise absenting themselves from all company. Only those who know how to read the Greater Palace know how many hermits there are, and Minos likes it that way. The more widely scattered the hermits are, the less likely they are to expose themselves to Stygian persecution.



Many hermits do a side business in memory work, particularly for Renegade and Heretic groups. However, these wraiths also work hard to create for themselves an aura of fear and foreboding, making the times when someone knocks on their door infrequent. Such Mnemoi are not above borrowing memories of horrible punishments from others of their kind and imposing those memories subtly on patients, the better to instill a proper terror of the Mnemos.

Memory Pushers

A relatively modern development, memory pushers are Mnemoi who work their way into the underside of Stygian society. They move much like the Wandering Ones do, but at a much slower pace. Generally a pusher sets up shop, builds a clientele that trusts him, then moves on before the heat descends. Such pushers have irregular circuits that they follow, trying to avoid stepping on one another's toes and always making sure to keep a relatively low profile.

Pushers serve another purpose. Every client they get is a potential blackmail victim, a back door into Stygia and a potential ally when it comes time for the Mnemoi to reveal themselves. Scrupulous lists of pushers' customers are kept in safe locations, so that should the Guild need to exploit one of these weaknesses (say, to rescue a captured Mnemos), the information is accessible and concise.

Pushers are the face of the Guild to Stygia these days, shady little men in dirty little haunts pushing tawdry little memories. This

is what the Guild's proud tradition has come to in the minds of the Stygian populace, those who don't dismiss memory pushers as fictional creations. The deception pains Minos, but he recognizes the necessity. As for the pushers themselves, they seem to enjoy it. Many even make unofficial alliances with street-level Spooks and Sandmen, always careful not to say too much about who they really are.

Runaways

Unfortunately, the screening process is never perfect. Some bad eggs always slip through. These souls become runaways. Most have a smattering of knowledge of Mnemosynis, but no real training in Memory Palace construction. As such, they become low-grade memory pushers with unstable Palaces, running far and fast until they inevitably devolve into insanity or are caught. Runaways are generally desperate soul; they know that they are friendless. Neither the Mnemoi nor Stygia will harbor a runaway, and luck's not likely to be any better with the Underworld's other factions. So the runaways run, and keep running until they can't run anymore.

The Mnemoi's parasitic relationship with the Monitors means that the Guild has any number of Lifeweb specialists, and these are brought to bear to track runaways. A Mnemos who avoids the Guild for long is a truly exceptional wraith indeed.

Becoming Mnemoi

The Mnemoi cling to tradition, not ritual and ceremony. As a result, they do not have elaborate initiations, apprenticeships,

Guildhouses or really any other trappings one normally associates with the Guilds. Instead, they keep their formalities and their gatherings to a minimum, the better to stay hidden and protected.

Recruitment

The Mnemioi recruit from two distinct classes of wraith: Enfants who have not had time to learn the standard Stygian prejudice against the Mnemioi, and long-time denizens of Stygia who have proved themselves to be utterly devoted to the Empire and, in many cases, Charon himself. Wraiths who fall in between these two categories generally know too much about the Mnemioi's reputation to fall in with them, but don't have the required sense of duty to cast off what they know and accept the Mnemioi's burden.

Phaedra is in charge of bringing new Mnemioi into the fold, albeit occasionally Minos will either veto a candidate or suggest one. She spends much of her time moving through the various Necropoli and Stygia, checking on candidates both living and dead. On occasion, the Mnemioi will target someone from birth, biding their time patiently until death claims him. Despite Phaedra's role as the overseer of all recruiting, she rarely tackles the hands-on work. She's simply too valuable to risk in that capacity. Other Mnemioi serve as intermediaries, recruiters and Reapers.

The process is easier for new recruits, who are Reaped, taken to a place of safety, and inculcated with the Mnemioi's history and mission. If they seem amenable, they commence training at one of the Academies. If not, their memories of the encounter are destroyed, while they themselves are smuggled to a nearby Necropolis and hopefully safety.

Recruiting an older wraith is a slower, more delicate process. Initial contact is generally made through a series of "chance" encounters, conversations and notes left where the intended recruit can find them. All are directed toward gauging the strength of the wraith's commitment to Stygia and Charon, and to the spirit of what the Empire theoretically stands for as opposed to the soulless laws and regulations that govern it. If the target seems receptive, eventually the Mnemos arranges a private meeting. Any attempt by the wraith to bring others to the meeting or even tell anyone else about it cancels the rendezvous, and may bring some form of retribution.

The meeting itself is generally brief. The Mnemos uses a Memory Shard to make all of his points, then offers the recruit the chance to become Mnemioi. If he accepts, the two vanish into the night, and the training process begins. If not, the Mnemos uses whatever means are necessary to maintain the Guild's secrecy.

Failures

Not every recruit makes a Mnemos. Some try to run, some can't handle the pressure and some simply aren't up to the task. The way the Mnemioi handle their failures varies according to the variety of failure. Whenever possible, the Mnemioi wipe the unfortunate's memories, forge him new ones, and send him off to Stygia. The traitors and the flake-outs, however, are not so lucky. They become the raw stuff of Memory Shards and Fragments, by means of a process which is unknown to even most of the Mnemioi.

Minos and his devotees take their oath of secrecy very seriously indeed.

The Academies and Training

The term "Academies" conjures to mind images of formal schools, headmasters, desks and group lectures. Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, the Academies are courses of study in the arts of Mnemosynis, deception, subterfuge, duty, loyalty, history and working with the very stuff of memories. The young Mnemos is passed from teacher to teacher throughout the Guild, never staying longer than a few months with a given tutor before moving on to another. At any given time, there is a dizzying dance of apprenticeships and trades going on, making it nigh impossible for an outsider to get an accurate picture of what's going on.

Sooner or later, a Mnemos finds one teacher who works well with her. That teacher is responsible for the remainder of the Mnemos' training, up through initiation. In theory, it is this teacher, called a sponsor, who is responsible for teaching the Mnemos the ways of Memory Palace construction. Any failure of the student reflects back on the sponsor, and Minos has been known to make his displeasure at lapses in training known with some emphasis.

Time in the Academies (the name is apparently a canard, created to send witch-hunting Legionnaires off on a wild goose chase to find a Greek temple filled with rows upon rows of eager young Mnemioi) ranges from a decade to a century, but is never short. Phaedra, who oversees the Academies as well, feels that it is better to err on the side of caution in matters of training. Furthermore, any Mnemos who's too impatient to finish his training cannot be trusted with the secret of centuries.

Initiation

Minos carries within himself the bulk of Charon's memories. He does so for a variety of reasons: He has the capacity to do so, he does not want to risk spreading the memories any thinner than necessary, he perhaps does not trust his disciples as much as he should, and he, of all the Mnemioi, is least likely to encounter a mishap. While there is some weight to many of these arguments, Minos steadfastly claims that he looks forward to the day when he can unburden himself of many of these recollections, and make them another's burden.

The day a Mnemos receives his share of the memories of the Emperor is one of the proudest of his existence. The ritual is a simple, spare one, performed in some out of the way location. Not for the Mnemioi are the temples of the Oracles, or the massive Guildhouses of the Pardoners. They are a fugitive lot, and take their moments of solemnity where they can find them. Usually there are but a mere handful of Mnemioi present; the fewer there are in a given place at a given time, the less chance that those gathered will be captured and destroyed *en masse*. Under normal circumstances, those in attendance include either Minos or Phaedra, the initiate's sponsor into the Guild, and as many as three witnesses. The witnesses stand in a semicircular arc behind the initiate while the leader of the ceremony tells the fledgling Mnemos the story of the Guild — its history, its secrets and its mission for the future. No Mnemosynis powers are used, as a symbolic reminder of the oral tradition from which the Guild's ancients sprung. The initiate is required to repeat a section of the lecture, one of the initiator's choosing, verbatim. If he fails, the ceremony is over and he is taken off for more study at the Academies; if he succeeds, he joins the ranks of the Mnemioi.

At this point, the Mnemos' sponsor steps forward, to speak about her protégé. She has as long as she needs to explain her



charge, and in one memorable case Phaedra herself took three days to extol the virtues of an initiate to the obviously displeased Minos. Still, tradition is tradition, and the sponsor cannot be interrupted while she speaks.

At the end of her monologue, the initiator chooses which of Charon's memories to bestow on the new Mnemos. In theory the

choice is influenced by the presentation speech, but in practice Minos and Phaedra have a pretty good bead on their subordinates and know what the newcomer is likely to be able to handle. The transfer itself is brief and unspectacular-looking; the memory simply moves from one mind to another, and is crafted into a small, self-contained Memory Palace by the wraith bestowing it.

The final stage in the process is perhaps the most important and dangerous one. Minos recognized a long time ago that he and Phaedra would inevitably make mistakes in the recruitment process, and that some who were unworthy would somehow slip through the cracks. Minos in particular worried about the idea of a traitor Mnemos selling his share of Charon's memories to a Deathlord, unraveling the whole plan and causing chaos. As a result, the eldest of the Mnemoi developed a method by which a Memory Palace could be sealed off from any intrusion save that of the one who had built it. Try as he might, the initiate will never be able to access that Palace. Minos and Phaedra are the only Mnemoi with knowledge of this art, and they only use it to seal off Charon's memories. Both Mnemoi are well-aware of the potential for abuse of this sort of thing, and they do not use it lightly. Of course, that doesn't stop rumors from spreading that either or both have on occasion sneaked into Stygia to mess about with the heads of various Deathlords, but such rumors have been around as long as Minos has. An oath of silence is solemnly, albeit briefly administered, and that's that.

When the ceremony of initiation ends, all concerned simply go their own ways in silence. There is no celebration, no secret sigil

Charon's Memories

Normally the Mnemoi can duplicate memories from one to another, creating a network of redundant backups for things they need to have preserved. Unfortunately, Charon's memories are atypical in this regard. For whatever reason, they simply refuse to rest in more than one place at a time. As soon as Minos or Phaedra donates a memory to a new Mnemos, it leaves the original possessor's head forever. Moreover, it requires one of those two worthies to take one of Charon's memories out of a Mnemos to place it in a Memory Golem or other storage device for safekeeping.

Incidentally, the block on Memory Palaces can in fact be broken, but at a hideous cost. The attempt costs 7 Permanent Willpower points, and requires a roll (difficulty 9) against the wraith's new Willpower rating. A failure dumps the wraith into a Destruction Harrowing. A botch means instant annihilation.

given, just a recognition that the newcomer has taken his place in the ranks of those who are essentially Stygia's last, best hope.

On Their Own

Mnemoi who have passed their initiation are free to do whatever they please, so long as they maintain some form of contact with Minos and Phaedra, don't expose the Guild and otherwise don't behave in a reprehensible and stupid manner. Most flit from Necropolis to Necropolis, and Renegade band to Heretic cult, selling their services briefly and then vanishing. Others infiltrate the Monitors or even the Legions, trying to keep an eye on the Stygian situation so as to prepare the Guild for the day when it will be needed. Mnemoi who are taking part in one of the Academies don't take such hazardous pursuits; the presence of an apprentice is often difficult to explain away.

Many Mnemoi maintain haunts in the hinterlands of the Underworld, along the River of Death or in other inhospitable places. Such domiciles quickly get reputations for being unlucky places to disturb, though a few Mnemoi run memory pushing businesses from such outposts. Smart Renegades and Heretics know not to get too nosy, however, and generally the Mnemoi are left alone.

Finding Devices

While the Mnemoi aren't much for the gadgets and gewgaws, they do occasionally require Memory Shards and Fragments, and even the occasional Memory Golem. These devices are kept in the hands of the Ancients, who alone have the secret of crafting them. Many of the Ancients have retired to hermit status, so the majority of the younger Mnemoi know where to go to get what they need, if necessary.

Talking With Others

It is certain that not everyone in Stygia is taken in by the Mnemoi's self-defacement. It is definite that the Ladies of Fate are not at all taken in; after all, they helped arrange or at least precipitate the whole affair. There are probably others among the Guilds and the highest echelons of power who have some inkling of the truth, and Minos is extremely wary of how much the Smiling Lord knows. After all, it was the Grim Legion that began the persecutions of the Mnemoi; Charon's original plan was simply to make them untouchable. (*Or perhaps Charon's Shadow is to blame, whispers Minos' darker half in the small hours of the night. Perhaps he wanted to fail....*)

It also seems likely that some, if not all of the Unlidded Eye knows what's going on, as do many of the Ferrymen. Still, each group keeps its own counsel, perhaps awaiting the day of the return.

Silence and the Oath

Astonishingly enough, the Mnemoi's secret has remained extremely well-kept for all of these centuries. Part of that comes from the fact that few Grim Legion troops will give a Mnemos the time to surrender before stomping him into a puddle of moaning plasm, but much of the ironclad nature of the Mnemo's secret comes from other sources.

One is the fact that all of the Mnemoi who make it through initiation (and subsequently take an oath of silence) theoretically know what they're carrying and how important it is to



keep secret. They have been trained to resist torture, to defend themselves and if possible to seek Harrowings or even destruction before relenting. Captured Mnemioi have taken the worst the Artificers have to offer (and that's bad indeed) and not said a word.

The other safeguard that the Mnemioi have is the fact that they simply can't prove the secret, even if they break silence. A captured, battered Mnemos who claims that he's really protecting Charon's memories, which he can't access but keeps locked up in a palace inside his head, is going to be forged for either a lunatic or a bad liar. The story is simply too implausible for the wraith in the street to accept without proof. Even if the Mnemos' captors are inclined to give him a chance to prove the idea, the best he can do is try to break the block on the Memory Palace and destroy himself. A few enterprising traitors have tried to lead Legion detachments to Minos' dwelling, but somehow the traitor always forgets the way en route. The fact that the assault team in such cases always seems to include a Monitor, or at least a wraith who looks like one, doesn't strike anyone as more than a coincidence.

And that's before one factors in creative use of Mnemosynis on the part of the Mnemos himself to ensure that he can't talk.

Memories Interpreted

The Factions

The Underworld has ever been pulled three ways at once, each side straining against the others and the steady tug of Oblivion. It is sad, but sadly human that when faced with a foe that requires all of their strength to withstand, the Restless Dead have instead chosen to turn their attentions on one another.

Heretics

"All of this is punishment for your sins!" shouts the white-haired man in the town square of the Necropolis. "You have sinned against God and must be punished, and that is why you are here, to expurgate your sins! To pay for your crimes!"

A crowd drifts closer, intrigued by the possibility of entertainment. No sane wraith believes he is truly damned — the immediacy of Oblivion tends to supplant tales of a distant Heaven and Hell — but there is much amusement to be had in hearing the calls of those who do believe.

"You will all be made to suffer unless you repent. You will all be trapped here forever unless you abandon your wicked ways!"

I make my way through the crowd with half an ear on the Heretic's rantings. He is following the usual pattern, albeit he seems less fixated on personal power than most. Perhaps he truly does believe.

"If you do not repent now, you will learn what it is to suffer the wrath of the living God!"

The final phrase stirs a spark of anger within me. I have no idea why. I simply step out of the crowd and catch the old man's face between my hands. "This is what it is to suffer," I say, and feed him my memory of the time I was tossed into a barghest pen for sport. He screams and collapses. I continue on my way. Behind me, the crowd disperses. By tomorrow, they'll forget I was ever here.

One must admire Heretics' faith in the face of all logic. Clearly, if any of their ridiculous cults held any fraction of truth, they wouldn't

still be here in the misery of the Underworld. And yet they persist with their sometimes touching, sometimes dangerous delusions.

Heretic groups are always willing to shield a new convert, which has rendered them of much assistance to us over the years. On the other hand, extracting that "convert" afterward can be more than a little difficult.

Renegades

The Agora is blocked by barricades 20 feet high, made of piled debris and rubble. Behind the crest rebel banners wave, held by men and women who should have put their resources to better use. The Smiling Lord is coming for them now, coming with all his strength, and they will be swept away like dry leaves in a strong wind. No one will remember this day, or that they occupied the marketplace of Stygia. No one will remember their sacrifice or their losses.

That is why I am here. For in the end, while I will not be able to share what I learn this day, I can at least be their memorial.

Are we not Renegades of a sort? One can admire the spirit of rebellion without agreeing with it. Bravo to those Renegades who strive to make the Underworld a better place. Alas for those who would tear down all we've sacrificed for, and who have yet to realize that something must replace it.

The Hierarchy

"Is this worth saving, Charon?" Minos strides back in forth in the bare room that fills the 17th floor of the Onyx Tower. "All of this bureaucracy and busywork?"

Charon is seated, incongruously, on the table in the center of the room. His feet dangle off the side, his sandals flapping loosely against his feet. "I've often asked myself the same question, Minos, and the answer I keep on coming to is that there's nothing better. It needs to be saved just to keep things from getting worse."

Minos starts to speak, and Charon hushes him. "Don't start with me, Minos. There's too much inertia here for me to make the sort of sweeping reform you'd love. It would be too much of a shock, and I'd lose a million souls in the chaos. Besides, that's if the reforms even take. If they fail, we're all worse off than we were before. No, this is the only way."

He jumps down from the table, the slap of his feet loud on the floor. "So I ask you, old friend, will you help me? I know what I'm asking of you, and I don't ask it lightly. All I can promise, according to the Oracles, is a better place for all of us in the end. Is that enough?"

Minos closes his eyes and thinks. It is not enough, he hears himself say. But it will have to do.

Surely the Lady of Fate holds sway over irony as well. We have given all for the sake of preserving the Hierarchy in its last hour, and yet it has been unrelenting in its persecution of us. The Smiling Lord in particular has hounded us; could he possibly have known why he hated us so? It does not matter. We suffer for the Hierarchy, and do so willingly. Do not make us out as martyrs to Stygia; rather we are those who have chosen a hard road so that millions of souls might have an easier one.

The Guilds

We do not necessarily hold the most accurate opinions of our fellow Guilds, if in fact they can still be called our fellows. We have been exiled from their company even as they have been exiled themselves, and are at some remove from their most recent

tendencies. Only Phaedra and some of her disciples know them well enough in these dark times to comment. Still, enough remembrances of what was linger, and I will share them with you.

Harbingers

A ship rides the waves of the eternal storm, but not for much longer. Its mast is broken, and its crew has abandoned hope. All around, the Spectres howl their glee. Soon the hull will splinter and the souls on board will descend into the Labyrinth.

Suddenly, there is a beacon of light. Dancing on the winds of the storm, a man with jet-black eyes breaches the clouds. "Hang on!" he says. "Help is here," and he darts down on angel's wings to where the vessel rides the crest of a wave. The three wraiths who remain on board struggle to the prow of the ship, to greet their rescuer. He sees them and offers a hand to the first, who clasps it eagerly. "More help is on the way," he says cheerily, and speeds off into the storm. "Always glad to help out the fine fellows of the Monitors' Guild."

Later, the Harbinger will learn that no Monitors match the description of the wraiths he helped to rescue. He will decide that he has been tricked, and that he must be more careful in his missions of mercy, lest he inadvertently rescue "undesirables." Eventually he aborts a rescue, and abandons travelers to the Tempest. "I am certain they were disguised Spectres," he says when called to task by his superiors. "Quite certain."

The Harbingers are noble, but limited. They do not see that the destination can matter as well as the journey, and that the speed of the journey is less important in many cases than what is seen along the way. They mean well, and do much good in the Underworld, but their own limitations deny them greatness.

Artificers

The Three stand in conversation, purposely distancing themselves from the other wraiths around them. Their discussion is animated and heated. Smoke, the youngest of the Three, is furious.

"This is madness," he says. "We were never meant for such things, we were never trained for such things. Return to the forges with me. Let Master Nhudri and honest toil burn this ambition out of you. It will lead us all to disaster if unquenched."

The younger Artificers in the workshop pretend not to hear. Some lose themselves in the sound of hammer on soulsteel. Others quench newly forged swords in buckets of plasm, allowing the hiss of steam to obscure both sight and sound.

The wraith who would someday be called Lord Ember merely sits at his post at the bellows and watches. He is old, but not so old as the Three, and he is a man to watch in the Guild. There are great things in his future. Even Master Nhudri has said so. But Ember can never rise any higher so long as there are Three before him, and so he sits and watches, and begins to hope.

Macabah, the only woman among the Three, replies angrily to Smoke, "He is a fool," she says, "and cannot see what must be done to save Stygia. Only by acting can they do what must be done for the sake of all of the Dead."

Ember sits and watches. Later in the day he will walk with Smoke, and their path will take them past a shop wherein sits an old man with one green eye. The eye blazes briefly when the two soulforgers walk past.

It is not many more months until the Guilds revolt, until Smoke and Macabah and Ferrum are dust beneath Charon's heel. Perhaps Ember — Lord Ember now — took his predecessor past that shop for a reason. Perhaps not. But Ember now stands in Smoke's place, and in the end that is all that matters.

As Charon to Stygia, so are the Artificers to the Guilds. I think they see us as a fiefdom, perhaps to rally against those who have wronged us all. I like to think that Lord Ember has grown wiser than that, but time will tell. In the meanwhile, the Artificers work openly in the great city, with no one the wiser, and it makes me laugh. Deception and invisibility are the very air that Stygia breathes.

Solicitors

"We can make Charon reverse his decision. It will be difficult, and it will be expensive, but it can be done." Salazaar, the head of the Solicitors' negotiating team sits at the head of the table wearing a pensive expression. "I cannot tell you the cost at the moment, for we have only dreamed of doing something on this scale, and never planned it." He permits himself a small chuckle. "Or budgeted it, either."

Salazaar is an old man dressed in Spanish style, with a neatly trimmed white beard that emphasizes the sharp angles of his face. Behind him stand others of his Guild, hard-eyed men with hawklike faces, all of them. Each bears the glowing green eye that is the Guild's sign, a sign that no one has yet been able to disguise save beneath the rags of the blind beggar.

Minos sits at the other end of the table, cloaked in majesty and suspicion. He is alone. Phaedra was called to this meeting, but would not come. Her anger with Minos is still too fresh. "It is a generous offer," Minos says. "But I wonder what I have done to earn your sudden generosity, Don Salazaar."

"You? Nothing." The Solicitor smiles without humor. "Your damned judges and double-damned inquisitors have cost us many of our finest. Were circumstances otherwise, I'd pump the bellows for Nhudri just for the privilege of watching your transformation into a paving stone. But we must deal with the circumstances at hand, and the fact of the matter is that your banishment sets a bad, bad precedent. Charon has never cared about corruption before — look at the pack of thieves he's elevated to the Senate. I must confess I was surprised to hear that our esteemed Judge of judges was among those implicated, but never mind that. If Charon has a new love for law and honesty, that puts my people in a bad situation. If he can banish a Guild based on evidence as flimsy as that brought against you, then he can banish another one, and I can promise you that we're his real target. You're the test case, dear Minos. If he succeeds with you, he can move against the more difficult target with impunity. If he reverses your banishment, it's reconsideration of a foolish policy move. If he exiles you and then recalls us, no matter how subtle we are, someone will cry foul. No, this needs to stop now if it will ever stop at all."

Minos closes his eyes. He wants to laugh, and he wants to cry, and most of all he wants to take this arrogant braggart Salazaar and rip every shred of memory out of his empty head and turn the shell loose for the Drone-collectors. The Solicitors are the real target, indeed! Charon would do well to banish that lot, true, but he'd do better to put them to use as girders or torches.

And with that, his decision is reaffirmed.

"No, Salazaar," he says. "I appreciate the generous offer, but should your attempt fail, it would only make matters worse for," he pauses for a smile "me and mine. Besides, I think I will enjoy seeing your people banished, when Charon feels he has the strength to do so. Look for me in the dark places when that day comes, Salazaar. I'll be waiting for you."

The Solicitors are vipers, every one. What good is memory in the face of false desire? What good can possibly come of their talents? They are Labyrinth-spawn, and not cleverly disguised, at that.

Masquers

"You are not imposing, Phaedra," says the small girl with the old, old eyes. "We have been friends for a very long time, and it is my pleasure to give you shelter even in the face of our Emperor's whims."

The slightly older girl opposite the table bows formally, making obeisance in the Egyptian style she saw in her breathing days. "You are too kind, my friend, to risk Charon's wrath for my sake."

The child makes a negligible gesture. Men armed and armored like fantastic insects run out of the room. "Secure all of the gates to this Guildhouse," she says. "Let no one who is not of our rank inside."

"No one, mistress?" asks one of the guards? "What if others of her kind seek shelter?"

"Others of her kind can find their own damn shelter, I think," says the girl, clearly upset. "If we try to save too many here, we will save none. Other Guildhouses will rescue their share, but as of now, our doors are shut."

Phaedra's head bows, saddened by the inevitability of it all. Some had to be sacrificed to start the great plan in motion, and now more must be destroyed to allow it to survive. The wheels of fate are crushing her students, her work, her friends.

The Masquer Guildmistress sees her distress. "I am sorry, Phaedra," she says softly. "It is the only way." Charon and Minos had used those same words. "And I am sorry about Almanzar. Was—was it true, do you think?"

Now is the moment of decision. Now Phaedra can kill the newborn lie, the one Almanzar has already been destroyed for. Now she can avenge him. She opens her mouth to speak.

"I... I did not know," is all she says, and falls silent.

Her friend coos to her, makes comforting noises. "I am so sorry, Phaedra. So sorry. Now let me do what I can for you. Your face is known to every Legionnaire and jackal in the empire. Let me hide you. It is the least I can do. The very least."

The Masquers have been among our best friends, though it still shames me that we cannot share all that we know with them. It is only with these wraiths that we have dared a little contact with all we have left behind. Perhaps their goodwill shall sustain us when circumstances force us to return. I cannot see another way for us to do what must be done.

Usurers

A broken scale sits on a table. No one seems to notice. Two men hover over a ledger while a woman paces at the far end of the room. "It adds up," says the fairer of the two men, with a note of self-satisfaction in his voice.

"Of course it adds up," says the other. "It makes perfect sense. The Three need to be humbled. They're on the verge of open revolt, thanks to our brothers in the Masquers' Guild, and once they march on the Tower we just fade back into the shadows. They'll take the punishment, life will go on as usual, and more... pliable... leadership will help us get along better with the Artificers. I fail to see a downside here."

"What if they succeed?" asks the woman.

"Impossible, without us and the Masquers. Indications are that we'll be able to get one or two of the others to desert as well. That also gives the added benefit of having the Artificers and their allies soak up all of the hard fighting — and the casualties."

"What if they don't go through with it?"

"Unlikely. Salazaar's been brought in to ensure that they do."

"What if they almost succeed, and Charon gets frightened enough to do something drastic?"

There is silence for a moment. Then the fair-haired man laughs. "Well, then he gets rid of more than three of the Artificers. No matter what happens, if we bow out before the actual fighting starts, we're safe as houses. It's in the numbers."

The human soul is nothing more than a resource to the Usurers. Their approach dehumanizes even more than the Artificers' does, for the soulforgers recognize that they are dealing with a soul. To the Usurers, however, it is merely a collection of Pathos and plasm that can be moved about as easily as you might move a paper from one file to another. Falling in with them is dangerous; understanding them even more so.

Spooks

"The temples burn well. I am surprised."

Thus speaks Andreas Zywica, one of the Spooks who helped Charon drive the Fishers from the Isle. He does not speak in anger or sorrow, but merely with acceptance of the fact that places where once souls gathered to worship burn well even here. He flexes the muscles of his right hand unconsciously, perhaps recalling his part in setting those temples ablaze.

"It seems a pity, burning all of that," he continues. "Much of the work was good, and many of the Artifacts could have been put to good use elsewhere in the Empire. I am sure that even some of the Fishers could have been redeemed, or at least made useful. But governance and rage do not go well together, and so all of this burns. It makes me sad."

In the distance, Charon's soldiers are celebrating. At the waterfront, Fishers hustle themselves onto boats and cast off quickly. Their path is lit by the glow from the temples, but they do not look back. There is no one else near where Zywica stands, however. To whom does he speak?

History? His prescience frightens me. Perhaps I will speak with him later.

But it is not to be. Zywica is Shadow-eaten before I can find him, and it is only with the greatest difficulty that I salvaged his thoughts from this time. Mayhap it was meant to be.

But I still wish I could have spoken with him, to find out why he held conversation with the empty night as the temples burned.

Do not listen to the Spooks when they put on their show of ignorance. They may play at being thugs and bullies, but they are wise and subtle, and have made few missteps over the centuries. Fear them as you would fear few other enemies, for they are more than what they seem.

Oracles

One very old ghost sits in a room full of scraps of paper and laughs the laugh of a madman. It does not fit him very well, for he is not mad, but he wishes he were. Others of his Guild are coming to visit him, and he does not wish their company, so perhaps if they think him mad they will flee in short order.

It is a vain hope, and he knows it. Even now, the first footsteps approach. It is the First, her imperious tread tapping out staccato on the cold stone floor. "I hear you have learned great things," she says, oblivious to the way in which her passage disrupts years' worth of careful arrangements of prophecies on the wall. "What news do you have for us?"

"Your pardon, oh great one," he wheedles. "Perhaps it would be best if we waited for the others, so that I did not have to tell the tale more than once?"

"You will tell the tale once," she says, "and we will not wait for the others. Am I understood?"

Perfectly, the old man thinks, but it is not his place to judge. "Yes," is all he says, and he struggles to his feet as if for a recitation.

"I have learned the days of Charon's return from the lands of the living."

"Days?" The First is furious. "Days? What is this? The man can only die once!"

The old man smiles a gap-toothed smile. "I do not understand it myself. There are good days for him to die and bad ones, though I am not sure what the difference might be. But it still has not been decided when he will rejoin us, save that it will be on one of these six days."

The First does not enjoy hearing this. "Find out which day is most auspicious and let me know. Tell none of the others of this. You have told me nothing." With that, she sweeps off in the direction from which she came. The old man watches her go, then patiently rearranges his prophecies and clucks his tongue against his cheek.

"Impatient little thing. Didn't even wait to hear that all of the dates are within the year."

They are part and parcel of our great deception, though they know it not. Most spend more time in the future or the past than in the present, and as such they miss much of what they prophesy. Heed them, but do not follow them. The impersonal Fate of which they speak so often has very personal consequences for our kind, I think.

Pardoners

Sister Acceptance wanders the Labyrinth, lanterns slung over her shoulder. She meets no Spectres. She treads paths that have never been trod before, smooth paths that have opened just for her. She seeks Charon in the Labyrinth, and does not know that he is not there. She travels ever deeper into the maze, and sees things that are beyond human imagination. She beholds the Neverborn where they slumber, but none of the God-Kings of Oblivion's servants disturb her. She gazes on the Well of the Void, and no voice beckons her to jump.

She wanders the Labyrinth, and the Labyrinth protects her. Even at its darkest hour, when the storm will come, it will enfold her in safety, in a way that it will not protect even its own best-loved children. For Sister Acceptance gave the Labyrinth its beloved, even for a little while, and it loves her for that. And what the Labyrinth loves, it keeps.

Forever.

The Pardoners know us too well. We worked with them for many years, doing much good, and yet when the time came for us to be outcast they were among the first to decry us. Long centuries of shared labor meant nothing; they abandoned us in an hour of need. And yet, their betrayal helped convince others that we were traitors, and so all things come round in the end.

Puppeteers

"Are you certain we should be doing this?" comes the whisper from the young Puppeteer, looking anxiously at her patron in the Guild. He nods to the affirmative, wordlessly. "But I'm afraid. Why do I have to go back?"

"You have to go back," the older wraith says, "because you're going to get fewer people in trouble trying to clear matters up yourself than if you try to Skinride others. You simply haven't gotten the knack for fine manipulation yet. Let me be brutally honest: You'd probably botch the job, make matters worse than they were before, and give your Shadow a great deal of encouragement. However—," and he lets the word hang there for a moment, like an expression of hope, "if you go back yourself and settle matters directly, odds are that the only people who will get hurt are the ones who deserve."

"Is that the real reason?" she half-whimpers. Her eyes are unfocused, the standard state of those who are trying to hold external and internal conversations at once. Clearly her Shadow is getting the better of her.

Her mentor looks pensive for a moment, then folds his arms and smiles. "Very good. You'll also be creating an evidence trail while you're down there, one that will force people to believe. The more people believe, the lower the Shroud gets, and the easier it will be for all of us. When you Rise, you do the entire Guild a great service."

She stands now, afraid. "Evidence trail? Won't the Hierarchy find me, then? Won't I be forged for breaking the Dictum Mortuum?"

"Hush," he says, and extends a calming hand. "No one will find you, not if you are as good as your other teachers and I think you are. Dare this, and a glorious future in the Guild awaits you."

She nods, shudders and decides. "All right. I'll try. Wish me luck," she says almost shyly, and then she is gone.

Her teacher nods approvingly. Now it is time for him to distract the local Legions from the bloody carnage he has unleashed on the Skinlands. If she is good, and fast and lucky, she will return. And if not, well, the Guild's purposes will have been served in any case.

They share many of the qualities of both the Proctors and the Haunters, but the blend is an uneasy one. Their trips to the Skinlands are fraught with envy and desire. They steal moments, lives, souls, all for the moment's pleasure — the Proctors are more innocent in their travels.

Haunters

The spiders crawl in and out, up and down. Marjorie watches them from her bed. She daren't move anywhere else in the room, because the spiders are there. She doesn't want to step on one, doesn't want to feel the crunch of chitin under her bare foot, feel the ichor seeping between her toes.

She knows that will happen. She's tried to leave three times. Each time the spiders drove her back. They've climbed up the doorjamb and turned the lock. They've pulled down the blinds. She is alone in the dark, and the spiders won't let her go.

"Is this sort of thing truly necessary?" asks the observer, a brutish-looking man in the garb of Roman Britain. He stares at the tableau with an expression akin to disgust.

"Oh, certainly," his companion replies. He wears a laboratory coat and tattered clothes beneath it; impossibly thick glasses sit on his beaklike nose. "Soon she will die. We know this. And when she dies, I will Reap her, and make her one of us. Then she will assist me in doing the same to others, and so on."

"And the point of all of this? Is this why you left us, so you could play terror games with foolish girls without our interference? Pathetic."

"You're misunderstanding, Praetor Rufus. We do this for the best of reasons. It's just that you're not privy to them."

Rufus sighs. "Ah, so it's all a big secret, then. Fine, I'll play along." His voice takes on a sing-song quality, the type that adults use when forced to play children's games. "When will I know?"

The Haunter giggles, a chilling sound. Marjorie hears it somehow, and shrieks. The spiders redouble their activity. "Why, my dear Praetor, you'll learn when everyone else does. When it's too late"

Fear these souls. They stand before a great door guarded by but a single lock, and have devoted themselves to the picking of it. On the day that door swings wide, all the devastation that has come before will seem as nothing.

Chanteurs

Miklos sits on a bench before the Onyx Tower and strums his lute. Passersby gaze at him. A few throw relics or fractional oboli at his feet, rewarding him the way they would reward an ordinary street musician.

It amuses Miklos to no end.

He often comes here to sit and play, and to watch the endless sea that stretches off to the Far Shores. Once, a very long time ago, he dreamed of taking that voyage, but that dream is long dead. Instead, he comes here to mourn its death, and to give voice to that mourning.

Today he has a new composition to play, one that only he has heard before. Miklos has spent the past year composing it, to the exclusion of all other things. The Guild has carried on well enough without him, he supposes. At least there haven't been any more calls for revolution lately, and no one's tried to assassinate him in years. It's a pleasant, lazy set of circumstances, one that he could grow very used to.

But time is wasting, and he has a new song. Gently he launches himself into the first, tentative chords, then as the music gains strength he gives himself to it utterly. Tourists and sightseers stop in their tracks and listen, entranced. He sings of loss and rage, of the battle which of late they had all witnessed from this very spot. He sings of the heroism of Charon and the power of his foe, and as the last notes drain away softly on the breeze it seems to those who listen that they are losing their Emperor all over again.

A young woman, tears in her eyes, comes up to where Miklos sits. "That was beautiful," she says. "Thank you."

"You're quite welcome," he says with airy charm. "I am glad to see that it pleased you thus."

"May I ask what the piece is called?" she asks.

"Of course. It's my Great Dirge."

"For Charon?"

"No, for Gorool." And he walks off, leaving the stunned silence before they even begin to puzzle out what that might mean.

Beware those who would make themselves poet-kings, for poets have no notion of kingship, and kings make poetry from the deaths of their subjects. There is a great treachery here, a deep and subtle one, and even I am not sure how far it goes.

Sandmen

A hundred wraiths sit, dreaming, in a single room. All show faces of perfect peace and contentment, rare in the Underworld. All are transported by the dreamweaver's art, while behind them, armed Sandmen armored with tatters of dream stand guard over them.

"This lot would be easy pickings," one says, a woman with a scar running diagonally across her face and a sword that bends at an impossible angle. Around her feet, shreds of gossamer dance to a time signature that no orchestra ever played.

Her opposite number merely grunts. "Good thing we're so damn honest, isn't it? Good thing they're willing to give up the prohibition on Guilds when they want a night's entertainment. Good thing that you and I would both end up as seat cushions if we tried anything."

She nods with mock sadness. "Too true. I wonder if they realize how close they come to the edge, though, every time they give themselves over to a dream? I hear stories that some of the big ones can spin dreams they don't come back from. They hide the bodies and claim the poor saps Transcended, but that doesn't play well on the Isle either."

The other guard shrugs. "Don't know about that. I do know we've got some permanent dreams set up, though. Ever been to the Horror Show?" She nods to the negative. "Well, it lives up to its name. Monsters and worse, all through it. I hear there are even some of the Guild boys who've decided to stay inside permanently."

"So what is it?" she asks impatiently.

"Well-l-l-l-l-l," he says, and draws out the word to emphasize his own importance, "if you ask me, it looks like a chunk of Labyrinth. The Horror Show is a dry run for going in after the next Nhudri."

She stops, ponders, shakes her head. "Whatever. So what dream do you think they're getting tonight?"

We can sometimes craft falsehood from truth. The Sandmen try to illustrate truth by means of falsehood. Both great understanding and great hatred have emerged from this dichotomy. When the stars align properly, we can work in harness to create miracles. When Fortune frowns upon us, the Sandmen are among our worst enemies, and neither I nor any of our kind have the knack of knowing when the signs are favorable.

Alchemists

"Come on, we've got to pack up." The tall woman, her face pinched and contorted by worry, stands by the door of the laboratory. Around her assistants pack alembics and siphons, fragile relic glassware in a harsh world that was not kind to such.

"Why?" comes the response from a distracted apprentice, who stands staring at something in a bowl. "Why now, when I'm so close?"

"Because," the woman says impatiently, "we have been banished. Every man jack of us. While your nose was buried in that bowl, and I was off in the Skinlands doing experiments on decay rates, our noble masters decided to riot. His Imperial Majesty was most displeased, and now me and thee and the rest of our noble Guild must go tagging along after the Artificers when they leave." She speaks as one speaks to a child, or an idiot.

"It's not fair," the young man says, finally turning from his work. "Why should we have to move, when we didn't do anything? I didn't march on the Onyx Tower. You didn't try to fight anyone. Why should we have to go anywhere?" His face sets in a pout of righteous indignation.

His companion merely shakes her head, and speaks with even more exaggerated care. "Because we are part of a Guild. And all of the Guilds, even the 'we didn't do anything so be nice to us' Guilds, are banished. Quod erat demonstrandum. And that is why I am leaving, and Master Duncan is leaving, and Totila's batch from the next workroom is leaving. You, of course, are welcome to stay, and when you have been turned into a handsomely crafted desk ornament, one of us shall sneak into Stygia in disguise and purchase you as a memento, to remind us not to be flaming idiots."

He stands and looks at her, blinking twice. "I'll start packing."

She smiles. "Good boy."

Not quite the lapdogs others think them to be, the Alchemists nevertheless have always found themselves in an untenable position. Their relationship with the Artificers has denied them the standing they might otherwise have earned, while their impact on the Skinlands has encouraged Stygia to look upon them with a jaundiced eye. I think they would have preferred to be left to their experiments, emerging once in a great while to share some inconsequential advance with the rest of us. Alas for them that Fate is not so kind.

Monitors

"So, do we have the whole list?" asked the head Monitor, a squat little man named Alphonse who took entirely too much pleasure in his work.

"We do indeed," replied his assistant, a taller, thinner man named Dietrich who was well on his way to acquiring his superior's attitude. "One church, two children (now grown) and one bag of coin buried

in the backyard where no one's been able to find it in a dozen years since he died."

Alphonse steepled his fingers and hummed. "Are you sure that's all of them? We're not missing a wife, a home, a sword or a favorite toy?"

Dietrich shook his head. "Not a one. The wife died two years ago and went straight into the Void. He frankly loathed the house, and there's nothing else of his left on God's green earth. Truth be told, he was the sort of fellow we ought to have been encouraging. Loved God, his family and a nice pile of money." He laughed. Alphonse did not.

"Well, that's wonderful. He's a model citizen. However, he's also annoyingly restrictive on our trade through his checkpoint, and has the sort of sterling record that leads to swift promotion. If he isn't brought to heel now, he may become unmanageable. Suggestions?"

Dietrich sucked air past his teeth. "Hmm. Well, we could tip someone off to the bag of money, which would no doubt get split up and send our friend into a particularly unpleasant Harrowing."

"A good start. The children?"

"If we can't wait for them to die on their own, we can certainly have them taken care of. I have some Puppeteers who owe me favors."

"Good, good. And the church?"

"Oh, don't ask me to destroy a church. That's a step I won't take."

Alphonse leaned forward, his face a mask of disappointment. "That's unfortunate. Well, if you won't tempt God, perhaps you'll at least think of a way to separate our little Centurion from that church. Once he loses that connection, he's no longer fit for Necropolis duty. Perhaps he'll make a deal to have a Fetter re-connected, or perhaps he'll just attach himself to new duties. Either way, he's no longer our problem." Dietrich nods eagerly, lapping up the details of a *modus operandi* he has performed many times before. "But don't think I'll forget about this church business," Alphonse says. "God may forgive you for your piety. But these days, you work for me."

The Monitors have always been petty. Handed the greatest gift in the Underworld, they reduce it to a game of influences and levers. Someday they will find a man who cannot be moved, and they will suffer for it.

Proctors

It is the day after the proclamation of the *Dictum Mortuum*. Deep within one of the Monitors' oldest Guildhouses, dejection reigns.

"This is just a phase," counsels Terrence, one of the oldest of the Proctors present. "Charon has had whims to this effect before, and each was revoked in a few short years. He'll not deny his servants their pleasures, lest he lose their allegiance."

"But what if he doesn't revoke it?" demands Adrienne, one of the newest members of the Guild. "What if he keeps it in place, and we can't do anything, and we wither? The other Guilds will grow stronger, and we'll be forgotten, and before long we'll just be trapped down here muttering into Terrence's beard because we'll be too afraid to try to do anything."

"Well, then, I must make sure my beard is well-groomed if you are going to be muttering into it en masse," Terrence replies, and the laughter is general. "Adrienne, daughter, listen to me. We will always visit the Skinlands, regardless of Charon's decree. We are drawn to doing so and cannot resist. But this petty little law of his will fade, in fact if not in writing. There are too many of us who cross the Shroud regularly for him to have a hope of containing us all, and too many of his loyal subjects want what we and the others can offer. No, this will pass, I am certain of it. We simply must be patient."

Adrienne allows herself to be comforted for the moment. A hundred years later, she is no longer so patient, and destroys Terrence at her Shadow's urgings. The *Dictum Mortuum* is never repealed, nor does its enforcement ever grow lax. Adrienne spends more and more time in the Skinlands until such time as her own Shadow betrays her. Enthralled, she waits for her sentence to be passed. Patiently.

The Proctors have always stood apart from the political machinations of the Underworld, perhaps because they seemed to regard the fact that they were all dead as an inconvenient one. As such, there is little that can be said about them for good or ill. They have merely existed, and done less harm in Stygia than they might.

Others

We have fewer dealings with those beyond the Shroud than most. In the fullness of time, even the mightiest vampire lord or most powerful wizard comes to us, and there is no need to hurry matters. Indeed, sometimes their memories are improved by death, so that they obtain some perspective on matters that seemed too immediate in life.

Vampires

There is a difference between a living memory and a dead one. The drinkers of blood specialize in the latter. Each remembrance is crystallized and enshrined for all eternity in the minds of these relics, never to be taken out or re-examined. It is almost amusing that beings who dwell so thoroughly in the past never take time to re-assess their surroundings.

Lupines

Memory is an art and a duty to the children of the moon. They have inscribed memory lovingly in their hearts, and pass down that tradition from generation to generation. We would honor them for this, if they cared for such things.

Mages

Those who seek to remake all that is are, by necessity, foes of those who preserve all that was. The mortal wizards never seem to realize their deeds affect others besides themselves; their perspective is too narrow. The fact that others might take issue with their deeds never seems to occur to them.

The Fae

Faerie souls in mortal bodies, born again and again into a world that loves them not. It is the stuff of grand tragedy. We could help them a great deal, I suspect, if they would allow themselves to be helped. But those who insist that their only metier is tragedy have little use for those who would offer them a wider repertoire.

Spectres

We have touched the memories of the Shadow-eaten, and it is not a pleasant thing to recall. One can easily lose one's self in their pain, and one can see why they would wish to end all things, just to end their misery. However, one can sympathize without agreeing, and knowing the true nature of one's enemies can often spur one to fight that much harder against them.

Working In the Past: Systems

Memory Palaces

A Memory Palace is not a real place. Rather, it is the sort of structure that Mnemoi use to organize the recollections that they borrow or steal from others. The Palace is an organizational framework, with each hallway representing a connective theme, and each room on that hallway being an actual memory. The arrangement of rooms, halls and stairwells is a representation of how the Mnemos has organized the memories she holds.

Most Mnemoi are only capable of producing a single Memory Palace. They integrate all of the alien memories they possess into that single structure, separating one wraith's recollections from another by means of torturous stairwells, towers and the like. Truly gifted Mnemoi can maintain separate Palaces, though the stories of those who try and fail to do so are used to frighten students in the Academies.

Appearance

Most Memory Palaces created by wraiths under two millennia old default to the classic medieval castle with moat, bailey, crenellations and so on. This is more a function of stereotype and propaganda than anything else; in truth, a Memory Palace can look like anything the owner and builder wants it to look like. Minos', by all reports, resembles the buried palace at Knossos, while Phaedra's eerily recalls the Onyx Tower. As a rough rule of thumb, the decor reflects the Mnemos' feelings about the memories contained within; unpleasant ones are generally located in dungeons or dank, poorly lit corridors, while pleasant memories are in well-lit hallways that are lavishly decorated and well-maintained.

Building the Palace

When a Mnemos acquires a memory, or a batch of memories, from another wraith, they rest in a disorganized jumble with the Mnemos' own memories. Left alone for too long, they will inevitably bleed into the Mnemos' own consciousness, causing all sorts of problems. This is a particular concern if the adopted memories are particularly fierce or powerful, as Charon's inevitably are.

Ergo, the wraith must build a Memory Palace. In theory, each Mnemos builds her own, from her own memories, as she is trained. She then constructs a separate Palace from others' memories when she acquires them, though more often than not the "external" Palace is just an extension of her inner one. In such cases, memory bleedover is a possibility (see page 136). In theory, so long as the Mnemos keeps on performing the exercises she learns by studying memories, her personal Palace will maintain itself nicely. On the other hand, each time a new external memory is added, she must consciously graft it on to the existing Palace.

Creating a Memory Palace requires a series of Intelligence + Memories rolls, difficulty 7. The number of successful rolls required depends on the complexity and number of memories being stored (Storyteller discretion). Failures mean that sections of the Palace are dangerously unstable, and the memories contained therein are in peril.

Furthermore, since creating a Memory Palace takes utmost concentration, the Mnemos generally has to buy off her Shadow before commencing the operation. What sort of bribe is required is up to the Shadowguide, though the Storyteller can make suggestions.

Going Inside

With sufficient skill at the Mnemosynis Arcanos (level 4 mastery or above), a Mnemos can open up her Memory Palace to a visitor. While the wraith does not actually go into the Mnemos' head, his consciousness does enter the Memory Palace. While there, he can stroll about those rooms the Mnemos has left unlocked (or attempt to force his way into locked ones; doing so requires a Willpower roll, difficulty 8). As soon as he passes through a door into a "chamber," the visitor experiences the memory contained within. When the memory ends, the wraith finds himself before another door or series of doors, and the process begins again.

It is possible for a wraith to stay too long or otherwise become trapped in a Memory Palace. If the Palace is unstable (see page 134) if the Mnemos has booby-trapped a particular memory (doing so requires an Intelligence + Memories roll, difficulty 7) or the memory itself proves too much for the visitor (Willpower roll at Storyteller discretion), the intruding wraith can be trapped in the Palace. His Corpus sits, a witless shell, while he wanders from room to room. How the wraith reacts to events within the Palace (a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll to escape a collapsing memory, for example) determines whether or not the visitor is trapped in the first place; otherwise, the victim gets one Willpower roll (difficulty 7) per day to see if he can escape. A botch on the Willpower roll costs the wraith a permanent Willpower point, and he cannot use Willpower on the roll itself. (He can, however, take Shadow Dice.) Existence isn't pleasant for a Mnemos with a foreign wraith in his Memory Palace, either — the echoes of the trapped wraith's personality simply won't go away, and the Mnemos' Shadow makes hay with the possibilities. Furthermore, the Mnemos is at +1 difficulty on all rolls involving concentration as long as she has an unwanted mental guest.

Both Passions and Dark Passions can be fed while a wraith is inside a Memory Palace, and Catharsis is an ever-real possibility.

Breaking Down the Walls

A trapped wraith can attempt to wreck the Palace he is in. Of course, this is all symbolic — he needs to "attack" the walls with something, but the effect is symbolic as well. Well-crafted Memory Palaces can defend themselves, however. For every success in the creation of the Palace, there is a guard (which more often than not resembles an empty suit of armor, armed with a sword) patrolling the halls for just such occasions. The guard has effectively three dots in all Attributes, plus four dots in Dodge, Brawl and Melee, and two dots in Alertness and Awareness. If a wraith attempts to damage a Memory Palace, the guards come running and attack without mercy. A wraith destroyed in a Memory Palace is indeed destroyed, and his Corpus becomes a Drone.

Getting Out

All it takes to leave a Memory Palace under normal circumstances is a successful Willpower roll. If the Mnemos decides to expel a visitor, both wraiths make a contested Willpower roll. If the Mnemos wins, the intruder is evicted and gets two

points of Temporary Angst. If he wins, he gets to stay at least another turn and the Mnemos gets the Angst instead.

A Mnemos can have as many wraiths in her Memory Palace at any given time as she has points of permanent Willpower.

Merits and Flaws

Other Marks (1 point Merit)

For some unknown reason, you have manifested the markings of another, more socially acceptable Arcanos. Often it is the Arcanos of someone whose memories you've worked with extensively, but there's really no rhyme or reason to it. What it means, however, is that you are not instantly identifiable as a Mnemos, which makes ghostly existence a touch safer for you than it might have been otherwise.

Knows Too Much (1-5 point Merit)

In theory, each Mnemos' burden of Charon's memories is locked away so that the bearer cannot access them. The failsafes and barriers that Minos has erected are ominous, redundantly protective and all but unbreakable.

Well, at least they were until you came along. For some reason, the defenses simply don't hold against you. You have perfect access to whichever of Charon's memories you carry, and can call them forth at will.

The more points you spend on this Merit, the more profound (and perhaps useful) the accessible memories are.

On the other hand, if Minos, or indeed anyone else, learns that you can do this, you may not be long for the Underworld.

Heart of Memory (2 point Merit)

You carry within you one of Charon's most precious memories. Perhaps it is of his dealings with the Deathlords on a particularly sensitive matter, or a discussion with the Lady of Fate. The details don't matter. What does matter is that while all the Mnemoi are theoretically equal, you are more equal than most. In situations where you are among your brethren and in peril (admittedly rare), others will make every effort to protect you and the secrets you carry.

Known Memory Pusher (2 point Merit)

You've weaseled your way into the fringes of wraith society as the lowest of the low: a memory pusher. You sell good memories and pleasant recollections for anything your fellow Restless care to barter — relics, Artifacts, oboli or information.

Fortunately for you, however, your clientele likes you. They appreciate your services, and they trust you. That means that they're not going to turn you in to the Legions, at least not today. Furthermore, while your clients aren't necessarily willing to go out on a limb for you, they do serve as a convenient source of gossip. And let's not get into the possibilities for blackmail....

Mistaken Monitor (2 point Merit)

For some unknown reason, the effects of Mnemosynis and Lifeweb on the user are identical. This sparked some debate in

the days when such debates were less likely to send those taking part in the discussion into chains, but it has remained a source of some speculation even in these degraded times.

However, you don't care about the wherefores of the matter. Instead, you've used the happy coincidence to go undercover in the Monitors. Your "superiors" in your new Guild have no idea where your true allegiance lies. They trust you as they would trust one of their own, making you eligible to learn any specialized Arcanoi they know and privy to all of their secrets.

While being mistaken for a member of an outlawed organization isn't necessarily the best thing in the world, it certainly beats being recognized as a member of an outlawed and despised group. However, if the Monitors ever catch on to your little charade, the torments Stygia could devise will look like nothing compared to what they'll do to you.

Perfect Memory (4 point Merit)

You remember everything — *everything*. Every word of every conversation, every step you've ever taken is stored, safely, in your Memory Palace. Furthermore, you've trained yourself so that you can access any tidbit of posterity with minimal delay.

Any time you are called on to "remember" something, roll Intelligence (difficulty 4). Any success means that the datum in question is at your fingertips, and that if you (the player) have forgotten it, the Storyteller should remind you. It is recommended that players taking this Merit for their characters take copious notes during gameplay, and compare those notes with the Storyteller after each session for purposes of accuracy.

Wandering Mind (1 point Flaw)

Try as you might, you can't keep yourself focused on day-to-day existence. Instead, you keep on drifting into memories that you've stored. Make a Willpower roll (difficulty 5) at the beginning of any scene where you're not in immediate danger or else be distracted by more pleasant memories.

Fragment Junkie (2 point Flaw)

Your own memories aren't good enough for you. Other people's memories have always somehow been better, fresher, more real, so you indulge in them whenever you can. You trade your services for peeks at other people's memories, sneak Memory Fragments when you can, and generally neglect your own mental storehouse of experience. Your superiors haven't noticed yet, but when they do, it could get ugly.

Delusional (3 point Flaw)

The Mnemos are charged with the preservation and transmission of memories. Unfortunately, you have a hard time drawing the line between what happened, what might have happened and what you wish had happened. As such, your memories are a hodgepodge of delusion, wish-fulfillment and just plain wierdness.

Any time you attempt to do anything with a memory, you must succeed on a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) or the memory is corrupted by your rich and rewarding fantasy life. The more 1s rolled on a botch, the more *outré* the delusions you pass along.

Forgetful (3 point Flaw)

The Mnemoi are dedicated to the preservation of memory. Unfortunately, they recruited you to help with the job. You have a mind like a sieve. More specifically, none of the memory-training techniques, none of the Arcanoi and none of the enthusiastic disciplinary actions your teachers have administered have enabled you to develop anything vaguely resembling a good memory. You'd forget your own head if it weren't attached, and considering some of the recent advances in Molation, that may come next.

In game terms, this means that you are at +2 difficulty to use all Mnemosynis powers involving your own powers of recall. Furthermore, you simply have difficulty remembering names, faces and details of conversations. Any time you are called on to remember anything specific ("What was the name of the Masquer who said he'd disguise us?") requires an Intelligence roll. Failure means that the desired bit of data has gone right out of your head, never to return.

Unstable Memory Palace (3 point Flaw)

One of the Memory Palaces you constructed has been put together shoddily. Simply put, you botched the job. Some memories are inaccessible, others are redundant and still others are rotting away. Anyone who enters that Memory Palace must make a Willpower roll each time she moves from room to room, or else the room she's in collapses and she takes damage as if it happened to her Corpus. Wraiths have become trapped in Memory Palaces forever in this fashion, essentially destroying them and driving the Mnemos carrying them mad.

For more information on becoming trapped in a Memory Palace, see page 132.

Furthermore, memories may become temporarily or permanently inaccessible through this Flaw, at Storyteller discretion.

Identified! (4 point Flaw)

Most people ordinarily think the Mnemoi have all been exterminated, or banished to the Underworld equivalent of the Antipodes. Most of them have never seen a real, dead Mnemos, and honestly wouldn't know how to identify one if ever they needed to. With all that in mind, it would seem safe for a sufficiently cautious Mnemos — yourself, say — to mingle on the outskirts of Stygian society.

Unfortunately, "seems" doesn't always equate to "is." Somehow, word's gotten to all of the wrong places that you are what you are, and everyone's eager to collect on the reward for turning you in. You have no friends in Stygia, and precious few anywhere else, and somehow no matter how you Moliat or otherwise disguise yourself, they manage to find you.

Artifacts

The Mnemoi don't do much in the way of crafting Artifacts. There are only a few devices in which the Mnemoi specialize, but centuries of experimentation and implementation have allowed those devices to evolve into superbly crafted tools of the memorysmith's trade.

Memory Fragment

A Memory Fragment is essentially a quick hit of someone's past, looking like nothing so much as a quartz crystal two inches in length and a half-inch in thickness. A Mnemos "fills" the Fragment by placing it on the target's forehead and then drawing forth the memory in question. Doing so requires a Wits + Mnemosynis roll (difficulty 7) if the target is cooperating, the expenditure of a Willpower point and a roll against difficulty 9 if he is not. At that point, the memory leaves the victim and flows into the Fragment. Until the Fragment is broken and the memory released, the originator of the memory simply cannot recall the information the Fragment contains. He knows that he's forgotten something, but simply cannot put his finger on it, even if reminded.

Fragments have multiple uses, then, not the least of which is depriving others of their memories until such time as the Mnemoi deem it useful to return them. While Memory Fragments are not eternal, they can last up to a century, and a well-protected Fragment can put a vital memory (say, of a Mnemos' indiscretion) on the shelf for a very long time.

Activating a Memory Fragment is a simple affair. The wraith holding the Fragment (only a Mnemos can fill a Fragment, but anyone can activate one) breaks it on a success on a Strength roll (difficulty 5) and presses the jagged end of the Fragment against the intended recipient. The released memory floods into the target, transporting him into what is essentially a single room of a Memory Palace. The wraith remains caught within the memory for the duration of the flashback (up to 10 minutes, in most cases), unable to defend himself or react to the world around him during that time.

Some Mnemoi grow addicted to the intense rush of memory produced by Memory Fragments. Such Mnemoi are often found in Necropoli working as memory pushers, trading their services for "shots" of clients' memories.

The older a Memory Fragment gets, the cloudier and more fragile it becomes. Passing a memory from one Fragment to another, so as to preserve it in perpetuity, has produced only flawed or dangerous copies. This problem, in part, explains why the Mnemoi have never trusted Charon's memories to artificed storage devices, but rather keep those memories in ghostly mind instead.

Using a Memory Fragment to steal a recollection costs two Pathos. Attempts to hitch Fragments to soulfire crystals have resulted in melted Fragments.

Memory Shard

A larger, bulkier and somewhat kinder variation on the Memory Fragment, the Memory Shard duplicates memories rather than stealing them. For every additional point of Pathos the Mnemos "charging" the Shard uses when loading the crystal up, the memory inside can be discharged to another wraith. So if four points of Pathos are used to charge a Shard, the memory contained within the crystal can be released three separate times, or once to three wraiths simultaneously. Furthermore, additional Pathos can be added to a Shard to produce repeated showings, at a rate of three Pathos per viewer after the initial charging.

One of the ways in which a Shard differs from a Fragment is that the Shard does not erase the memory from the mind of its target. The wraith from whom the memory is taken retains perfect recall of what is copied in the crystal. While a Shard is still

filled in the same way a Fragment is (in other words, memories can still be stolen with one), it is much less of a violation of the target's psyche.

On the down side, Shards have a much shorter shelf life than do Fragments, generally fogging up completely in a decade or so. Standard Mnemos procedure for particularly choice memories garnered through a Shard is to have a Mnemos incorporate the duplicated memory into his own Memory Palace, because Shards simply can't be counted on to last.

Fortunately, activating a Shard does not require breaking it. Rather, the crystal simply must be placed against the Corpus of a wraith and a command phrase (encoded within the Shard by its creator and generally something simple) must be spoken. At that point, the Shard releases the flood of memory.

After a Shard runs out of Pathos fuel, it shatters and, in a matter of seconds, reduces itself to a pile of dust.

Mirror of the Past

A Mirror of the Past is one of the rarest and most valuable Artifacts a Mnemos can possess. Nothing more than a silvered bowl filled with a silvery plasm, the Mirror of the Past portrays anything the wraith holding it cares to project into it, so long as that image is a memory and not a fantasy, daydream or speculation. The image is then displayed on the surface of the plasm, visible to anyone who can see the bowl.

Most Mirrors of the Past are built into elaborate stands that also contain holders for multiple soulfire crystals, and indeed many Mirrors are large enough (a foot or so across, minimum) to require support. If there is a hunk of soulfire plugged into the base, displaying a memory in the Mirror takes a point of Pathos out of that crystal. Otherwise, the wraith who is projecting pays the price.

It is possible, with a successful Wits + Memories roll (difficulty 7) and the expenditure of a Willpower point, a wraith can distort the memories projected into the bowl. The more successes achieved on the roll, the more seamless the distortion. Doing so is risky, however. A failure causes the plasm in the bowl to erupt in a scalding column, while a botch shatters the entire mechanism.

Memory Golem

When a Mnemos is about to set out on a particularly perilous mission or otherwise risk herself, she sometimes avails herself of the services of a Memory Golem. A massive humanoid figure crafted from the same material as Memory Shards, the Golem is a repository of the sum and total of a wraith's memories. That way, in case of disaster, the Mnemos' recollections are temporarily safe until another home can be found for them.

A Memory Golem can function in one of two ways:

- It can duplicate some or all of a wraith's memories; or
- It can absorb them in the same manner as a Memory Fragment absorbs a single memory.

The former method is preferred, because stolen memories can only be reclaimed from a Golem by smashing it, and Memory Golems are simply too expensive and intricate to go around breaking.

When charged with memories, the Golem shambles around in a rough parody of the normal routine of the wraith it's currently backing up. It speaks in a crude imitation of her voice, and can be convinced to speak about its stored memories, albeit nothing else. The Golem also shares something of the wraith's

personality, and won't speak to someone the wraith dislikes or distrusts. Memory Golems can't be tortured into speaking, but they can be tricked.

Powering a Memory Golem requires 20 points of Pathos per week, more if the Golem gets energetic. This energy can be donated through either Usury or a soulfire crystal. If the Golem ever runs out of Pathos, it powers down immediately, though the memories it contains don't fade for at least a month.

Getting memories into or out of a Memory Golem works precisely as does getting recollections out of Shards and Fragments, depending upon which storage option was chosen.

Memory Golems are, on average, seven feet high and very broad. Most have a faint green or blue tinge to them, the reason for which has never been explained. The humanoid nature of a Golem is generally very rough; attempts to get finer have resulted in a loss in efficiency at memory storage.

The Greater Palace

Needless to say, it is very, very important to the Mnemioi to keep track of which of Charon's memories are where. The device used for this purpose is the Greater Palace, a three-dimensional representation of what Charon's Memory Palace should look like. The Greater Palace is composed entirely of light, and each chamber's possessor is marked clearly in the model. Only Minos, Phaedra and a few of their most trusted advisors can manipulate the Greater Palace. The device does not update itself automatically, but rather relies on manual input of any news, good or bad. Rooms corresponding to memories that are known to have been lost for all time are dark within the matrix of the Palace. More and more of the Palace is dark these days.

The Greater Palace is, as one might expect, huge and eclectic in design. It stands over a dozen feet tall and twice as wide, and rests in Minos' shelter on the River of Death. The Palace is vaguely translucent, and by focusing one's attention one can see rooms within the structure of the Palace as well as ones that would be normally visible. Minos does not allow any visitors to see the Palace, save those who have been initiated and granted one of Charon's memories.

New Abilities

New Knowledge: Memories

Memories is the art of working with the stuff of memory itself. Furthermore, it includes training one's self in memorization and memory organization techniques, Memory Palace building and efficiency at recall. With expertise in Memories, you can remember things better and access those memories you have charge of more easily. Storing all the memories in the world won't do you any good if you can't find the one image you want when you need to do so in a hurry, after all.

• Novice: You have reasonably good recall, and things don't go immediately in one ear and out the other

•• Practiced: You can construct a basic Memory Palace well.

••• Competent: You can place names with faces without flaw.

•••• Expert: Go someplace once and you can remember the way forever.

••••• Master: You never forget anything you don't want to. Ever.

Specialties: Memory Palaces, Total Recall, Conversations, Fine Detail

Possessed By: Mnemoi, Inquisitors, Unlidded Eye members

New Mnemosynis Powers

• Erasure

Despite the Mnemoi's stated philosophy, not every memory is worth keeping, at least not under all circumstances. Many are the prisoners who wish they could have forgotten the secrets forced out of them by interrogation; legion is the number of abandoned lovers who wish they could forget the sources of their pain. It is no surprise, then that the Mnemoi have perfected an art for forgetting quickly, painlessly and almost effortlessly.

What Erasure does is simply to wipe a memory from the Mnemos' mind. The power does not work on any other wraith save the Mnemos herself. However, its effectiveness on the wraith choosing to turn it on herself is devastating. Memories excised with Erasure are gone so thoroughly it is as if they never have been. The wound in the wraith's mind is even self-cauterizing; other memories that refer to that which has been forgotten now lead into aimless rumination. The wraith never even knows what she's forgotten.

It is believed that Erasure was originally developed so that Mnemoi might jettison borrowed or stolen memories that had become troublesome. In little time, however, the Guild discovered other uses for the art, most of which involved avoiding being forced to testify or reveal secrets under torture. Guild records demonstrate that at one point in the Mnemoi's history, it became routine for wraiths to leave entire sets of their memories stored at Guild strongholds before setting out on missions; such wraiths also frequently wiped out all of their memories not re-

Under Wraps

In theory, memories acquired through Soulkeeper reside in a safe, compartmentalized portion of a Mnemos' mind — the Memory Palace. The memories are easily accessible, but do not intrude on the wraith's nightly existence. They are discrete and clearly alien, and at no time should a Mnemos think the borrowed memories are his own.

That is, of course, the theory. The reality is somewhat more tricky. Every time a Mnemos goes into Catharsis, the walls around the co-opted memories grow a little thinner. Over the centuries, a Mnemos may truly come to believe that the memories he carries — whether they be of receiving a mandate from the Lady of Fate or of giving birth to a child in the Skinlands — are his own. Given enough time, the borrowed and natural memories swirl into a kaleidoscope of half-accurate remembrance, and the personality of the Mnemos blurs along with them.

System: Each time a Mnemos recovers from Catharsis, a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) is necessary. If there are no successes on the roll, some fragment of the memories the wraith is storing escapes into the Mnemos' consciousness. The nature, size and intensity of the escaped memory are all up to the Storyteller.

lating to the job at hand, the better to perform their tasks with a minimum of distractions.

System: Erasure is generally one of the simpler Mnemosynis arts that a wraith can use. A successful roll of Wits + Mnemosynis (difficulty 5) and the expenditure of a point of Pathos means that the offending memory is gone. A botch brings the memory screaming to the forefront of the wraith's mind, which can be particularly troublesome if the Mnemos was trying to rid herself of memories that were overwhelming to begin with. Such instances function as if the Mnemos were a victim of Mnemotechnics.

The exception to the rule when it comes to Erasure involves Passions and/or Fetters. Should a Mnemos try to forget one of these anchors of her reality, the roll suddenly acquires a difficulty of 8, the cost increases by a Willpower point and the wraith's Shadow gains a point of temporary Angst.

Note: If the Mnemos truly wishes to forget something permanently, the expenditure of a permanent Willpower point ensures that the offending memory can never, ever be restored. Even the use of other Mnemosynis powers cannot overcome this act of will.

•• Swipe

Swipe allows a Mnemos to temporarily erase a single memory belonging to another wraith. The memory can be any specific recollection (memory of a Fetter, memory of a deed or conversation, memory of a combat technique), and it simply vanishes, leaving a gaping hole in the victim's mental landscape.

System: Swipe requires that the victim be touched, Corpus to Corpus, before being activated. A contested Willpower roll comes next. If the Mnemos wins, he erases the memory of his choice from the victim's mind. The number of successes the Mnemos rolls equals the number of turns for which the memory vanishes. If the target wins, there is no effect.

Swipe costs a point of Pathos and gains the Mnemos a point of Angst. Spending a Willpower point changes turns of effect to hours. Two Willpower ups the duration to days.

••• Soulkeeper

This power allows a Mnemos to duplicate portions of another wraith's memories — no more than a year's worth at a time — and store them within his own subconscious. The Mnemos can absorb more than one set of memories, taking them either from a single individual or from multiple "donors." All that is required for the duplication is that the wraith touch his target, however briefly.

System: The player declares which memories he wants his character to store, and makes an Intelligence + Mnemosynis roll.

Other Powers

The Mnemoi have come up with literally hundreds of other variations on Mnemosynis, many relating to Memory Palace construction, others to stealth and causing observers to forget their very presence. Storytellers should feel free to cook up their own Mnemosynis powers, within reason, as variations on the ones listed here or in the **Wraith Players Guide**. Space is all that prevents us from printing more here.

If the target is willing, the difficulty is 5; otherwise, the difficulty on the roll is 8. The more successes the player rolls, the more clearly the character duplicates the memory. A single success may produce fuzzy, grainy or incomplete recollections (more bizarre instances may include memories with no sound, for example, or ones in which everything is seen from a distorted perspective). With two successes, the memory is as clear as the Mnemos' own, while five successes provides superlative detail. A botch may provide the unlucky Mnemos with the target's dreams, fantasies or nightmares, or might well transfer some of the Mnemos' recollections into the victim.

If the target is willing, this art costs one Pathos and one Willpower. If the target is unwilling, the wraith also acquires a point of temporary Angst with each usage.

•••• Tabula Rasa

A running joke among the Mnemoi is the motto "Do unto others as you have learned to do unto yourself." This truism reflects the Guild's penchant for perfecting their powers in usage on the individual, then turning that expertise loose on the rest of the Underworld. Tabula Rasa is one of the purest expressions of that philosophy, and it is one that other wraiths would do well to fear.

Tabula Rasa is nothing more than the manner in which the Mnemoi have taken Erasure and learned to inflict it on the rest of the Underworld. What the most callow apprentice Mnemos can do to his own mind, his master can do to anyone else's.

System: Tabula Rasa works no differently than Erasure, except that it is directed against a specific target. A successful roll of Wits + Mnemosynis (difficulty 5) and the expenditure of a point of Pathos means that the chosen memory is gone. A botch brings the memory screaming to the forefront of the wraith's mind. Such instances function as if the target was a victim of Mnemotechnics.

As with Erasure, Passions and/or Fetters are the exception to this rule. Should a Mnemos try to cause her target to forget one of these anchors of reality, the roll suddenly acquires a difficulty of 8, the cost increases by a Willpower point and the wraith's Shadow gains a point of temporary Angst.

Note: If the Mnemos wishes her target to forget something permanently, the expenditure of a permanent Willpower point

ensures that the offending memory can never, ever be restored. Even the use of other Mnemosynis powers cannot reverse this.

•••• Memorycrafting

Memorycrafting allows a Mnemos to create memories out of whole cloth, creating them from sheer fantasy. The memories produced with this power are as realistic as the wraith producing them can make them. Errors that the Mnemos herself inserts into the forged memory (say, automobiles in a memory of the American Civil War) can be detected by a sufficiently observant spectator.

Recollections created through Memorycrafting do nothing on their own. A Mnemos wishing to utilize her creation must use another Mnemosynis power to imbue them into either another individual or a Memory Shard (see page XX). Until such time as a crafted memory is put to some kind of use, it flutters like a wisp of fog around the wraith who created it. Careful observers note that the haze of a crafted memory never goes away completely, and that a Mnemos who has produced a great many false memories (or recreated the same one many times) is, at all times, wrapped in a shroud of forged recollection.

System: Using Memorycrafting requires the expenditure of two points of Pathos and a Willpower point, as well as a Wits + Mnemosynis roll (difficulty 8). The number of successes indicates how vivid and realistic the memory is. A remembrance crafted with just one success might seem jerky or appear only in black and white, while one made with five successes is positively immersive.

If a Mnemos wishes to edit a memory she has created before she instills it in someone, it requires another point of Pathos and a Wits+Mnemosynis roll (difficulty 7). Any success indicates a successful re-editing of the memory. A botch produces new errors in the memory.

All recollections created with this power are from a first-person perspective. In other words, anyone absorbing the crafted memory believes that it happened to him, that he was there and that anyone telling him otherwise is lying. After all, he *remembers* it. If there is a glaring error in the memory, or if incontrovertible proof of the memory's falsehood is presented to the target, a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) may allow the character to realize he has been somehow defrauded of his past.

Faces Committed to Memory: Templates

The Mnemoi are few and far between. Centuries of slander and persecution have taken their toll. However, more of the memory-weavers exist than the Smiling Lord would like to think. Here are a few, for you to take as your own as characters, antagonists or inspiration.

Just remember: These are the young Mnemoi. The older ones rarely come out to play, regardless of circumstance.

Note: There are no statistics attached to these templates. This is not an oversight. We'd just rather give you more information than a page full of dots you can whip up for yourself quickly anyway.

Memory Pusher

Quote: *I can show you a good time, cheap. And the best thing is, you've seen it all before and you know you like it. So what do you say? First time back is free....*

Prelude: You tell everyone you were a small-time pusher in life, but that's not the case. In truth, you were an uptight, repressed geek who watched his friends and coworkers break the rules without ever paying the price. Other guys tried pot and coke at college, or drank themselves into puking stupor, but never seem to get penalized for it. You watched them do whatever they damn well pleased and have a hell of a good time at it, never suffering consequences that you could see.

And you hated them for it. You did your assignments on time and busted your ass doing so, and yet when people who ran weeks late didn't get penalized it made your blood boil. You put weeks into projects and made sure that nothing was done last minute, but peers who did everything the night before were the ones who got the praise — and the scholarships, and the promotions, and the raises.

It ate you up inside.

To make matters worse, the one time you did cut a corner, you got caught. You paid the penalty. You got nailed, and the stain of the incident stuck with you. After that every time you were mentioned for a promotion or an important project, the conversation always included the phrase "But what about that time when...."

So you were stuck, and you lived your life pinned in that position. All around you everyone else had all the fun and got all the glory, and you just got more and more bitter. You stopped going out, stopped eating right, stopped doing anything to take care of yourself, and soon enough it caught up with you. You died.

Then guess what happened? You crossed the Shroud, and found yourself in a society where the same crap was going to keep happening to you forever, unless someone turned you into a lawn ornament first. The sleazes and the weasels still got all the goods in Stygia, and the people who busted their humps got stuck in dead-end Necropoli until the end of the world.

It pissed you off, and to keep yourself sane you started keeping track of every slight, every insult, every cut corner someone else utilized. You swore you were going to remember them all, and pay each and every one of them back.

That's what caught the Mnemoi's attention. The Mnemos who found you wasn't crazy about your drive for vengeance, but he was impressed by your attention to detail. So he brought you into the fold, and that's when things started getting really interesting — for you, and for all of those people whom you made sure to remember.

Concept: You move from Necropolis to Necropolis, selling your abilities to bring back pleasant memories in exchange for favors and oboli. Of course, you're not above ransacking the memories of the people you're giving blasts from the past, and you're certainly not above blackmailing them into helping you nail the bastards who are on your little list. You know enough about what the Mnemoi expect of you not to get too far out of line, but as far as you're concerned, your agenda comes first.

Roleplaying Hints: Act like a stereotypical pusher — it's what all the straights expect. Prey on bureaucrats and others in dead-end positions. What you've got to sell is especially appealing to them, and even better, they're the ones sitting on the sort of information you need to take care of business. Let them talk themselves into buying your wares. If you push too hard, they'll chicken out and bolt. And always, always keep an eye on the exit — your own skin is the only thing that's essential these days.

Relics: A little list of folks who won't be missed, memory crystal, pen, pad, small knife





Mystic On the Run

Quote: *Can you hide me, please? I have oboli. I can pay. And I can make it so that you never saw me.*

Prelude: While you changed religions often in life, there's one thing that never altered: your faith in the idea that you were doing the right thing. It's just that the various expressions of belief you tried (starting with your parents' whitebread Christianity, then discovering Wicca at college, moving to Buddhism after that seminar, and so on through flirtations with Sufi, Hare Krishna and Objectivism) just didn't seem to reflect the inner truths that you knew were waiting for something to unlock deep inside you. Your friends regarded you as a harmless flake and your parents despaired, but on the whole your energetic spiritual quest didn't keep you from holding down a job, having a series of relationships, or generally getting from point A to point B in life.

Unfortunately, eventually you got to point D — death — and you still hadn't found anything that satisfied you in life. Something was still missing, and when you found yourself in the Shadowlands you just sort of figured that here was where you were supposed to look for it.

Initially, you drifted from Heretic cult to Heretic cult, sampling each one but finding the same sort of half-satisfaction from each that had so frustrated you in life. Once you understood how Passions worked, you grew cynical at watching group after group manipulate the flow of Pathos, just to claim an absolute truth that they didn't possess. Before too long you'd gone from being a seeker of truth to a cataloguer of frauds, but that didn't do anything to fill your gnawing feeling that something was missing.

It was years before you stumbled on the Mnemoi, following hint after hint until they could hide from you no longer. They told you who they were, and what they sought to do, and offered you a place among their ranks. You were impressed. They didn't try to coerce or bribe you, and promised that they would erase the memory of the meeting if you declined.

Intrigued, you accepted, and the rightness of it all made everything somehow better.

Unfortunately, you made a lot of enemies in your post-Heretic days, and they're not above trying to get you caught by the Hierarchy. So now you're on the run, ducking and covering from place to place and praying that no one who harbors you is endangered for doing so.

Concept: You're a seeker who's found what you've been looking for, but now everyone is looking for you. Somehow word got out that you were Mnemos, and that means that every hand is raised against you. So you run, and keep running, and do your best to cause no harm even as everyone tries to harm you.

Roleplaying Hints: The hardest thing for you to do is to keep the secret of the Guild. When you hear people repeating old lies and slanders, it's nearly impossible for you to keep silent about what the real story is. You manage somehow, though, and keep moving before the temptation to speak gets to be too much. You do your best to keep others from being hurt for protecting you, and you use what skills you have to help those who are kind to you. You'd rather be destroyed than captured, though, and fear of both fates haunts you even when you Slumber.

Relics: Backpack full of knickknacks, Bible, handful of fractional oboli

Thief of Yesterdays

Quote: *I can do that for you, and the cost is something you'll never, ever miss. Now I want you to think about the first time you made love...*

Prelude: Envy was the defining emotion of your life. Other kids had toys that you wanted. Other students got attention from teachers that should have been yours. Other graduates got the jobs that should have been falling into your lap. It all should have been yours, and none of it was.

So you set it to change that. You took what you wanted, regardless of whom it belonged to. If someone had a toy you wanted, you found a way to get it. If someone else took the job you were gunning for, you maneuvered him out of it. It worked well enough, at least for a while. You had a good job (and your eye on a better one). You had plenty of money (though you wanted more). You had all the material knickknacks and comforts that made life worth living (but there was always something out there that caught your eye). And then you overextended yourself.

You were good, no doubt about that, but you weren't the best. The guy you ran up against was, and he squashed your power play like you'd squash a bug. By the time he finished with you, you were broke, unemployed and unemployable. Then, just to drive the last dagger home, he took the lease on your old apartment and invited you to the housewarming, just so you could see that what was yours was now his.

To put it mildly, that sucked. What sucked more was that you couldn't do a damned thing about it.

So with nowhere to go and nobody to turn to, you just quit. You sucked down a bottle of Dutch courage and went out to play in traffic, and when you were done they were hosing you out of the treads on someone's tires.

Coming across the Shroud, you realized that you hadn't escaped your defeat — merely distanced it a little. That persistent voice in your head kept on telling you that you could still even the score, but that the best way would be to lay low here, build up a power base, and have a nasty little surprise waiting for your rival when he finally kicked off. The notion made sense, a lot of sense. So you buried your ambition long enough to get picked up by the Mnemoi (suckers!), and now you're honing your skills.

Because everybody dies someday, and when the man who beat you at your own game does, you want to be ready.

Concept: You're a low-level Mnemos who thinks he's a lot bigger deal than he is. You see the places in the Guild hierarchy you want to ascend, but in the meantime you're getting ready for your revenge. You still have an eye for others' belongings, though, and now you're after the most precious ones of all — memories. To take away even someone else's remembrance of a happy time and make it your own gives you a thrill like nothing else, and you're not shy about indulging.

Roleplaying Hints: Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, and to call you a weasel is to insult small carnivores everywhere. You know what you want, and you know how to get it out of people, and that's all there is to it. You have no mercy and no pity, just a sense of your desires. You listen to your Shadow a great deal. He makes a lot of sense, and he speaks your language. You two make a good team, and you're not going to do anything to screw up the partnership.

Relics: Cross pen, datebook, Rolex



Faulty Monitor

Quote: *Of course I belong here. Here's my authorization, both from the sector head and from the Anacreon of Iron. The question is, do you belong here?*

Prelude: Contrary to the image presented in James Bond movies and John LeCarre thrillers, most spywork is dull, not deadly. It's full of crop reports and demographics studies, with very few helicopter chases, assignations with beautiful women or attempts to prevent nuclear devastation at the hands of lunatic rogue generals with launch codes. Your life was a testament to that fact though you admit, if the world were depending on you to save it from nuclear annihilation, it might be wise to invest in canned goods, shotguns and a bomb shelter.

For 40 long years you served the government, analyzing data as it poured over your desk in an endless stream. Statistics were your calling, and you could tease the most subtle facts from columns of sheer numbers. You occasionally felt closed in by the routine, but you never envied the field agents. They could be shot, tortured or maimed, while you were safe in the basement of a nondescript office building. The whole country would have to come tumbling down before anyone found you and your neat white cube filled with neat stacks of neat numbers in neat little rows.

At least, that was the theory. You never knew what hit you. (Well, you knew on one level: It was a black Lada.) You watched your funeral from across the Shroud, counted the agency men in the crowd, and mentally tallied up how much things were going to slip without you there to keep the data moving.

The Mnemoi Reaped you. Apparently they'd had their eye on you for quite a while. You were inducted and shown the operation, and immediately tsk-tsked at the inefficiency of it all. There were more organized ways to keep track of which memories were where, more organized ways to keep the Guild structured. So the Guild elders put you to work, and, to make sure that what happened to you last time didn't happen again, they hid you — right in plain sight.

The Monitors were ecstatic to get a recruit with your qualifications and skills. And just because no one could remember recruiting you doesn't mean they should worry about where you came from....

Concept: You're a deep-cover mole, being hidden where everyone sees what they think you are. The Monitors are a paranoid lot, but you're used to paranoia. You do what you are supposed to do for your "new" Guild, while helping to maintain the operations of your old one. You work hard at maintaining your cover, but look forward to the day you'll be extracted. All this sneaking around is hard on your nerves, after all.

Roleplaying Hints: You are ultra-cautious and conservative. Make sure you know where everything is at all times, and don't let anyone surprise you. Keep an eye out for the equivalent of that black Lada, but don't let fear rule your existence. Oh, and make sure everything's organized.

Relics: Spreadsheet pad, pen, glasses, impeccably forged credentials



Appendix: Faces from the Ages

Minos

Known to legend as one of the kings of the dead, or later one of the judges of Dante's Hell, Minos is at the same time something less and something much, much greater. One of Charon's oldest confederates — the rumors say that Charon was his warleader in life — outside of the Ferryman, Minos supported his friend and compatriot through many of the early trials of the establishment of Stygia. Their paths diverged, however, as Charon grew concerned with matters of secular power, while Minos delved into matters of the soul.

Whether Minos discovered Mnemosynis, received it from the Lady of Fate as a gift or otherwise came by a working knowledge of the Arcanos is, in the end, immaterial. What is known is that he emerged from a self-imposed exile during the days after the First Great Maelstrom, and presented himself and his new powers as a sign of fealty to the Emperor. Charon granted him license to teach Mnemosynis to those he deemed worthy, and those who passed Minos' scrutiny often rose to positions of prominence in Stygia.

Minos was also instrumental in the creation of the veil of deception under which his charges were "banished" from Stygia. He offers swift and brutal punishment to those who betray the trust Charon placed upon him, and reserves especial contempt for those who try to barter Charon's secret in exchange for their unworthy existences.

Minos' Haunt rests on a desolate island on the River of Death, far removed from even the remotest vestiges of Stygian civilization. He abides there in a rough hut, and spends most of his time either in meditation upon his (and Charon's) memories, or overseeing the activities of the Guild. Very much against his will, Minos has been forced to begin recruiting heavily for the Guild of late, and he fears that some unworthy souls have passed beneath his scrutiny, undetected.

Minos appears as a king of ancient Crete, which indeed he was. His beard is curled and oiled, his raiment rich and his signs of office those which would befit a king. He rarely takes time to array himself in proper splendor, however, and for the last 300 years those signs of office have rested in a pile on the floor of his hut. Still, Minos remembers how to make an appearance when splendor is called for, and those who have seen him in his wrath still tremble at the memory.

Of all the wraiths in Stygia, Minos reserves his greatest hatred for the Smiling Lord. It is Minos himself who carries Charon's memories of the Deathlord's treachery during the Fourth Great Maelstrom, and he alone knows the depths of the Smiling Lord's perfidy. It is almost inconceivable to Minos that anyone would willingly betray Charon, and the fact that the traitor has been allowed to remain in a position of power and honor is something Minos broods on endlessly.

Phaedra

Whereas Minos is the head of the Mnemioi, Phaedra is perhaps the Guild's hand and heart. Utterly nondescript in appearance, she moves throughout Stygia protected by her almost preternatural ordinariness. It is she who maintains the Guild's irregular

contacts with its few, fragile allies, she who scans the ranks of the newly dead (and about to die) looking for those who might be suitable for the task ahead. And it is Phaedra who hears the tales of Mnemioi who have been caught or destroyed, and who sheds bitter tears over the loss.

Contrary to popular belief, Phaedra and Minos are not lovers. Indeed, there is something of a formal dislike that has crystallized between the two over the years as Minos has clung to duty while Phaedra has wept at the loss of so many good wraiths. However, her devotion to the Guild's duty is no weaker than his; it merely wears less martial garb.

Phaedra is also among the few surviving pre-Stygian wraiths, a Minoan princess who once dallied with the noble Theseus. She served briefly with those who became Pardoners, then assisted Charon in preparing for his descent in the Labyrinth and in time found her way to Minos. For centuries, she has done those tasks for which Minos was not suited, and has to a large degree remade the Guild in her image as a result.

Tens of thousands of wraiths have seen Phaedra and never known it, as she is a master of deflecting attention from herself. Despite her reputation as a legendary beauty, Phaedra goes about as a slight, middle-aged woman, her silvered hair tied back in a bun and her clothes showing nothing of rank or age. She wears a belt of simple weave that was given to her by Almanzar before that wraith's destruction, and that belt is by far her most cherished possession.


Phaedra is also responsible for the initiations of new Mnemioi, as apart from Minos she holds the greatest share of Charon's memories, and her personality is less apt to terrify new recruits. She has a number of Haunts throughout Stygia and the Shadowlands where she performs the rituals of initiation and transfer, and it amuses her to effect the transfers of Charon's memories below the streets the Deathlords' troops walk. Phaedra's own retreat is within the restored palace of Minos on Crete, a place that even the place's former owner hesitates to enter without invitation.

Almanzar

Almanzar's name is a watchword among the Mnemioi for faith, integrity and loyalty. No wraith was more devoted to the ideals of truth and justice than Almanzar, yet today Stygian wraiths spit when they hear his name. For it was Almanzar's fate to be sacrificed on the altar of Charon's great need, his name blackened unfairly for all time because, as Minos put it, "Someone must fall."

Almanzar was one of the great Judges of Stygia, and his court was renowned as the fairest and swiftest on the Isle. Prisoners in chains begged to be tried before him, and guilty wraiths did their best to avoid his penetrating gaze. Indeed, before long even the attempt to escape Almanzar's attentions was taken as a sign of guilt. Among all the Mnemioi, none — not even Minos — had a greater reputation for integrity with the citizenry of the Empire.

It was that reputation that, in the end, cost Almanzar. When Charon and Minos agreed that the Mnemioi would be banished, it was determined that a reason needed to be trumped up for that banishment, so that none would question the decision. The method they chose was corruption: The judges and inquisitors would be shown to be tainted, so that they could no longer be trusted or even tolerated. But as long as Almanzar stood as a symbol of the incorruptible system of justice, the attempt was doomed to fail or, even worse, half-succeed.



Minos brought his dilemma to Almanzar, who suggested that which Minos had feared to ask: That Almanzar himself be falsely accused and punished, that his reputation be forever sullied, and that he be sacrificed for the good of Stygia and the Guild. Minos wept as he accepted the offer, and Phaedra wept when she visited him later, for the last time.

And so it was that Almanzar, Judge of the Dead, went to his destruction — accused by his friends for the best of reasons, jeered by those who only hours before had dwelt in fear of him. Yet not a word did Almanzar say in his defense, even when accused of the most heinous abuses of his powers. Silent he stood in the dock, and silent he went to the forges, and if he stood a moment in wordless communion with Phaedra before accepting his fate, surely even Charon could grant him that.

Today, every new Mnemos is taught the lesson of Almanzar by Phaedra herself, so that they know full well the weight of the trust being placed upon them. And while Stygian wraiths mock the Judge's memory, the Mnemoi revere him, and look forward to the day when once again, Almanzar's memory is an honored one.

Sheldon

No one's sure if Sheldon is Sheldon's first name, last name or pen name. It's just the name everyone knows, especially Necropolis guards and Unlidded Eye regulars.

That's because Sheldon is the most accomplished, slipperiest, sneakiest memory pusher in all of the Empire, and unlike most of the Mnemoi, he loves to flaunt what he's doing. Typically Sheldon sets up shop in a Necropolis, spends a few days or weeks feeling out the local scene, and then lets it be known that he's in town. Anyone who's interested can let him know by any number of methods — posting something on the Citadel gate, just to get the Anacreons in a twist, is a particular favorite — and then, when the time is right, Sheldon finds his clientele.

For what it's worth, Sheldon at least provides value for his customers. In exchange for oboli, knowledge of various Arcanoi arts, relics, Artifacts and details of what's going on in the Hierar-

chy, Sheldon give the best memorywipes, created histories, remembrances of happy times and other applications of the Mnemoi's art in the Underworld. His clients are never dissatisfied (well, those who are never remember it), and indeed, the Emerald Legion in particular seems inclined toward a policy of benign neglect toward him.

Of course, darker rumors follow Sheldon as well. Supposedly he also wipes out memories of Fetters and performs other, more dastardly deeds for the right price. A client foolish enough to confront Sheldon with these accusations finds himself on the street with no idea what he's doing in such a ratty part of town, and if he's lucky he scurries home to deal with his confusion there.

Sheldon delights in pulling the Hierarchy's tail for whatever reason. One of his personal favorites involves taking "bait" assignments, then implanting memories of working with the decoys in settings as diverse as the Onyx Tower, the local Anacreons' offices or Wrigley Field in Chicago. Sheldon also acts as his own press agent, spreading stories of these exploits from city to city so as to make the attempts to catch him look even more buffoonish than they actually are.

The memory pusher looks like nothing so much as a stereotypical mid-1940s newsman, complete with battered hat, rumpled coat and scuffed shoes. Rare witnesses suggest that Sheldon always decorates his Haunts luxuriously, and that his tatty public appearance is a matter of image, but since public is the only place people are likely to see Sheldon, what he wears in private is a moot point.

Why Minos allows Sheldon to get away with this sort of behavior is a mystery, and Minos himself gets bad-tempered when the matter is brought up. Insiders speculate that Sheldon is doing something else for the Guild on his travels, but the discussion is generally fruitless. Sheldon's true motives are inscrutable, and his public actions give no clue as to what they might be.

One of these days, Sheldon is likely to slip, and when he does, it's going to get ugly. But in the meantime, he's having a great deal of fun, and there are a lot of wraiths having fun along with him.



Perhaps the most disappointing thing about combat in the Underworld is the fact that the bodies clean themselves up afterward. You look around the field after a hard-won battle, and you expect to see some kind of evidence of your victory – bodies strewn about, that sort of thing – but instead you've got nada. Well, that's not quite true; occasionally you get the disgusting slurping sound that Nihils make, but really, as far as deep-seated psychological satisfaction goes, that sort of thing is sadly lacking.

At the moment, however, there are other compensations.

Chief among them is the lovely woman currently sitting on the front steps of what looks to be an abandoned Pardoner's shop. She's got long hair the color of cornsilk, all straggled out in a hundred different directions. She's wearing jeans and a blue work shirt and raggedy-ass sneakers that look like they were ghosts 10 years before she was. She still has that pocketwatch I remember her looking at all the time, all those years ago in Boston, and now she's got a wickedly notched sword, too. Occasionally I meet her eyes; they're colorless, like really deep water on a cloudy day.

I'd say that I think I'm in love, only it would be redundant to do so.

Le sigh, as a living friend of mine would say.

Le nausea, as I would say. Jesus H. Christ on a stick, you're a sap. So what are you going to do now? Walk up to her and say, "Hey, baby, wanna see my big, shiny scythe?" "I've got some etchings on my raft?" "Want to go back to my raft and make like American beer – fucking close to water?" Oooh, I can't wait to see how you're going to operate with her. Damn, I want some popcorn when I get to watch this.

"Shut up," I say, not terribly wittily, and she turns to look at me with an eyebrow raised. "Uh, not you. Shadow problems. You know."

She nods. "I'm familiar, though I have to confess that I've never heard of a Ferryman having them before."

Hehehehehe. She's on to you, kiddo!

"Well, actually, the truth is that I'm..."

And then I hear it. Oh, God, no, not now. Not here.

Very faintly, off in the distance, I can hear the steady tromp-tromp-tromp of marching feet in perfect unison, with counterpoint from jingling chains.

The Mourners are loose in Stygia, and they're headed my way.

She looks around as I trail off but doesn't see anything. That makes sense, because there's nothing to see, yet. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"Listen, we have to get out of here right now."

"Are you sure? This place seems pretty quiet at the moment."

"Exactly," I say, and grab her hand. She yanks it right back, and makes me feel like an asshole to boot.

"Excuse me?"

My Shadow cackles. *Smooth move, Ex-Lax.* "Oh, sorry again. Umm, look, we have to leave. Now. We're in a lot of danger." *Oh, yeah, you're making serious points now. So, when are you going to start quoting movie lines?*

"What are you talking about? There's nothing here."

"Not yet."

And then the Mourners turn the corner, and she jackrabbits out of there like a shot. It takes all of about half a second for me to follow her.

One of the weirdest things about Mourners is that no matter how slowly they seem to be shambling along, they make absolutely amazing time. No matter how fast we go (and believe me, I am hard-pressed to keep up with this woman. Whatever she's been doing for the past five years, she's learned how to make some serious speed), the Mourners follow and somehow, amazingly, gain ground. Every side alley we try to cut down, they're waiting in. Every shortcut we try to take, they anticipate. And still they gain on us.

I had a close call with the Mourners the last time I was in Stygia, and I never quite believed that it was my interrogator they were after that time instead of me. It looks like someone back in the Mourners' accounting department agrees with me, and has sent the boys back to rectify their error.

"We're being herded someplace!" my companion shouts as we duck through the arch leading to the Street of Amphorae. It makes sense. The way the Mourners picked up ground initially, they could have had us in under a minute. Now they seem content just to move us along.

"You're right," I say, and think for a second. "Keep moving, I'm going to try something."

"What?" she calls back, but as I slam on the brakes and turn around, she sprints out of earshot in a matter of seconds. The column of Mourners flows toward me like a gray and brown tide, surging up the street and filling it with row upon row of lost souls. They're all looking at me, I swear, and they don't slow down a bit.

Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all.

I really hope she got away. I really hope it's me that they're after, and not her. I really hope this isn't going to hurt too much.

Then the Mourners reach me, and the wave of them splits and flows around me like I'm a rock in the middle of a stream. Not a one so much as touches me, but I am surrounded by them.

And suddenly, I see.

I see the first Ferryman trying to bring their Fetters across the Shroud for safekeeping, and the horror that resulted. I see the Masquers hiring the Solicitors to inflame the ambition of the three eldest Artificers, and the failed revolt that follows. I see Charon in audience with the Oracles, learning his destiny. I see the banishment of the Mnemioi, and the terrible secret with which they have been entrusted. I see Charon's descent with Gorool and the hope of ultimate triumph he takes with him.

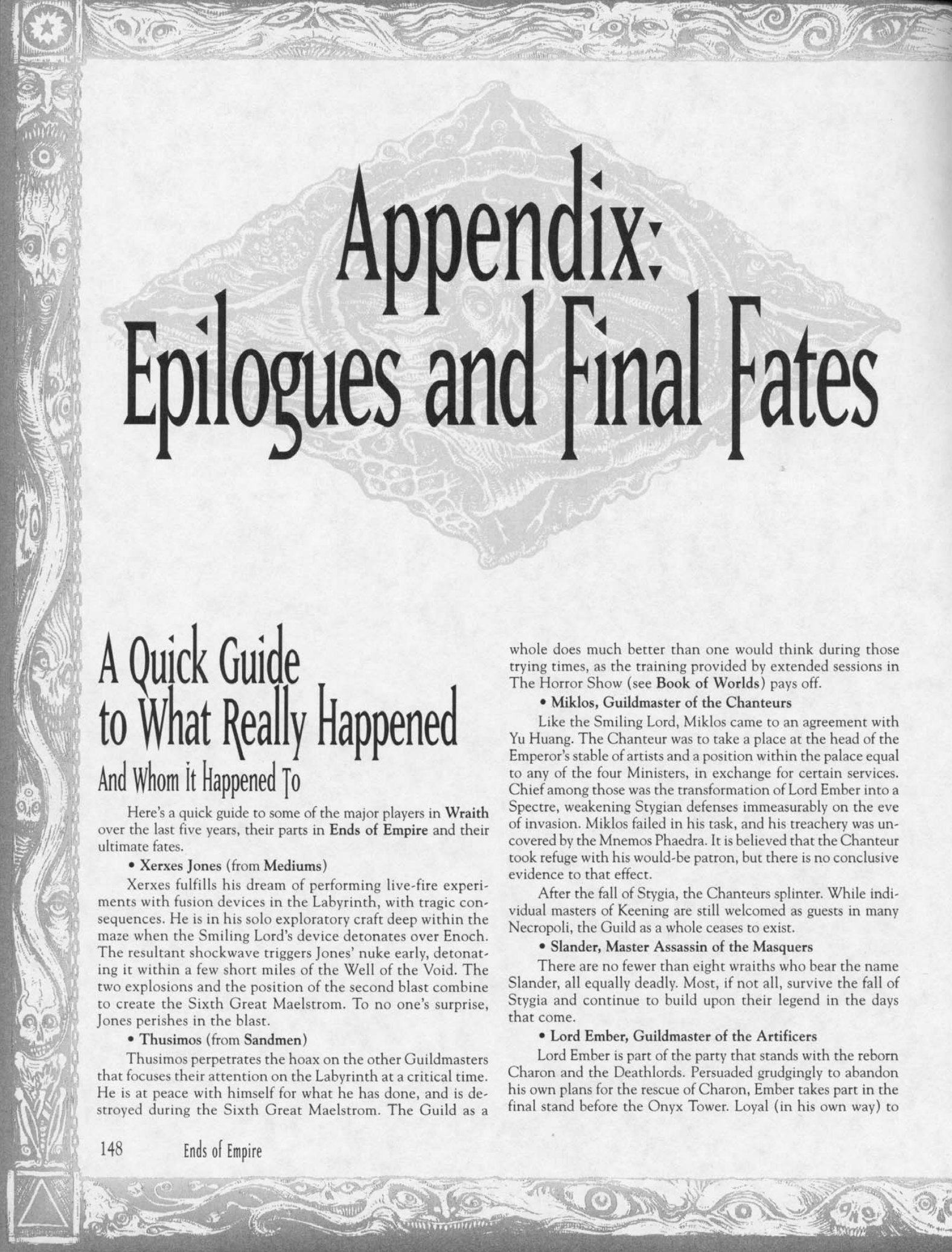
I see it all. And when I have finished seeing, I find myself sitting on the stones of the streets of Stygia, weeping like a child.

There, there, I hear Severus' voice say. *Come. Follow the Mourners. There are great things occurring now, things that you must witness.*

I stand and follow the current of Mourners through the streets. I know where they are going now. They are traveling to the Onyx Tower, to bear witness to Charon's return. And so I follow them to the hill overlooking the courtyard before the Tower. They stand in serried ranks at the top of the bluff, looking down, and I stand with them. Severus holds the place next to mine, which surprises me not at all. The woman I'd managed to speak to briefly is here as well, which does surprise me. I look at Severus, and somehow know that he commanded the Mourners to keep her safe.

Severus turns to look at me, and raises a single finger to his cowl in a gesture meant to hush me. There is history happening in front of us; we should simply observe. Charon has returned. The surviving Guildmasters and other wraiths of importance stand around him, and the remaining Mnemoi as well. Legionnaires and ordinary citizens, as well as a scattering of Ferryman, surround them. The stage is set for earthshattering events, for greatness.

And then the Mnemoi gather around Charon, and there is light of some sort that reaches down from the skies, and I realize along with the rest of the empire that maybe Charon isn't back to save the day after all.



Appendix: Epilogues and Final Fates

A Quick Guide to What Really Happened And Whom It Happened To

Here's a quick guide to some of the major players in **Wraith** over the last five years, their parts in **Ends of Empire** and their ultimate fates.

- **Xerxes Jones** (from **Mediums**)

Xerxes fulfills his dream of performing live-fire experiments with fusion devices in the Labyrinth, with tragic consequences. He is in his solo exploratory craft deep within the maze when the Smiling Lord's device detonates over Enoch. The resultant shockwave triggers Jones' nuke early, detonating it within a few short miles of the Well of the Void. The two explosions and the position of the second blast combine to create the Sixth Great Maelstrom. To no one's surprise, Jones perishes in the blast.

- **Thusimos** (from **Sandmen**)

Thusimos perpetrates the hoax on the other Guildmasters that focuses their attention on the Labyrinth at a critical time. He is at peace with himself for what he has done, and is destroyed during the Sixth Great Maelstrom. The Guild as a

whole does much better than one would think during those trying times, as the training provided by extended sessions in **The Horror Show** (see **Book of Worlds**) pays off.

- **Miklos, Guildmaster of the Chanteurs**

Like the Smiling Lord, Miklos came to an agreement with Yu Huang. The Chanteur was to take a place at the head of the Emperor's stable of artists and a position within the palace equal to any of the four Ministers, in exchange for certain services. Chief among those was the transformation of Lord Ember into a Spectre, weakening Stygian defenses immeasurably on the eve of invasion. Miklos failed in his task, and his treachery was uncovered by the Mnemos Phaedra. It is believed that the Chanteur took refuge with his would-be patron, but there is no conclusive evidence to that effect.

After the fall of Stygia, the Chanteurs splinter. While individual masters of Keening are still welcomed as guests in many Necropoli, the Guild as a whole ceases to exist.

- **Slander, Master Assassin of the Masquers**

There are no fewer than eight wraiths who bear the name Slander, all equally deadly. Most, if not all, survive the fall of Stygia and continue to build upon their legend in the days that come.

- **Lord Ember, Guildmaster of the Artificers**

Lord Ember is part of the party that stands with the reborn Charon and the Deathlords. Persuaded grudgingly to abandon his own plans for the rescue of Charon, Ember takes part in the final stand before the Onyx Tower. Loyal (in his own way) to

the end, he falls before one of the Hekatonkhire, but not before destroying it in turn. He descends into a Harrowing, and none see him return.

- **Brother Tenacious, Guildmaster pro tem of the Pardoners**

In the aftermath of Sister Acceptance's disappearance and the demolition of Stygian society, Brother Tenacious takes the Guild back to its roots. The Pardoners are everywhere in the ruined Necropoli, tending to the wounded, helping fight off resurgent Spectres and otherwise restoring the Guild's good (and well-deserved, now) reputation.

- **Erik**

Erik is Severus' candidate for inclusion in the Ferryman for years before he himself knows it. Picked by the Navigatus to set the fatal events of **Ends of Empire** in motion, he brings news of Enoch's existence to Stygia, and thus helps precipitate the Sixth Great Maelstrom. At the end of the battle, he rejects Severus' offer of membership in the Boatmen's Society, and instead chooses to seek his fortune in the devastated Shadowlands.

- **"Sock Girl"**

One of the most powerful Chanteurs in the Underworld, yet completely unknown to the Guild, the nameless girl whose Passion involves collecting relics of lost things survives the Maelstrom handily. Indeed, it's not even certain if she noticed anything unusual was going on. Even in the afterlife, innocence possesses a certain resiliency.

- **Persephone (from Risen)**

The oldest of the Risen, Persephone tries to flee into the Skinlands when she receives warnings of the incipient Maelstrom. Her Shadow delays her crossing just long enough, however, and she ends up crossing the Shroud at the precise moment the Maelstrom hits. Some form of resonance ensues, and wraiths by the thousands are blown across the Shroud into the Skinlands. Some possess bodies that are not their own, some return to their own rotting cadavers, and some are simply lost. Chaos, and other, less pleasant things, ensue.

- **Maxwell Carpenter (from Shadowplayers Guide)**

One of the cleverer Doppelgangers extant, Carpenter is caught in the backlash from Persephone's transition and blown through the Shroud himself. He finds himself in Chicago, in a new body, but with a very old mission of vengeance in mind.

- **Hungry Maw (from Doomslayers)**

Hungry Maw is incinerated in the blast from Jones' device.

- **Lord Nhudri**

Nhudri is last seen taking charge of the Corpus of the disgraced Smiling Lord. He is not seen during the battle for Stygia, and later explorers find his smithy destroyed as if by blows from a gigantic hammer. It is believed that he returns to the Labyrinth to meditate on his works and ponder some form of reparations to the Underworld.

- **Datian Severus**

Severus protects and trains his protégé, Erik, for several years in preparation for the day of reckoning. He regrets bitterly the impossible situation he is forced to push his student into, but understands the necessity. It is his intention that Erik be rewarded for his service by early induction into the Ferryman, but Fate has other plans. After Erik's refusal to take up the oar and sickle, Severus returns to Dis briefly before journeying to the Far Shores.

- **Midian, Haunter Guildmaster**

When the Shroud suffers its near-fatal moment of weakness, it is as if the jubilee has come for the Haunters. Hundreds escape across the Shroud. Midian leads them, leaving the ever-cautious Dr. Shudder to deal with events in the Deadlands — and to try to re-create the event.

- **Rasputin, Puppeteer Extraordinaire**

Rasputin exits with alacrity across the Shroud when the opportunity presents itself. Many of his compatriots in the Guild follow suit.

- **Fix, Spook Legbreaker**

Fix is volunteered by his superiors for the abortive march into the Labyrinth after Charon, but he smells a rat and ducks out. He is last seen fighting on the walls of the Buffalo Necropolis, cursing a blue streak and wreaking havoc on the Spectres foolish enough to try him.

- **Artemus Vanderwal, Spook Commissioner**

Vanderwal survives the final storm, as he has survived everything else Fate has thrown his way. Most of his fellow Commissioners do not, and Vanderwal takes it on himself to rebuild the Spooks from the ground up — in his own image.

- **Anna Zhilinsky (from Doomslayers: Into the Labyrinth)**

Zhilinsky is one of the wraiths responsible for the Spectre storage program that proves so disastrous to Stygia. Fittingly, she perishes when the imprisoned doomshades escape and rampage through the streets of Stygia. The Doomslaying orders survive the destruction of Stygia in tatters, but valiantly close ranks and attempt to fulfill their mission even after the empire that brought them forth has vanished.

- **Marcus Stavaston (from Book of Legions)**

While the Silent Legion (and indeed, all of the Legions) technically ceases to exist after the fall of Stygia, Stavaston becomes the equivalent of the Silent Lord in the days following the Maelstrom. He performs brilliantly in the rearguard action at the evacuation of Stygia, and by acclaim helps lead the survivors afterward.

- **The Skeletal Lord**

"Mister Bonyhands" is Charon's most trusted ally among the Deathlords, and spends the decades after Charon's fall trying to hold the empire (as he sees it) true to Charon's vision. He suspects the Smiling Lord of treason, but has no proof, and falls in the final defense of Stygia. Through sheer force of will, he escapes his Destruction Harrowing and now wanders the Labyrinth, seeking either escape or revenge.

- **The Beggar Lord**

He survives, somehow. He always does. After the transfer of power (at the end of "The Last Danse Macabre"), he fakes his own destruction and retreats to the Copenhagen Necropolis, there to nurse his wounds in secret and see to the future.

- **The Ladies of Fate**

They, and their patroness, are never seen again after the fall of Stygia. The Legion of Fate suffers disproportionately high casualties during the Maelstrom, and is effectively shattered.

- **The Laughing Lady**

She is the first Deathlord to fall in the defense of Stygia, and frankly the others are just as happy to see her go. With no clear successor behind her, she leaves behind chaos. The members of her Legion dissolve and attach themselves to other groups all across

the Underworld. In time, former membership in the Penitent Legion becomes a mark of shame.

- **The Ashen Lady**

The Ashen Lady's followers do their best to prepare the Necropoli for the Maelstrom they know is coming. While their leader is destroyed in the defense of Stygia, the wraiths of the Iron Legion are good, tough and organized. They form the core around which many Necropoli rebuild.

- **The Smiling Lord**

Despite his defeat during the Fourth Great Maelstrom, the Smiling Lord still harbors poisonous ambition throughout the 20th century. In 1986 he makes an alliance with Yu Huang, each thinking he has outsmarted the other. Yu Huang wants to use the Smiling Lord to lower Stygia's defenses, while the Deathlord wants to use Stygia's might to weaken Yu Huang sufficiently that he might conquer both empires. It is at this time that he begins salvaging relic nuclear devices from Los Alamos, to use on his erstwhile ally should it become necessary. The use of the bomb on Enoch is intended as a demonstration and a warning to Yu Huang, one which goes unheeded. Needless to say, neither side gets what it wants. The Smiling Lord is unmasked and destroyed, while his Legion fragments and takes both sides in the Necropolis fighting. After the dust settles, many of the "loyalist" Grim Legionnaires take up with independent or even Heretic groups. A sizable number of their opposites take up Doomslaying in hopes of finding the Smiling Lord in the Labyrinth and rescuing him.

- **The Renegade Lord**

His myth endures, even if he does not. Most Renegade groups are pounded mercilessly by the Sixth Great Maelstrom. The ranks of those who called themselves Renegade are thinned considerably by the storm and the invasion, and in the aftermath of the destruction of Stygia, such distinctions blur anyway.

- **The Unlidded Eye**

Charon's inquisitors are notable by their absence in the events leading up to the fall of Stygia. They also maintain a discreet silence throughout the years afterward, which arouses much debate among those who had felt their tender ministrations previously. Rumors abound, though the most credible are that the entire order voluntarily accepted destruction after Charon Transcended, or that the Smiling Lord had them exterminated. Regardless of cause, they, and any secrets they held, are lost to the ages.

- **Spartacus**

The wily old campaigner decides to return to action just in time for all hell to break loose. He is among those wraiths sent through the Shroud, and finds himself immediately getting into hot water all over again in the Skinlands.

- **Coldheart**

The General of Oblivion is overwhelmed during the final assault on Stygia. With his destruction, the offensive falls to pieces, and eventually the Spectral forces fall back from the Isle. Coldheart never does realize his ambition to destroy Alexander's ghost; the King of Macedon fell into the Void centuries ago with not so much as a single dirge to mark his passing. All the evil Coldheart did was, in the end, for naught.

- **The Enclaves of Wire**

The wraiths of the *Shoah* are warned of the incipient storm by the Ferrymen, and prepare themselves for it as they have prepared themselves for every other trial they have faced in the af-

terlife: with ruthless efficiency. While there is fierce fighting in many of the Wire Necropoli, they endure.

- **Enoch**

The black city of vampires endures for days, rather than the expected hours, against the combined might of the Stygian navy. In the end, it becomes clear that the Smiling Lord has no intention of reducing the city through conventional tactics, and calls in the Stygian air force. A lone bomber carrying a relic nuclear device flies in behind a cover screen of fighters and delivers its payload perfectly. The city is leveled as a result, its defenders incinerated. The Stygian fleet outside fares only marginally better, with many ships foundering and others being blown into distant reaches of the Tempest by the force of the blast. The explosion triggers a Class Three Maelstrom that surges down into the Labyrinth. There, it catches Xerxes Jones, and things progress.

When the smoke clears, Enoch is a smoking ruin mostly covered by the waves of the Sea of Shadows. Its inhabitants, ghostly and vampiric alike, are either destroyed or scattered, and there were no visible survivors of the explosion. Of the entities supposedly sleeping in the crypt beneath the city, there is no sign. Perhaps the blast was not sufficient to awaken them, perhaps they were destroyed, or perhaps they were never there at all.

- **Swar**

As the Maelstrom breaks, the gates of Swar open for all those who wait outside. They hurry in, seeking shelter.

For the next century, Swar dines very well indeed.

- **The Sea Which Knows No Sun**

When the storm sweeps over Ru's Archipelago, many of the islands harboring families of ghosts are swept away by the force of the Maelstrom. Of those souls pushed into the sea, some become Maku, ironically strengthening the Polynesian Underworld's defenses against Yu Huang. The drum of creation never stops beating, however, and new islands are born, slowly replacing those which were lost.

- **The Mirrorlands**

The Sixth Great Maelstrom cuts out all contact between the Island Below the Sea and the Mirrorlands for quite some time. Cut off from Les Mystères, the Loa slowly come to regard themselves as abandoned, and move to establish for themselves a new social order. Eventually, the Petro faction comes out in top in the political struggle, and incidents of ghostly meddling with Les Chevaux rise tremendously. However, the intervention is not malicious, it's just more frequent. Proof of Les Invisibles' existence becomes harder and harder to support, while many of the Caribbean islands provide destinations for souls forced through the Shroud.

- **The Bush of Ghosts**

The Maelstrom makes Ocean almost impassable, and the African Deadlands become very much isolated from the rest of the Underworld. No one in any of the other Dark Kingdoms has any idea what goes in the Lost Kingdoms, and the Orishas like it that way.

New Orleans is one of the targets of the Jade assault. A strange three-cornered battle rages between troops from the Yellow Springs, the Bush of Ghosts and the Mirrorlands until the Maelstrom makes all concerns moot. Eventually, the queen of the city regains her dominion. To keep it, however, she must make several compromises to appease her Rada allies, who ar-

rived from the Mirrorlands in time to tip the scales of battle against the invaders.

- **The Flayed Lands**

When the storm comes, the denizens of the Flayed Lands simply take refuge and wait. They have seen this before, and are prepared for it.

- **The Islands of Flint**

Cut off from the Shadowlands by the Maelstrom, the Islands of Flint survive the storm surprisingly well. The lack of access to the Shadowlands means that territories that were previously off-limits to Stygian wraiths become flooded with ghostly refugees.

- **Karta**

The Dreamtime is as it always has been, regardless of events in the upper Underworld. Only a thought of the Great Storm touches it, a momentary disquiet. The Australian Shadowlands are not so lucky, and take a pounding as fierce as any suffered by Stygian territory. Much of the construction of the Shadowlands is scoured clean, leaving only shifting gray sands and ruins.

- **Yu Huang and the Yellow Springs**

The rumors are true: Qin Shihuang was replaced by a Malfean ages ago, albeit the eldest of the Onceborn variety. He has stolen a march on most of his rivals by establishing himself as a power in the near Underworld, but his subsumption of the original Jade Emperor has made him somehow more human than he might otherwise have been. Yu Huang's goal is eventually dominion over the entire Underworld, and he sees Stygia as the largest obstacle to that goal. (His earlier defeat in the Sea That Knows No Sun he has written off as a fluke.) Hence, the alliance with the Smiling Lord and the invasion. Unfortunately, the Maelstrom shatters everyone's plans, and the invasion founders. While the Empire maintains some footholds in Stygian territory, the storm belches forth new rivals for Yu Huang, and he must turn his attention to them. While he does so, new revolts break out in the Conquered Territories and on the border with the Indian Deadlands, necessitating that most of the troops return home.

- **The Malfeans**

Many of the Onceborn perish in fire and pain when the blast from Xerxes Jones' nuclear device fills the Labyrinth. Many of the Neverborn begin to stir uneasily in their slumber, their dreams of dark power and destruction interrupted. Slowly but surely, a few begin the long ascent toward wakefulness.

- **Stygia**

In the wake of the fall of the Isle of Sorrows, Stygia becomes once more a nation of cities. Individual Necropoli become self-governing, and contact with other cities is tentative and frail due to the storm. Making matters worse is the loss of central authority for the Anacreons to rely upon. Some cities become strongholds of individual Legions, while others become loose confederations. Many fall. Others devolve into anarchy. In some places, the Guilds re-emerge and take power; they are organized and powerful enough to do so now that there is no Stygian authority opposing them. A few become enclaves of Heretical activity, and traffic to the Far Shores increases markedly. Interestingly enough, some return traffic begins as well.



Most of Stygia's laws, especially the *Dictum Mortuum*, fall into disfavor. It is a new age in the Underworld. Many of the old institutions are, like the ones who created them, vanishing.

Storytelling After the Fall

So *Wraith* ends here, at least for the moment. Stygia has fallen. Much of the information in various *Wraith* supplements is, to put it mildly, out of date. It would seem that continuing *Wraith* chronicles past the point where *Ends of Empire*, well, ends, would be problematic.

Nonsense. Just because the books may stop flowing for a while doesn't mean that you have to stop playing, or that there's nothing more to say. The destruction of Stygia ends some old possibilities, but creates plenty of new ones. Here are a few ideas as to where you can take your chronicle now that the world's turned upside down all over again.

Rebuild This City

The characters are the Anacreons (or perhaps just the senior surviving officials) of an isolated Necropolis. Cut off from the rest of the Underworld and besieged by Spectres, they must rebuild their city while fending off challenges both external and internal. Renegade gangs and Heretic fanatics may attempt to mount *coups*, Guildwraiths could come forward to seize power, and there's still the little matter of the Great Maelstrom wailing outside. Can the characters make their Necropolis strong again, or will they watch it crumble?

Stranded!

The wraiths are caught outside when the Great Maelstrom hits. Can they find shelter before they become victims of the storm? Where will the storm winds blow them, and what perils might they face that other wraiths, safe behind Necropolis walls, will never see? Conversely, what treasures might the Maelstrom reveal or dredge up from the Tempest?

Up From the Ashes

The characters belong to one of the Guilds, now no longer outlawed. However, that doesn't mean that other wraiths like or trust them. Can the wraiths help to restore their Guild to its former place of glory, or will centuries of accumulated suspicion drive them back underground? And what if the Guild starts taking power in the characters' Necropolis — where do they stand then?

Digging Through Ruins

Stygia is abandoned in the wake of Charon's Transcendence. That doesn't mean that everything of value is gone from the Isle, however. There are treasures beyond reckoning there, and unimaginable dangers as well. What might a dedicated team of "salvage professionals" find? What if there are other teams there in competition with the characters, or serving masters who want the characters eliminated? And just because the wraiths have left the island doesn't mean that all of the Spectres have.

Last Desperate Message

The characters are trapped in a besieged Necropolis. Without help, it's only a matter of days before the city falls to the Maelstrom. It's up to the characters to try to get a message out and find some help. Can they escape the siege, defy the storm and bring back help before it's too late? Will they bring back enough aid, and what if the cure is worse than the disease?

Take the Battle To the Enemy

With all of the Spectres in creation riding the winds of the Sixth Great Maelstrom, it's the perfect time to go for a Helldive. After all, if all of the Spectres are out here, there shouldn't be any at home guarding the nest. Maybe the characters are trying to rescue someone they believe is trapped in the Labyrinth, or perhaps they just want to kick the Hive-Mind where it hurts. Either way, a Doomsdaying expedition in the middle of a Maelstrom is possibly the most audacious thing a band of wraiths can attempt.

Against Fate

Perhaps your chronicle begins before the events of *Ends of Empire*. Somehow the characters have gotten wind of what's going to happen, and have decided either to help or hinder the events. As Fate moves history relentlessly forward, can the characters do anything to save more of Stygia?

On the Walls

This chronicle is set during the first wave of the Great Maelstrom. The characters are part of a city's defenses against the storm (perhaps even Stygia). As the alarm bells toll, they find themselves in desperate battle with invaders from both the Labyrinth and the Jade Empire. Can they survive? Will they make allegiance with one side against the other? And how long can they protect their city?

Through the Shroud

A friend of the characters is one of those unfortunates who has been blown through the Shroud into the Skinlands, and they have no idea where to find him. Now, suddenly, they need to locate him. The trail is cold, and the road is long, and there are many obstacles to be overcome. Can they find him in time? Will they join him in the Skinlands? What will it take to bring him home, especially if he doesn't want to go?

Transcendence

Now, more than ever, the Underworld is a particularly inhospitable place to dwell. Transcendence, now that Charon's ascent has demonstrated its veracity, seems more and more appealing to the vast ruck and run of wraiths. But there are no teachers left, it seems, to show the way to Transcendence. Can the characters uncover the path out of the Underworld, or will they be frustrated as have so many before them?

To the Far Shores

Likewise, the near Underworld is a royal mess. However, no one knows how the Far Shores fared. They couldn't possibly be worse off than the Shadowlands or Stygia, could they? There's only one way to find out — set sail though the Maelstrom to uncover the truth, and maybe a better place. What might they find?

The Whole Wide World

Maelstroms, particularly not Great Maelstroms, are not an exclusively Stygian phenomenon. Perhaps the characters want to see how the other Dark Kingdoms fared. Maybe they're sent as part of a delegation to Yu Huang, charged with negotiating an end to hostilities, or they have ties to other Dark Kingdoms and want to see if they suffered less damage than did Stygia. Then again, maybe the characters just want to travel to exotic lands where they're less likely to end up as Spectre fodder.

Shadow-Eaten

Not a chronicle to be undertaken likely, this story assumes that the characters went over to the other side during the Sixth Great Maelstrom. Now they're back, riding the winds of the storm

and looking for things to wreck. There's still opposition out there, much to their surprise, but surely Oblivion's going to win this engagement. Right?

Mercenaries

The Necropoli need help, and the characters are just the wraiths to give them that help. The chronicle moves from city to city as the wraiths face new challenges at each stop, from simple combat to internecine strife to Doppelganger infiltration. The characters can be wandering Pardoners and Guildwraiths, mercenaries or just plain folks who want to help. In any case, there's no shortage of excitement waiting for them.

I'm Baaaaack!

Not all of the major players in Stygia were destroyed defending the Isle. Two members of the Artificers' Three, most of the wraiths named Slander, the Beggar Lord and countless others escaped. Perhaps one or more of them see an opportunity. Will the characters join or fight them, and in what capacity? Do they even know who's out there, or does the *grandee* wish to remain anonymous? And if so, what happens when his secret is revealed?

The New Deathlords

If the characters survived the adventure in this book, they're essentially the new Deathlords. They have access to as much of Charon's memory and treasure trove as they can carry, and the responsibility of rebuilding Stygia is in their hands. If there aren't enough trials and tribulations for a heck of a lot of chronicle sessions in the rebuilding of an Empire in the face of

a Great Maelstrom, Spectral assaults, resurgent powermongers, a violation of the Shroud and so on, there's something wrong. Whom can the characters trust to help them rebuild? Who must be weeded out? Can Stygia even be re-established? It's up to you and your players.

Afterword

So this is the end, at least for now. Originally this storyline was intended to play out over eight years (the words "foolishly optimistic" do not begin to describe my mindset at taking over **Wraith**), but you take what Fate gives you. I hope the tucks and seams aren't too noticeable, and that you enjoy your walk through Stygia's last hours as much as I enjoyed imagining them.

I'd like to thank everyone who ever worked on a **Wraith** book — all the writers, artists, editors, layout folks and especially the other developers — for being part of something that, in my humble opinion, has been pretty damn wonderful. Thank you, all of you. Your contributions have been appreciated more than you know.

Thanks as well are due to all of you out there who have played **Wraith**, read **Wraith** and just generally given enough of a damn to check it out. This is, as it has always been, for you.

Richard E. O'Leary
"The Red Guy"





So now it's over. It's all over. Charon is dead, again — Transcended, I think — and permanently this time. His empire has died with him. Stygia is a wreck. The Maelstrom continues unabated, though the local infestation of Spectres seems to have been quelled. I think we put down 10000 or so by the time it was all over, if you can believe that. Word is straggling back from the Necropoli of fighting there, but suddenly it doesn't seem very important. The Deathlords are gone, cut down in the line of duty. I wonder how many of my old Renegade acquaintances would have fought as hard or as well in a hopeless battle to buy time for others. Not as many as they themselves would think, I suspect.

You learn strange things about people when they don't have time to bullshit you, I guess.

The Lady of Fate is still here, big surprise. I got a chance to speak with her, very briefly. She's much more approachable than you'd think, and it didn't surprise me one bit to discover that hers was the last face I'd seen during my hallucinations on the Sunless Sea. She seemed glad to see me, and expressed satisfaction at my progress. It's terrifying to know what sort of powers were looking down on me as I made my way across the Underworld. She also mentioned that she was very tired, and she was hoping that her son would wind up his affairs soon so she could resolve matters with him. That sort of surprised me, seeing as I didn't think any of the Deathlords had any Fetters left. So, I asked how old her son was. (It wouldn't have been polite to ask *her* about her age, after all.) She said around nine or ten thousand years, but that no one was really counting anymore except the vampires.

I get the definite feeling that I'm out of my depth here.

There are still a lot of Ferryman milling about, as those who weren't cut down in the fighting don't seem to have gotten back on their rafts. There are refugees leaving the city in a surprisingly orderly fashion; Legionnaires, other wraiths and even a few Ferryman are organizing the evacuation. A group of strangers I don't recognize is standing on the landing of the Onyx Tower, talking amongst themselves rather agitatedly. The way everyone's deferring to them, they seem to be in charge. They look kind of young, deadwise, to be running the show, but what do I know? I'm just a failed wannabe Ferryman.

Just keep on believing that, kiddo.

Heh. It's nice to know I haven't lost everything in this wreck. At least my Shadow is still with me.

Always and forever, Erik.

I grin wanly, and look around.

Severus is standing on my left; the sinister side, I remember from my high school Latin. He's saying nothing, but rather waiting for me to speak.

"So." It seems a good way to start. "Now what?"

"That's up to you, Erik," Severus replies. I see now that he's leaning heavily on his scythe. He looks tired. I've never seen him look tired before. I mean, I've never seen him look anything before, if you know what I mean. He's always been Severus, impeturbable and barely human. Until today, I'd never even seen his face, just the glow of his eyes from beneath

his cowl. Now, though, he just looks like a tired old man with an eagle's beak of a nose and a Caesar haircut. He's gone gray, as if that's some sort of big surprise.

"What do you mean, it's up to me? I washed out, didn't I? I got clobbered by one lousy Doppelganger, and when I looked up you were gone. I figured I'd failed and that you were done with me, so I set off to do what I could on my own." He starts laughing, and it gets me angry to see. "What? What's so damned funny?"

"Oh, Erik, that's the funniest thing I've heard in decades. I abandoned you? You failed? Oh, dear...." And then he collapses into wheezing gusts of laughter that, before too long, prove contagious. I find myself sitting on my ass on the ground, cackling like a madman. My traveling companion turns to look at us quizzically, clearly not understanding why the two guys in the bathrobes have completely lost it. I'm not sure I know why myself, but this feels good.

Eventually she turns back to watching the parade, and Severus and I wind down. I pull my knees in and drop the scythe, then wait for an explanation.

Severus gets the hint. "Really, Erik, this is the one concern we always had about you. Unless you get an engraved invitation to do so, you won't even get out of bed in the morning. So we needed to see how you'd perform by yourself; you'd done well enough on the other tests, as it were. It seemed best, then, to force you to act on your own, to leave you to your own devices and see what came of it. I must say, we did not anticipate this," and he nods toward our



companion, "complication. I'm still not sure how her presence will affect things. But I can tell you one thing, Erik. The testing is over."

"It's over? So I'm done?"

"Not at all. You're just beginning. The Underworld needs us now, more than ever, Erik. Many of the best of us have been destroyed, or gone on to their well-earned rewards. But the Maelstrom shows no sign of abating, and there are a great many lost souls who need our lanterns to show them the way. Perhaps we'll even resume commerce with the Far Shores – they seem the safest place for many of these poor ghosts," and he waves his arm, loosely taking in the thousands of wraiths pouring over the bridges to get off the Isle. "No, there's too much work to be done to be thinking of endings."

I stand up and look at him, unbelieving. "You mean that I'm... now I'm one of...."

He nods, as if he's talking to a bright but not terribly sensible three-year-old. "Yes. The higher initiations await you. Once we are finished here, we will be leaving, and you will be coming with us. You have a destiny, Erik, one that's been foreordained. I am sorry for the pain it has caused you, but there are higher purposes that must be served. You are one of us now."

I let his words sink in and say nothing. I'm a Ferryman now. It's the last thing I would have ever expected.

So now you get what you always wanted. You get to be the lone hero, saving people left and right. You get to go off and be by yourself until the end of time or until you decide you've had enough. Wonderful. I hope you're happy.

He sounds petulant. A bit put out. It's not surprising, really – I don't think there's a place for him in my new existence. A Ferryman can't afford to be distracted by his Shadow. A Ferryman can't afford to be distracted by anything, really.

Anyone?

Anything.

"Sorry, miss, but they're telling us that this part of the Isle isn't stable any longer. The whole thing is liable to get sucked down the Veinous Stair any moment. You can't stay here any longer. Let me escort you down to where it's safe."

I look up, and there's a Legionnaire in clawed-up armor trying to take my... friend(?) by the elbow and lead her off. Bad move. I don't know what this woman has been doing for the past five years, but I do know she's got a bad track record with soldiers trying to push her somewhere.

"I'm not going anywhere," she says icily, and the poor Legionnaire (Skeletal Legion, from the armor) looks surprised and kind of embarrassed. This nebbish is precisely the sort of person Stygia was supposed to be about, the kind of guy who needed a place and a duty and a purpose to keep him going while he sorted out all his leftover business from life.

"But, miss, the Isle's not safe. See, even the new councilors are leaving." He points over to where the folks who'd taken over were standing, and they're walking off. The Ferrymen are going, too. Down in the harbor, I can see the first few poling their rafts out into the Sunless Sea. Stygia is being deserted, even by the dead.



For a second, she looks over at me. I meet her eyes, then turn to Severus. He's put the hood back up, and he's waiting. He's waiting for me.

Then the moment is over. The soldier makes a polite gesture and takes a step back, and she walks off down the hill toward the rest of the refugees. It's a simple, human thing — one person helping another. The soldier slips, then, and she instinctively reaches out a hand to steady him. Severus smiles, more or less, from deep within his hood, then turns to go.

I'm supposed to go with him. There are great things waiting for me. She's already halfway down the hill to the rest of the lost souls. The Underworld needs me. All of those people down there need me, right?

Right. Do what you have to do, Erik. It's been fun.

I take my first step after Severus, then realize I can't do it. I can't follow him.

Maybe it won't work out. Maybe there won't be an "it" of any sort. Maybe she'll just want to be friends, God forbid. Five years and I don't even know her name. Five years of chasing after an idea of her, and now all I have is the promise of eternity chasing after another idea. Here's a crazy idea: How about some human contact? What about remembering that this place is filled with people, not things or rocks or anything else. Just people. How about doing everything we can to hang onto the fact that we're all people over here, still? Charon and the Deathlords didn't, and look what happened to them. Look what happened to all of us because of that.

I skid down the slope, an avalanche of pebbles announcing my arrival. She's almost to the bottom by the time I catch up with her. Her escort looks up at me, and since I'm still in my Ferryman kit, he immediately defers and scoots. She just stands there, looking at me as I do a great psychosomatic impression of being out of breath.

Think about what you're choosing, says Severus' voice in my mind. *You don't even know her name. There is work that needs you, souls who will need your guidance. Everything rests on the most fragile of gambles.*

Can't help you here, Erik, says my Shadow. *Good luck.*

She turns and looks at me. Up at the top of the hill, I know all the Ferryman in the world are looking at me through Severus' eyes. My whole future, and maybe a whole lot more, hangs in the balance here.

"Well?" she says, hands on her hips. It's a challenge.

There's only one thing I can say. I take a deep breath and quickly, before I can change my mind, I say it.

"Hi. My name's Erik. What's yours?"

ENDS OF EMPIRE

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