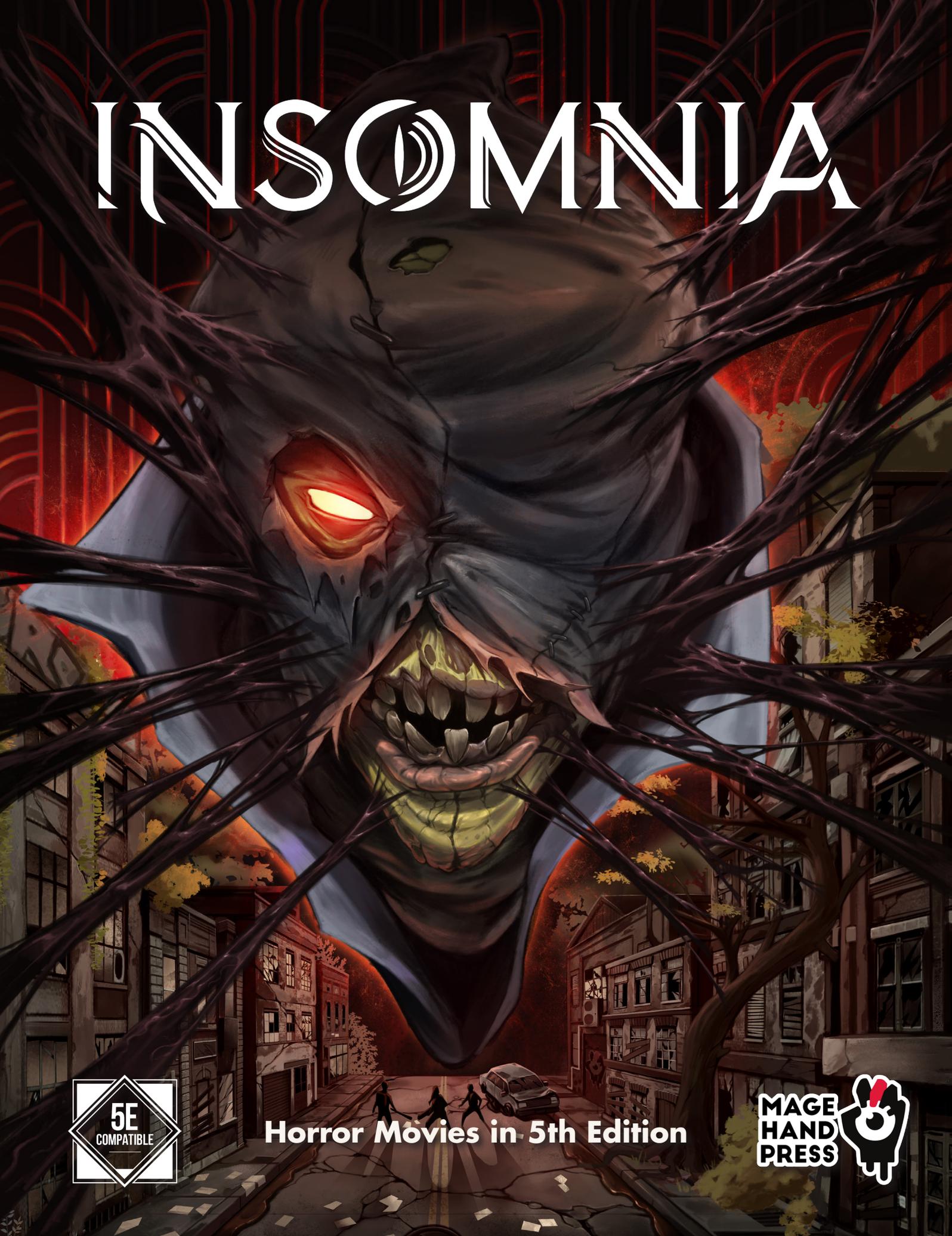


INSOMNIA



Horror Movies in 5th Edition



INSOMNIA

Blood-Chilling Horror
For 5th Edition



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INTRODUCTION

Insomnia Is...

Welcome to the ultimate horror expansion for 5th Edition! Before you delve into the pages beyond and begin plumbing the depths of fear, you should know that *Insomnia* is...

Terrifying.

Lurking under the floorboards and oozing out of the darkness—something unspeakable has crept into our world. And it's lurking right behind you.

Investigative.

Your conspiracy board fills with thumb tacks and colored string as you peel back the layers of detective mystery. Question every clue and inspect every shadow—any one of them could be the key.

Cinematic.

The camera pulls in close on the whites of your eyes as knife-like claws rake the air. *Insomnia* brings the visceral thrill of a horror movie to your tabletop.

Streamlined.

Insomnia's modular design allows you to pick and choose elements on the fly to suit an unfolding story, integrating seamlessly with 5th Edition rules.

Yours.

There is no canon in *Insomnia*, no story bible you must follow. Every element is designed to empower you, as a Game Master or player, to make your own story with minimal friction and maximum agency.

Using this Book.

Insomnia is your very own horror toolkit, bringing the spine-tingling thrill of a suspense novel, gory slasher film, or campy monster-of-the-week TV show to your tabletop through the medium of 5th Edition. With it in hand, you can transform a single session or an entire campaign in a domain of dread for your players.

Written for players and GMs alike, everything presented in this book is modular and optional. If it belongs in your 5th Edition game, it belongs in *Insomnia*. Use as much or as little of this book as you like with any other 5th Edition product to bring your horror experience to life.

Monsters and Settings.

To use *Insomnia*, simply pick a setting (including your own) and choose a monster. An adventure focuses on investigating, hunting, and ultimately surviving this single monster, whereas a campaign features an incursion of increasingly fearsome creatures.

This book presents an array of nightmare-inducing monsters, each of which contains an outline for an investigation surrounding it. These mysteries are open-ended enough to use them with any setting, and customizable enough to adapt to your players' actions. Furthermore, monster statistics will scale to whatever level the party attains.

This book also includes three short, flexible settings: **NOWHERE, USA**, a small town in the most remote corner of the American West; **BLACKPOST**, a futuristic outpost positioned at the very edge of the galaxy; and **GRISMOOR**, a medieval city in sharp decline, plagued by curses. Each includes all of the rules necessary to adapt your 5e game to that setting.

What Lies Within.

Chapter 1: *Insomnia* explores how horror sends chills down our spines and explains how to implement it into a roleplaying game. Then, it walks through how to run a horror game using *Insomnia*, and finally presents a few rules to enhance the horror experience at your table.



Chapter 2: *Nowhere, USA* takes you to a small town in an ambiguous part of rural America where strangeness seems to aggregate. Like all settings in this book, *Nowhere* is presented with an overview, a number of locations to explore, a handful of factions that might help or hinder the investigation, and a cast of drag-and-drop characters you can introduce. Finally, it contains a comprehensive rules expansion, allowing you to play 5th Edition in any modern setting.



Chapter 3: Blackpost launches you into the furthest fringes of the galaxy in the far future setting of *Dark Matter*, in which you are stationed on a lonely, isolated colony on the very edge of space. In addition to locations, factions, and NPCs, Blackpost contains a host of futuristic rules that expand 5th Edition into science-fiction settings of blasters and starships.



Chapter 4: Grismoor grounds itself in the medieval setting of Grismoor, a city on the brink of collapse. The most familiar to the usual fantasy settings of 5th Edition, Grismoor contains only locations, factions, and NPCs, and no additional rules. As such, you can embed Grismoor in any other fantasy setting or play it on its own.



Lastly, **Chapter 5: Monsters** contains a nightmare bestiary of terrible creatures to plague your players. Each monster entry contains an outline for an investigative adventure, designed loosely enough that you can use any monster with setting and adapt the monster's adventure to whatever antics your players employ.



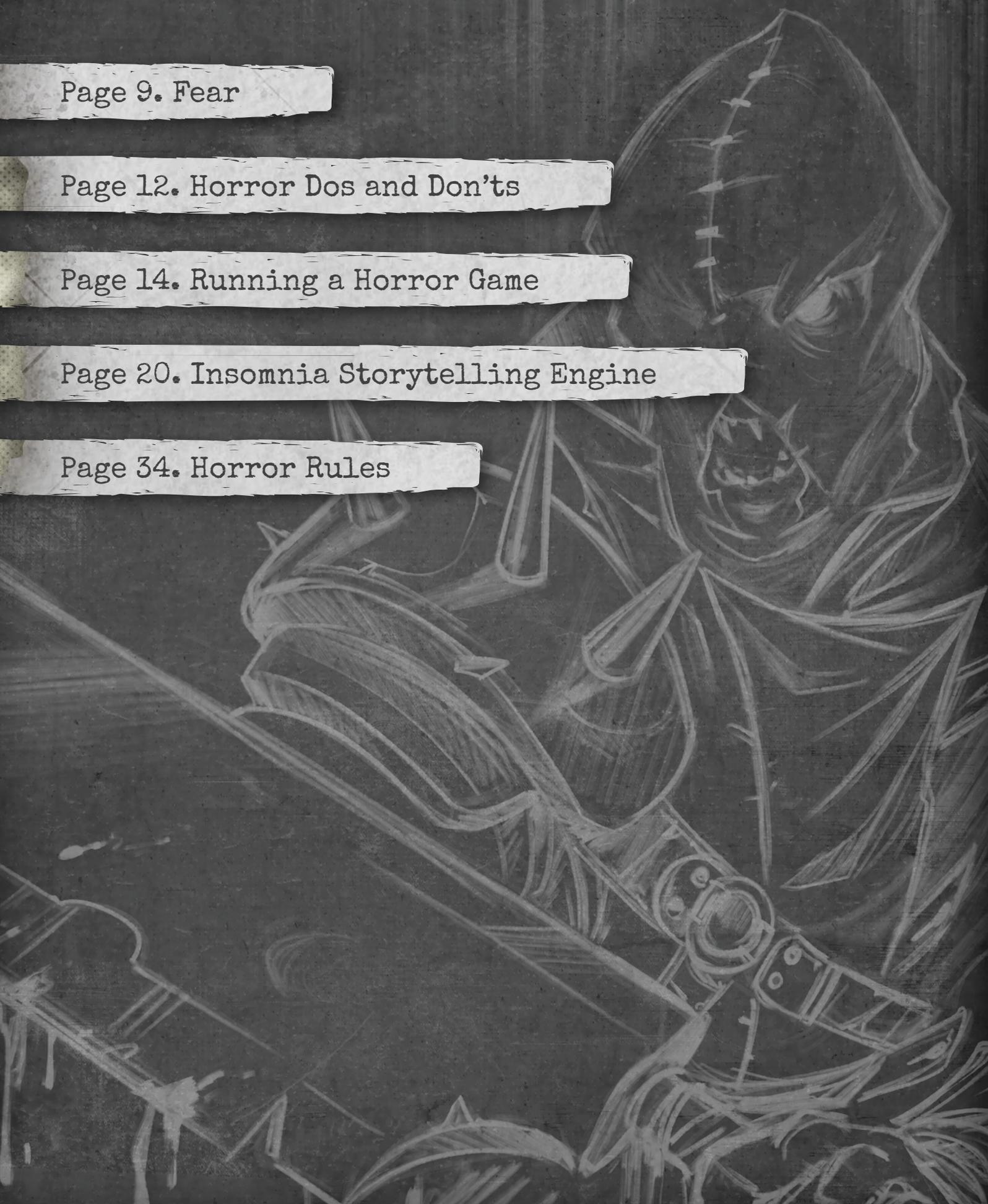
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CHAPTER 1: INSOMNIA

FEAR.

We all think we know fear; we've seen scary movies, we know what it's like to be scared, but we too often forget the difference between horror's trappings and horror itself. Horror is something that chills you to the bone and makes you hesitate before turning out the lights. Horror is the sense that something is lingering in the darkness, staring at you from the pitch blackness. Horror is the sort of animal impulse that pulls your knees slightly closer to your chest on the slimmest chance that something will strike at any moment. You can't just put vampires in something and make it horrific.

Too often, games and movies tend toward monster-stomping action, rife with spooky gravestones and gory zombies, but fall well short of horror. This isn't accidental—power fantasies are a time-honored staple of games and movies, and everyone needs affirmation in their media from time to time. However, while these works can certainly be intense on a moment-to-moment basis, they don't really qualify as horror.

By contrast, this book will pull at the cold strings of fear, figure out what makes it tick, and let you implement it in your 5th edition game. This journey will not be for the faint of heart, but perhaps, with good friends and fortunate dice rolls, it will be an enjoyable one.



Hierarchy of Fear.

Fear comes in a thousand different shapes, each a grim reflection of our phobias and insecurities, but to build a succinct hierarchy, we need only three.

Gore is glimpsing a body splatter against pavement. It's groping around in a pitch-black room and touching something warm and slimy. It's gallons of blood filling a bathtub.

Horror involves unnatural things which couldn't possibly exist, but in defiance of all good things, do so anyway. It's monsters that arise from a black lagoon, severed body parts skittering around of their own accord, and eyes on the walls blinking and staring at you.

Finally, **Terror** is the sickly creeping sense that something is wrong. It's when you know you're being watched by something behind you, and you can feel its shadow on your back, but when you turn around, nothing's there. It's when everyone you know has been replaced by exact duplicates, or when the flickering street light outside your window tells you that something terrible is about to creep out of the blackness. This hierarchy of scares—a list once laid out by Stephen King—is about as succinct as one can state the mechanics of fear.

Good works of the horror genre call for all three at different times, but the most potent of them—the ones that stick with you long after—make ample use of Terror. At some level, Gore and Horror are easy to rationalize away, since Gore consigns itself to our own world, and achieves fear by shocking us, and Horrors exist in someplace other than our world. An audience engrossed in the experience might shrink in their chairs, but a Gore- or Horror-based scare won't follow them home. Terrors, by contrast, infect the day-to-day lives of the audience with something uncomfortable, making familiar things foreign and convincing the audience to scare themselves. It leaves a lingering, persistent fear, which is essential to a good horror experience.

Tension and Release.

Much like a good joke, a good scare is all about the setup. The reveal of an unearthly horse-sized spider is only a punch line; it doesn't work without the moments beforehand: an eerie silence, punctuated by an unsettling clicking of joints, a sour smell choking the air, and a few long moments of hesitation before it finally comes into view. These periods of anticipation are an unspoken contract between the audience and the work: the audience knows something is deeply wrong, they know something terrible is about to happen; they just don't know when.

All horror is built on cycles of tension, which unrelentingly build up and suddenly release, like the burning fuse on a bomb or the unnerving tune of a jack-in-the-box. No matter how good the underlying scare, it always needs a mounting sense of dread and a period of unease before it arrives to break that tension. Horror movies, novels, and games use this to great effect, building up ever-rising mountains of tension, like a roller coaster, until the story's climax.

For this reason, it's actually counterproductive to pack a horror experience with scares at every turn; there needs to be time for the threat to build in the audience's mind, before it crystallizes in a fright. In other words, it takes time for a balloon to inflate before you pop it.

Horror Campaigns.

Horror and roleplaying games are a natural fit: they both serve to immerse their audiences, provide catharsis, reward an empathic audience with more visceral engagement, and are at their best when their unpredictability is reined in by an enthralling narrative. However, we often engage with these forms of entertainment for wildly different reasons. Roleplaying games usually serve power fantasies, placing players and GMs alike in the shoes of fantastic warriors, mages, and other dynamic individuals. Horror, by contrast, seeks to disempower the audience, robbing them of safety and control in order to force them to confront their fears.

Therefore, to merge these and create a horror roleplaying game, we must play a disempowering RPG. This is a subtle balancing act between difficulty, player choice, and expectations. Players should expect that their encounters with the monster could turn lethal at a moment's notice, that plot armor won't protect them, and that they'll have to make impossible decisions to proceed.

Roleplaying Horror.

Use the following techniques to emphasize the horror in your campaign:

Investment.

Players natively understand that their characters are figments of the game, avatars that they control. This distance between the world of the game and the real world is a key component of roleplaying games' catharsis, but it offers an underlying measure of safety. Therefore, the more you shrink the barrier between a player and their character, the more visceral the horror.

A good way to begin this process is by emphasizing player investment in their character. Players shouldn't just name their characters, but also conceptualize elements of their backstories. Let them name their character's pets, siblings, and hometowns. Each thread ties them closer to their character and the story.

Before the horror sets in, ensure that each player gets a moment in the spotlight to express how their character approaches problems or engages with others, so they can cement their personality. Give the players ample time to develop a dynamic. Only then can you threaten the lives of the characters—totally fictional entities—and provoke a reaction from the players.

Difficulty and Meaningful Failure.

A horror game without difficulty is a one without threat, and a sense of threat is critical to building tension. Combat should be objectively stacked against the characters in favor of the monster, and even social encounters should be unsafe at some level. Often, this approach violates what other games have taught the players to expect: that combats are meant to be won and that everyone will see the story to its proper conclusion.

Moreover, players need to feel that there's more than one type of failure, and that their failures have tangible consequences. If the only failure state in a game is total party wipeout, from which there is no recourse other than rolling up new characters and playing a new game, the players will learn that (paradoxically) failure is quite merciful. Either they die and move on to something else entirely, or they don't. If, however, failure leads to greivous, lasting punishments—insanity, dismemberment, loss of loved ones, or worse—players have something to fear from the game's continuation, and will tread more carefully.

Hard Choices.

Moreover, players should feel that they drive the story with their decisions—that they're not being "railroaded." This point is true in any good roleplaying game, but holds special importance when horror is the goal.

Roleplaying games rely on a sense of agency for the players, the sense that the consequences of their decisions keep the plot spinning. In a horror game, the goal of disempowering the players doesn't mean stripping them of their agency. Investment evaporates if the players feel like they're following someone else's script.

Instead, a good horror experience should turn the freedom of choices against the players. Pose impossible choices to the players, and force them to choose. Here are some examples of timeless and terrible questions you could pose:

- Should you betray your ideals or betray someone you love?
- Should you reveal a painful truth to a friend, or leave them blissfully unaware and at risk?
- Do you risk certain death for many people, or condemn an ally to death?

Stressful choices are perhaps the most powerful tool in your arsenal. Each one unleashes a microcosm of horrific possibilities in the players' imaginations.

Rules Obfuscation.

If players know how many hits they can take before falling unconscious, how many hit points the monster has, and what they need to roll on a die to hit, they

can chart a safe route through the campaign through optimization and hide the stress of combat behind cold calculations. This is the opposite of what you want for horror. Therefore, a measure of obfuscation is in order.

Hide the monster's statistics or make them fundamentally random, controlled by hidden dice rolls each round. What will the players do when the number to hit the monster keeps changing?

Force the players to interact with secret systems. If the players don't know what a condition afflicting one of them does, or what a public ticking timer indicates, they will have to make educated—and sometimes wrong—guesses. This serves to ratchet up the tension and disempower the players, key advantages for a horror experience.

Rip the Safety Net.

At the onset of a horror game, after a period of safety and building tension, you may have to emphasize these principles by shattering the players' expectations. You might have to kill a character outright, lay a downright mean trap that has permanent and personal consequences, or force the characters into a scenario that is impossible to win.

Only one drastic (and unfair) example is usually needed to shock the players out of their comfort zone. Once this expectation is shattered, all cards are on the table. Players will have to more carefully consider their gaming assumptions—that their character will be guaranteed safety and success—thereby placing them closer to a horror mindset.



HORROR DOS AND DON'TS

Why don't protagonists in a horror film simply call the police? Or, failing that, leave town in the dead of night to escape the killer's grasp?

According to legendary director Alfred Hitchcock, "They don't go to the police because it's dull." This explanation works in film, but it fails in games that grant players a modicum of agency. Roleplaying games often task players with finding creative solutions to problems, so if you're not careful, your cast of characters might spend the adventure in protective custody, or traveling as far as possible from the narrative's monster-infested setting.

The following commonsense strategies of horror fans have long frustrated storytellers like Hitchcock. In turn, horror writers have an arsenal of rationales used to capture characters in a "closed circle," a situation in which they have no alternative but to confront the darkness.

Call for Help!

An undead abomination staggers after a helpless character who dives into a nearby home and locks the door. With a single heaving slam, the monster shatters the obstacle to splinters. By now, the hero has retrieved their sought-after tool: a phone, with which to call 911.

If the characters can call the local authorities or the national guard to gun down the monster, the tension of the plot evaporates. This doesn't simply extend to authority figures, though. If a legendary monster hunter or an organized group of townsfolk can equally protect the main characters, the conflict is easily resolved.

You're on Your Own.

Details of the setting and contrivances of the plot can serve to close the characters off in relative isolation. Hiking up to a remote mountain cabin can cut the characters off from easy assistance, while a brewing storm promises to wash out the main roads and sever cell phone connection. Even placing the setting in a locale like a small village helps to place resources out of the character's reach. Can the local sheriff even hope to inconvenience a rampaging monster?

Nobody Will Believe You.

No matter how imperative or grave the threat, the characters can't expect others to assist or even believe them. The reasoning that "your life is in danger if you don't help us" will strike people as patently absurd until the moment that it's too late.

Supernatural threats also tend to make the characters look like lunatics themselves. At best, a bystander might assume the characters are charlatans performing an elaborate deception or a sick joke. Similar pranks involving ghosts or monsters have existed since the dawn of time, and only the very gullible have ever fallen for them.

Taking the Fall.

If the characters are too conspicuous during their investigation, they might be incriminated after the monster is dealt with. They were likely at the scene of many crimes and probably broke a handful of laws to survive the monster, so they're as good a scapegoat as anyone.

Skip Town Tonight!

A knife-wielding maniac is haunting a small town and the characters barely escape with their lives. However, they know the killer will be hot on their heels if they continue their investigation. What if they simply run? Not just away from the killer, but from the small town entirely, fleeing far beyond the bounds of the story. Sure, road trips are inconvenient, but it beats getting stabbed to death.

Nowhere to Run.

When the characters enter "fight or flight" mode, the setting is the best tool to ensure that characters can't evade the story entirely. An isolated mountain cabin or a ship at sea ensures that running is fruitless, for the characters will die of exposure or be caught before reaching civilization.

In a broader sense, the setting should confound larger escape attempts in mundane ways. The bus or caravan heading out of town doesn't leave for another three days. The car is broken down and the mechanic can't fix it until a part comes in. Perhaps the road was washed out in a rainstorm the night you arrived in town. Whatever contrivance you have in mind, ensure that you telegraph it early and often to ratchet up the tension and close the circle around the characters.

Skin in the Game.

The ultimate silver bullet to cowardly retreat is investment that transcends survival. A parent doesn't simply abandon their child, a group of friends might risk their lives for one another, and anyone might be spurred to action if it means saving dozens or hundreds of innocent people. The more personal the investment, the greater the odds of brave survival.

Everyone Saw a Werewolf.

A werewolf breaks into a sprint, chasing a character down a dark alleyway. The hero rounds the corner and dives into a crowded building—inside, practically everyone in town is engaged in a meeting about the local attacks. A moment later, the werewolf bursts through the doors in full view of everyone.

The mystery suddenly becomes a reality. What ramifications does this have on the townsfolk who have seen a werewolf with their own eyes? Or the world, which now has dozens of credible witnesses and maybe even a photograph of the supernatural?

The Status Quo.

Society has a way of reasserting itself after disasters. No matter how devastating the tragedy or terrible the loss, things will reset to something akin to normal, as long as people go back to work on Monday. Newspapers will report ordinary-sounding rationalizations of supernatural events, direct witnesses are said to be in shock, and lingering evidence will be swept under the rug. Perhaps, people just go back to the way things were out of habit; or perhaps, it's a profound fear of change.

Memory is profoundly unreliable and evidence can be faked. What's more likely: an elaborate ploy by a group of conspiracy theorists or that your entire framework of science and religion has been upturned in an instant?

You're the Last One to Know.

When ominous, supernatural forces grip a community, it might simply become an open secret too terrible to discuss. Staying quiet and vigilant is easier than acknowledging them outright.

Even if the characters survived something obviously supernatural in plain view of others, it's possible that most people have been quietly ignoring the seeping darkness for years, and the characters are simply late to the party. What could they or anyone do to change things?



RUNNING A HORROR GAME

The fundamentals of running a horror game are the same as telling a scary story around a bonfire. You need constant, building tension, a sense of mystery, and a shocking scare. Ideally, it should also be wrapped up with a clean beginning, middle, and end, though you don't need to know where it's going ahead of time.

This section walks through a conventional structure for a single horror game (anywhere from one to three sessions) and offers advice for how to effectively build tensions and deliver scares. Veterans of horror RPGs can comfortably skip past this walkthrough, whereas new players are encouraged to peruse at their pleasure.

ADVENTURE OUTLINE

Your story might differ, but this chapter presents an adventure with the following structure:

Act 1: Introductions

1. Introduce the Setting
2. Introduce the Characters
3. Build Tension
4. The Reveal

Act 2: Unraveling the Mystery

- Investigation Scenes
- Social Interactions
- Monster Encounters
 - The Final Confrontation

Act 3: Conclusions and Preludes

Introductions.

The first act of the story is principally concerned with introducing the setting and key characters, the fundamental pieces and board for the game to unfold. It also lets you start laying the first layers of tension, which rise to a fever pitch when the monster is revealed.

Introducing the Setting.

Dawn breaks on a quiet, unassuming town. Stories often begin on an unremarkable day (whatever that tends to mean in the setting) so that the audience has proper context for the conflict to follow. Without first establishing the expectations for the story's world, it's surprisingly hard to differentiate between narrative obstacles and mere inconveniences. For example, a string of sudden, unexplainable deaths is fairly unobtrusive to a medieval village suffering through the Black Plague, whereas the same would positively upturn a modern American town.

Introducing the setting doesn't require an elaborate map and dissertation on its history, just a short narration and perhaps a few mundane interactions: picking up groceries, meeting the neighbors, or taking a relaxing walk. These scenes give you a chance to characterize the setting in its default state, which doesn't have to be positive, but should be predictable enough to form a mental image. The characters might inhabit an ominous seaside fishing town, or an idyllic, picturesque village. Whatever the locale, distill its atmosphere and capture it in a few scenes as you introduce the characters and key NPCs.

Three ominous settings are presented in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, giving you a framework to run a game in a medieval village, a modern town, or a futuristic outpost.

Introducing the Characters.

Methods differ on how to introduce your principal cast of player characters. You can trickle them into the narrative one-by-one at appropriate moments, shove them all into a scene together for introductions, or waive the greetings altogether in favor of an informal explanation of each player's avatar. Choose whichever format fits your players without sacrificing too much momentum.

It's usually best to let the newly-empowered players get their bearings in an interactive yet safe space before the real tensions begin, hence the stereotype of all roleplaying games starting in a tavern. This is less like a guided tutorial and more like a rubberized playground. Giving the players a chance to roll checks and take small risks helps them come to grips with their abilities and define their personalities. In a classic cabin in the woods horror film, this sort of prelude could include packing bags, cleaning up around the spooky cabin, and the general shenanigans of an ensuing party.

This prelude should also serve to introduce important NPCs before the action intensifies. Think about each NPC like a prop: if you intend to use them later, they should make an earlier appearance.

Building Tension.

Ominous clues and a grim atmosphere press in on the characters even before the real horror sparks to life. Even while you introduce the setting and the characters on an ordinary day, it's critically important to start building layers of tension to set the tone and prepare for the reveal. An atmosphere of unease and sprinkles of disgust—as simple as peeling paint on the walls or rats scurrying along the floor—can help put your players in a horror mindset.

Inconspicuous signs that a monster might be lurking nearby can also foreshadow the upcoming horror. Players often feel an unspoken pressure when secrets are withheld from them. Tipping your hat that something sinister is lurking in the darkness prompts the characters to ask terrible questions and dread finding the answer.



Furthermore, the process of introducing elements that lock characters into the story also heightens the tension notch-by-notch. The road washes out in the storm, the car breaks down, or the phone lines or power goes out. Though these events aren't particularly disquieting, the players quietly understand their options are being clipped, that they're being led into a claustrophobic room with no means of escape.

The Reveal.

Your opening act shatters the unremarkable day with a splash of terror: a monster is on the prowl. This reveal is simultaneously the first peak of tension and also the impetus for the mystery to follow, so if you plan nothing else, determine how to introduce the main threat.

Contrary to low-budget horror films, the inciting incident for a monster story doesn't always involve the monster jumping out in front of the cast to a backdrop of shrieking violins. Instead, you can present any element of terror or gore that confirms the stakes: that an abominable monster is lurking somewhere in the darkness. Perhaps the characters find the monster's first victim or stumble into its lair. Perhaps they experience a supernatural event, such as objects flying around of their own accord.

A good rule of thumb for roleplaying games is that, if you want to ensure that your players take a narrative hint, you need three separate cues to that effect. Therefore, it's best to provide more than one "hook" for the players to follow toward the monster's reveal. Redundant hooks give opportunities to advance the story at the players' direction and give more opportunities to build a more ominous atmosphere, so they're never wasted. In fact, the monsters in this book include three separate plot hooks that introduce different facets of the mystery. Use all three, don't just pick the most appropriate!

Once the threat is revealed, the mystery begins in earnest.

Unraveling The Mystery.

The story's second act is the least predictable, an unfolding mystery in which the characters interview persons of interest, investigate the monster's murder scenes, and piece together clues in an effort to uncover the monster's motivations, and perhaps, its critical weakness.

As such, this section of the story is the most dictated by players and requires the most improvisation on your part. Don't panic if things go differently than you planned. An easygoing outline will serve you better than an iron-clad script, since it gives you the freedom to shift around locations, NPCs, and other details to line up with the player's natural direction. To that end, monsters in this book provide you with just enough guidance to shape this part of the narrative, but no more than is necessary.

Revelations.

Whether a scene entails a careful search of a drawer's contents or pouring through research at the local library, the best possible result is a **REVELATION** about the monstrous threat at hand. These narrative twists and turns shed light on the monster's hunting patterns, history, and motivations, and help isolate its critical weakness. Each revelation is a minor victory in its own right, but understanding them collectively is the secret to overcoming the monster's supernatural malice.

Weakness.

One revelation trumps them all: the monster's critical **WEAKNESS**. Finding this information is crucial to overcoming the monster in a direct confrontation, and even that is rarely enough on its own. The characters will also need preparation and plenty of luck to survive.

Uncovering a weakness is no easy task, and the same method seldom works twice on different foes. Some weaknesses are buried in esoteric lore, translated from forgotten languages, and cryptically stored in dusty tomes. Others require first uncovering a monster's history and motivation. Others still might be revealed by sheer happenstance during a monstrous encounter, as the monster suddenly retreats from an otherwise innocuous event.

Types of Encounters.

No matter which direction your players point, they'll generally find one of three types of encounters:

- Investigation scenes
- Social interactions
- Monster encounters

Investigation Scenes.

When the mystery is afoot or the characters stumble upon an unfamiliar scene, it's time to investigate. An in-depth investigation involves much more than use of the Investigation skill; it demands inquisitive thinking, sharp observation, and careful deduction on the part of the characters, plus a bit of preparation (or practiced improvisation) on your part.

You can divide a typical investigation scene into three parts: setting the scene, asking questions, and deductions.

Setting the Scene.

Generally, investigations are localized to a single scene where clues can be uncovered and conclusions can be reached. This might be a crime scene, where evidence is left behind, or something as innocuous as someone's living room.

In the following example, we'll imagine the players have broken into the office of a local priest, the minister of Old Nazareth church to discover more about a lycanthrope sighting nearby. When the characters arrive at the scene:

Set the Scene. Provide some exposition describing all the relevant details in the area. You don't have to describe every detail; an overview will do for now. For example:

The minister's office is moonlit by an open window, whose curtains blow into the room. You spy a pair of legs horizontal behind the desk: the minister lies dead, flat on his back with his hands crossed over a gory wound on his abdomen.

Establish Secrets. Decide what information is concealed at the scene, to be unraveled from the information left there.

You decide to establish that the minister was a part of an order of monster hunters.

Asking Questions.

Investigations are led by players asking specific questions about the scene. The following examples are excellent specific questions:

"What's in the minister's pockets?"
"Is the blood fresh?"
"Is the window broken?"

You should present answers detailing what the characters discover, and you can sometimes detail how they do so, but refrain from extrapolating conclusions from this information. For example:

You reach your hand into the minister's pockets and feel something small and cold: a silver arrowhead, marked with three intersecting lines.

If a player is unsure which question to ask (or you think that a player's question is too vague), the player can roll an ability check using a skill of their choosing. Rolling a check is a shot in the dark; the player doesn't need to specify their reasoning for the check or what they hope to accomplish. A player can only use each skill once in a scene. If the check is successful and turns out to be relevant, you can reveal fruitful information.

For example, if a player is unsure which questions to ask about the minister's office, they could attempt an Intelligence (History) check. On a good roll (against a DC you determine on the spot), the character notices the following:

The minister's personal library contains a half-dozen books on the witch trials that took place here over two hundred years ago. Some of the books bear a sigil of three intersecting lines on the cover.

Deductions.

At any time, players can ask a question that pieces together information uncovered at the scene with a deduction that explains something previously unknown. In our example, the players could ask:

"Is the minister part of a circle of witch-hunters?"
"Was the minister killed because of his witch-hunter ancestors?"
Or "Did the minister know what was happening around town all along?"

If the players successfully deduce some hidden information, you give the players a **LEAD**. Leads can be spent when piecing the mystery together.

Players can only deduce information relevant to the investigation at hand. Larger ruminations on more complex mysteries should be unraveled when the characters piece the mystery together.

Piecing the Mystery Together.

After multiple investigation scenes, it's sometimes to scratch your chin and think about the larger, underlying mystery. During a long rest, the characters can meet and **PIECE THE MYSTERY TOGETHER**.

When they do so, summarize all the clues the characters have uncovered with some relevant context. Like an investigation, players ask questions, but when piecing the mystery together, you answer only with **"YES"**, **"NO"**, and occasionally, **"REDACTED"**. The latter is for answers which are neither yes nor no, questions that contain an important false assertion, and conclusions that the characters couldn't reasonably deduce from their current information. Players can ask a number of questions equal to the number of characters trying to piece the mystery together, and can expend a Lead to ask an additional question.

Social Interactions.

The most fundamental encounters in roleplaying games are social interactions, scenes which see the players talking with NPCs. Whether the characters are interviewing witnesses of a crime, donning fake mustaches to impersonate someone else, delivering a not-so-veiled threat, or politely asking someone for a favor, a short conversation is in order.

This type of encounter is similar in every roleplaying game, so it seems like it should be easy. However, players and GMs alike run into difficulty with these short conversations precisely because they seem so effortless. Here's a smattering of suggestions to help ratchet up the suspense (and decrease the frustration) of your social scenes.

Set the Tone. Because tension is the cornerstone aspect of horror writing, dedicate a moment to setting the scene around the NPC. For the following example, we'll imagine the players are meeting the character *Alma Hedgewick* for the first time.

What does their appearance signify? As a venerable resident of the town, Alma looks ominously antique, as if she were plucked out of a previous decade and dropped here. Whether she's wearing dirty overalls, a shawl, a tarnished jeweled brooch, or a worn and outdated evening dress, this appearance serves to feel uncanny and reinforce how out-of-touch and deteriorated the town and its people have become.

Where are they? Perhaps Alma is sitting on her front porch in a rocking chair. This scene could be practically quaint, unless you introduce that the house has peeling paint and a sagging roof, and that Alma herself has a shotgun resting in her lap. Alternatively, Alma might be confrontational, chiding the characters for setting foot on her lawn while attempting to cudgel them with a cane.

What are they doing? Because the world doesn't revolve around the characters, Alma was probably doing something when the characters arrived. If she was hard at work, she might be burying something in the lawn or dragging a bloody sack toward a shed. Or perhaps she was chatting with neighbors over a picket fence, a conversation which abruptly ends as both parties shoot the characters a suspicious glare.

Know What You Want. Even the most transient one-line, NPCs should have some form of motivation. If you can answer the question: "What does this character want?" in that exact moment, you have most of a well-rounded character at your fingertips. Sometimes a character will want to be left alone; other times, curiosity will compel them to question the player's current antics. It might be that a character is driven by simple survival or greed. No matter what the character wants, it forms the basis for the push and pull of a social interaction scene.

Conversations Can Be Dangerous. The most tense moment in your horror game might not be a monstrous encounter, but a conversation with dire consequences. When the characters conceal or reveal information, an aloof conversation transforms into a high-stakes game of chess, in which the outcome reveals itself over many hours or days. Consider how the characters parry and counter interrogations from authorities about what they were doing at the scene of a monster attack, or how they attempt to broker peace with suspicious locals. Perhaps a misplaced

phrase will result in an immediate brawl, but more likely, the offended party will take their opportunity to undermine or impede the characters later, when it's least expected. Such is the nature of making casual enemies around town.

Dice Optional. Conversations don't need to end with someone rolling a Charisma check. Ability checks should only be necessary when something is perilous or uncertain. If the characters just wanted to learn a fact from someone that has no reason to conceal information, there's no dice needed. Question asked; question answered.

Monster Encounters.

A shaggy silhouette eclipses the moon and a booming, guttural growl rattles your bones. It's time to roll initiative.

In a horror game, the phrase "roll initiative" should send chills down the players' spines. It doesn't mean that it's time for heroics and action; it means the danger is real and survival is paramount.

Horror monsters represent a different paradigm to those of traditional fantasy games. Keep in mind the following ideas when presenting a monstrous encounter:

Peak of Tension.

The process of building and releasing tension is the invisible engine that drives a horror experience. Encountering a monster is the peak of tension, the critical moment of fever pitch.

Paradoxically, the intensity of this moment has little to do with the monster's appearance or how it is revealed; instead, it has everything to do with the tension leading up to it. Think about it like firing an arrow: all of the force comes from pulling the bowstring in advance. Even the sharpest arrowhead can't offset a weak release.

Before revealing the monster, you should offer glimpses at it from a distance, paint an ominous scene for its arrival, and leave clues of its presence, foreshadowing the monster's aftermath. Only after the players are on edge should you reveal the monster in all its fearsome glory.

Survive.

The balance of power around an *Insomnia* monster encounter is completely inverted: the characters have everything stacked against them and the monster has the narrative agency. Characters are forced to react, scramble to escape, and mitigate damage from the monster's onslaught. Most of all, they should be focused on survival.

Each round the characters manage to survive, they might learn another of the monster's supernatural defenses or a facet of how it hunts, but each round also increases the risk that the monster leaves one or more of them critically injured or worse. Until the characters have discovered the monster's weakness, they have no hope of victory. Monsters in this book leverage traits like damage immunity and regeneration to prevent a fair fight, a fact that foolhardy players might learn the hard way.

Final Confrontation.

At the end of an adventure, when the characters have learned all they can about the monstrous threat (and, critically, uncovered the monster's weakness), they can prepare for a **FINAL CONFRONTATION**. This battle doesn't completely reverse the monster-centric paradigm, but gives the characters time to prepare, lay a trap, and take every precaution possible. This confrontation is still a pitched life-or-death struggle, but one that can be won with enough persistence and sacrifice.

Not every adventure needs to end with a climactic battle. Sometimes, dispatching a monster calls for enacting an ancient ritual, halting one or more summoners, or more esoteric means. However, good storytelling calls for a climax of some sort, preferably one ride with danger and heightened stakes.

Conclusions and Preludes.

The third act of a horror story can be more truncated than most—once the monster is dispatched, the bulk of the tension subsides and the characters can enjoy a brief respite and wrap-up.

This is your moment to tie up loose narrative ends and answer the most pressing questions about the plot. What happened to important NPCs once the monster was defeated? Did the final confrontation have any witnesses, or were there unforeseen problems cleaning up the aftermath? Do the characters need a moment to grieve a fallen comrade?

Importantly, if the campaign continues next session, this final act also lets you gesture toward any lingering mysteries and tensions in the plot. Who sent the characters that mysterious letter? Have the authorities decided the characters are suspects? Who was behind the monster's arrival? What signs allude to darker threats on the horizon?

INSOMNIA STORYTELLING ENGINE

You don't have to be a master storyteller to enthrall your players with pulse-pounding, heartfelt sessions. In fact, you don't need to tell the story all on your own. The *Insomnia Storytelling Engine* is designed to give you all the help you need to ratchet up the tension and involve the players in the storytelling process.

The engine comes in two parts: **Beats** for players and **Shots** for GMs. The former gives players narrative objectives to help them craft engaging stories, and the latter gives the GM a tool to craft cinematically dynamic scenes. You can omit either half of the engine without consequence, and you can use them in conjunction with any other roleplaying game.

Beats.

At the start of each investigation, give each player two Beats—secret narrative objectives written on cards. If a player can achieve one of these Beats in the story, they reveal that card to the other players and gain a level at the end of the investigation.

Beats are often negative—at odds with what the players or even characters might want. You should choose beats for each character that help develop their personality or drive their story forward, even when it means someone fails to accomplish the goals of the investigation in the process. These are usually the most compelling stories of all: ones in which characters falter, struggle, and ultimately succeed.

It's a player's responsibility to accomplish one of their beats during the investigation, but they can plan with you to find narratively interesting ways to do so. Sometimes you'll need to introduce new characters, backstory elements, or locations in order to help players realize the full potential of their beats. If a player fails to accomplish their beat, they won't gain a level until they accomplish their following beat. Ideally, no player should fall more than a level behind.

Each beat comes with suggested tags to help you craft an engaging narrative. For example, Introductory beats are best at the onset of a story, whereas Climactic beats are best at the end. You can nevertheless introduce a beat at any point in the story. Beats may have more than one tag, if they can be used in multiple ways. You may want to give players a pair of cards with matching tags to ensure they can't avoid types of beats, such as Conflict beats, throughout the story.

BEATS: WORKED EXAMPLE

Consider the following example of how beats might craft a player story:

Samantha is playing a shy librarian in the small town of Nowhere. In the first investigation, the GM gives Samantha the "Cross the Threshold" and "Hesitation" beats, which are both Introductory in nature. If Samantha chooses the former beat, she establishes that her character to be bold (or naïve), whereas if she chooses the latter, we learn that she is unreliable or unprepared for danger. Let's assume that she picks Hesitation and flees from her first monstrous encounter.

For the next investigation, the GM gives Samantha "Nugget of Wisdom" and "Phobia." The former gives Samantha an opportunity to confront her fears with a moment from her backstory, whereas the latter lets her elaborate on her core fears more clearly.

Introductory Beat. These are the first beats to use in a story. They serve to elaborate character backstories and introduce new elements to the setting.

Story Beat. These beats ask the characters to move the story forward through adaptation, problem solving, and resilience.

Interaction Beat. These beats rely on a conversation between characters and the revelations they find together.

Conflict Beat. No characters can exclusively succeed. These beats ask characters to falter, fail, and make sacrifices.

Climactic Beats. These are the final beats of a story. They serve to drive characters to their breaking points, and either overcome or perish.



All Is Lost.

Conflict Beat

Lose your will to keep going.

It's all too much. You'll never win. Crestfallen after a defeat, you can't summon the courage to continue any longer. Another character, or perhaps a twist of fate, is needed to rouse you from this state. What happened to break your spirit?

Betrayal.

Conflict Beat

Betray a friend in an hour of need.

In a life or death moment, you push a friend over the edge to secure a few precious moments for yourself, or make a convenient alliance with a bitter foe. Your betrayal might be wildly out of character, driven by desperation or paranoia, or it might be an extension of your darker side, an evil impulse that now takes center stage. Who did you betray and how?

A Bitter Disagreement.

Conflict Beat

Dig in your heels on a sour, loud, or hateful argument with another character.

A disagreement on procedure turns personal, or a friendship splinters with a few poorly chosen words. The other party need not have started the argument, but they should oppose you vehemently. You can later make amends, but heated tempers and resentment should follow for some time. Who did you argue with, and why?

Contest of Wills.

Story Beat

Prove yourself in a pitched one-on-one battle—of weapons, wits, or words.

You stare down a bruiser or decide to go it alone in a battle. Whatever you do, the conflict is one-on-one, a pitched test of your skills and resolve against another. You might engage in the contest to prove something to yourself or someone else, or you might have no other choice. Furthermore, you need not succeed. What conflict do you engage in, and why?

BEATS: OVERVIEW

All Is Lost	I Know a Place
Betrayal	I Want
A Bitter Disagreement	Identity
Contest of Wills	Injury
Cross a Line	Leap of Faith
Cross the Threshold	Loss
Deal with the Devil	Nugget of Wisdom
A Death	Phobia
Dream Sequence	A Promise
An Event	A Promise, Broken
Failure	Reckless
Falling in Love	Redemption
Flashback	Sacrifice
Hesitation	Secret
A Hunch	Seen This Before
I Have A Bad Feeling About This	A Shoulder to Cry On
I Have Just the Thing	Sounds Crazy, Might Just Work
I Know a Guy	Too Far



Cross a Line.

Conflict Beat.

Betray what you believe in.

An impossible choice presents itself, and you opt to betray or abandon what you believe in most. You might endanger the one person you've sworn to protect, or destroy the thing you have searched for. This moment must have important consequences, but you might still find a road to redemption. What belief did you abandon, and why?

Cross the Threshold.

Introductory Beat

When you must rise to the occasion, you do something extraordinary.

An innocent person is in trouble, and you reflexively leap into action and do something that you've never done before. This moment needn't succeed, but it should wholly out of character, a new experience that changes your perspective. What do you do, and why?

Deal with the Devil.

Conflict, Story Beat

Strike a bargain with a powerful, sinister ally.

You sign on the dotted line or agree to a fatal deal. When you strike the devil's deal, you need not know that the other party has ulterior motives. The other party in question might be the GM, who makes a deal with you entirely outside of the game. No matter the nature of the deal, you may gain a short lived boon, but the deal promises lasting consequences. Who did you strike a deal with and what did you stand to gain?

A Death.

Conflict Beat

Lose someone precious to you.

A dagger is plunged into your best friend, or a loved one passes away quietly in the night. You might be directly responsible for the loss, or it might be completely unrelated. Who dies, and how does it affect you?

Dream Sequence.

Story Beat

Undergo a hallucination, symbolic dream sequence, or spirit quest.

You suffer a blow to the head or ingest a hallucinogenic poison and descend into a chaotic dreamscape composed of symbols and metaphor. During this brief scene, the GM can introduce elements into the dreamscape—symbols inspired by moments from the past or hinting at the future—but the dream itself is cooperative. How do you fall into a dream sequence and what do you see?

An Event.

Story, Introductory Beat

Introduce a local event that happens tonight.

A yearly festival takes place in the town square tonight, or you've received invitations to a birthday bash. Ideally, this event progresses the story in some way. You don't have to attend, but you're expected to be there. What event is happening, and when?

Failure.

Conflict Beat

Fail in a critical, life-or-death moment.

In this moment, everything hinges on you. You freeze. Utter disaster. Your failure doesn't need to result in death, but it must be significant enough to impact the story and critical enough that the situation can't easily be salvaged. How do you fail?

Falling in Love.

Interaction Beat

Do something spontaneous to reveal that you've fallen in love.

You fall head-over-heels for someone you just met, or the embers of friendship spark into romance. Your spontaneity doesn't have to be successful at communicating your feelings, and the object of your affection doesn't have to reciprocate. Don't fall in love with another player's character unless you have discussed it with them and received affirmative consent. Who do you fall in love with and what do you do?

Flashback.

Story, Introductory Beat

Describe, in a brief flashback scene, a moment from your past that relates to the present.

Perhaps you once glimpsed a supernatural event that left you changed, or you learned exactly how to hotwire a car from a high school friend. What moment do we revisit, and how does it relate to the ongoing events?

Hesitation.

Conflict, Introductory Beat

When you must rise to the occasion, you falter.

An innocent person is in trouble, and while others leap into action, you turn and run away. Your moment of hesitation needn't be permanent—you can later summon up your courage and heed the call to adventure—but it should be substantial enough to impact the story. How do you falter and why?

A Hunch.

Story Beat

You can't explain why, but you know where to lead the investigation.

Confer with the GM, who can give you a hint about where the story might lead. You feel certain that the monster is dwelling in the sewers, or that the mayor is certainly involved in the blackmail scheme. What's your hunch, and how do you pursue it?

I Have A Bad Feeling About This.

Story Beat

You can't explain it, but you feel certain that doom is on the horizon.

Confer with the GM, who can hint to you that a course of action is perilous or doomed to fail. Perhaps a creature dwells just beneath those floorboards or the road will surely wash out in the rain. What do you have a bad feeling about, and how do you pursue it?

I Have Just the Thing.

Story Beat

Reveal that you have the perfect item for the task at hand.

When you meet an impassable obstacle, you produce exactly the right tool to tackle it. If you didn't specifically prepare the item for this scenario, justify to the GM why you would likely have the item on your person. You might have squirreled away a set of lockpicks to break out of your handcuffs, or you might be carrying a road flare for a blinding distraction. What item do you produce and why were you carrying it?

I Know a Guy.

Interaction, Introductory Beat

Introduce into the story a friend or family member that might be able to help.

There is a librarian in the next town who has a book pertaining to the present dilemma, or you know a veterinarian who will patch people up without asking too many questions. How did you meet this person and why might they do you a favor?



I Know a Place.

Story, Introductory Beat

Introduce a new location and bring a character there.

You have a quiet place you go to think, or you used to frequent a seedy locale in another life. Perhaps it's isolated enough to enact a dangerous plan, or just scenic enough to relax. Where do you go, and why?

I Want.

Interaction, Introductory Beat

Reveal your motive to another character or demonstrate it through your actions.

You want to become the world's greatest baseball player, or you may be searching for a magical relic. You might take concrete steps to further your motive or you may simply opine about its importance over a drink. What is it that you truly want, and who learns about it?

Identity.

Story Beat

Claim a name, title, epithet, or group as your own.

Join a guild, change your name, take on a title like "the fixer," or adopt a group in town as your own. This shift in identity doesn't merely entail a name change, but a change in your outlook and who you view as natural allies. What identity do you claim?

Injury.

Conflict Beat

Suffer a debilitating injury.

Confer with the GM when you take damage. The fangs of a monstrous abomination take a chunk from your throat, or a mad slasher severs one of your fingers. This injury must be permanent in some way, even if the life-threatening damage is remedied. What type of injury do you sustain?

Leap of Faith.

Conflict, Story Beat

Take a risk with perilous consequences, entrusting the result to a higher power.

At a critical juncture, you decide to relinquish control and trust that things will succeed. This decision should be a risk with no assurances that things will go

well, but you need not be strictly passive. You might place yourself in the sights of a gunman, believing that they won't pull the trigger, or dive out of a car, hoping to land somewhere soft. Furthermore, the risk need not pay off. What risk did you take, and what force did you hope would prevail on your behalf?

Loss.

Conflict Beat

Lose an item of great value and personal worth.

The only memento you have of a loved one plunges into fire, or a priceless magical artifact is stolen. Try as you might, you can never recover this item. What do you lose, and why was it important to you?

Nugget of Wisdom.

Story, Introductory Beat

Recall a few important words of advice at a critical moment.

The words of a mentor ring out in your ears. Your grandmother might have told you, quite seriously, about how to ward off an evil spirit, or you might recall being told exactly how to survive being buried alive. They might have simply told you to focus and breathe. When did you learn this, and who told you?

Phobia.

Conflict, Introductory Beat

Reveal your greatest fear to another character or demonstrate it through your actions.

You have a paralyzing fear of heights, or you simply don't know where you fit in. Perhaps you find yourself teetering on the edge of a tall building or unable to find anyone to sit with at the school lunchroom. What's your fear and how does it manifest?

A Promise.

Interaction Beat

Make a solemn promise to another character or reveal a promise you've made.

With a few words, a pinky swear, or a contract, you pledge yourself to something critical. You might decide to protect an innocent, no matter the odds, or to return to a loved one after the carnage is over. In the end, you might not keep your promise, but failing to do so is a story beat in its own right. What do you promise and to who?

A Promise, Broken.

Conflict Beat

Break a solemn promise.

An impossible choice presents itself, and you choose to break a vow. Perhaps you're simply incapable of keeping your promise, such as if a monster has attacked someone you swore to protect. Or perhaps you simply made a mistake, and didn't realize the consequences until too late. You might even flirt with infidelity. No matter what, someone gets hurt. What promise did you break and who did it hurt?

Reckless.

Conflict Beat

Do something hopelessly rash or misguided.

You gamble it all on a long-shot bet. You might plant an explosive with little regard for safety, or commit a serious crime to meet your goals. This act can be perfectly safe to you, but wildly irresponsible to others, or vice-versa. It may even be the act of an adrenaline junkie. What did you do and why? Who did it endanger?

Redemption.

Climactic Beat

Redeem your past failings through sacrifice or success.

In a critical moment, you earn redemption for a past failing or betrayal. Perhaps you sacrifice yourself to save a character you have wronged, or perhaps you succeed where you have previously faltered. What did you do to redeem yourself, and why?

Sacrifice.

Climactic, Conflict Beat

Die heroically.

To save others, you pay the ultimate price. Perhaps you are stitched back up and revived, or you are granted a supernatural second chance, but for a moment, your heart was stopped. How did you sacrifice yourself, and why?

Secret.

Interaction, Introductory Beat

Reveal your greatest secret to another character.

Your previous line of work was unsavory, or you possess a talent you hoped never to use again. Perhaps you're in some way to blame for the current situation. What is your secret and why did you conceal it?

Seen This Before.

Story, Introductory Beat

Reveal that you've seen this situation before, or something eerily like it.

You've read about this in a science textbook, or you brushed up against the supernatural once before and buried the memory as deep as you could. Maybe you stood on this exact spot. When did you encounter this situation, and what did you learn?

A Shoulder to Cry On.

Interaction Beat

When a friend is at their lowest point, help them through it.

When the fear finally proves too much to bear, your friend simply loses the will to go on. Or perhaps they are exhausted and can't muster the strength to continue. Listen to their problems and offer a ray of hope that changes their perspective. Who is at their lowest point, and how do you help them?

Sounds Crazy, Might Just Work.

Story Beat

Concoct an outlandish plan and do your best to see it succeed.

Confer with the GM, who can introduce elements to make your plan possible. Out of sheer desperation or a stroke of genius, you come up with an elaborate plan. You might perform an improvised demolition of a warehouse, or you may cobble together a special-effects-laden display to distract a crowd. You could even enact a multi-stage heist. What's your plan?

Too Far.

Conflict Beat

Do something unforgivably, inhumanly terrible.

In this instant, you've become the story's monster. You exact vengeance on someone who did you wrong, or consign dozens of innocent people to a terrible fate. When you're done seeing red, you realize the magnitude of your actions, and either embrace them or recoil from what you've done. What terrible thing did you do, and why? How did it change you?

Shots.

At the start of each session, draw three **Shot Cards** and deal one to each player. Each card contains cinematic suggestions and narrative breadcrumbs that you can incorporate into your storytelling. Think about them as the advice of a veteran cinematographer. Collectively, the players choose one shot card that you should incorporate into a scene. The other shot cards are optional—use one, two, or all three, whatever best serves the narrative.

Shots emphasize the nature of the camera and give you total freedom over where you direct that camera, and hence, the story's focus. To maximize their impact, feel free to use cinematic language in your scenes and refer to the camera directly. Many shot cards even reveal information that the characters might not know.

Each shot also comes with suggested tags to help establish where they fit within the cinematic lexicon. For example, Transition shots are used to bridge two scenes and suggest various things about those scenes, whereas Cutaway shots add information to a scene by showing us something outside the cast's perspective. Shots may have more than one tag if they can be used in multiple ways.

Cast Shot. Unlike shots that place you squarely in control, a cast shot hands the camera over to a player. For a few moments, they're in the spotlight.

Cutaway Shot. A cutaway serves to inform the viewer by cutting to something important and returning thereafter. Often, this information isn't shared by the characters in the scene.

Perspective Shot. A perspective shot shows us the world—usually in a distorted manner—from a character's unique perspective.

Transition Shots. Transition shots connect two scenes together and imply various connections between them.

Spectacle Shot. Spectacle shots primarily dazzle the audience with beautiful or horrific cinematography. Often, these shots reinforce the tone or punctuate a scene.

Action Cut.

Transition Shot

Precisely at a moment of action or violence, we cut to somewhere else.

When the scene abruptly changes, the players are left to fill in the blanks. Perhaps we witness a monster pounce on its first victim, or we see a gas leak in a house culminate in an explosion. We don't see the aftermath; only the initial, inciting violence. What happens when we cut? What's the implication?

Close Up.

Cast Shot

The camera pulls in close on one player.

At a critical moment, ask a player to narrate their actions and their emotions in detail. What do they look like, what do they do precisely? We see the camera pull in for a close up when they deal a killing blow, when they suffer a tremendous wound, or when they must make a critical choice. Give the player Advantage on any rolls they narrate during their close up.

SHOTS: OVERVIEW

In lieu of drawing cards, feel free to roll for shots on the following table.

d100 Shots

01-04 Action Cut

05-08 Close Up

09-11 Cut Back and Forth

12-15 Dutch Angle

16-19 The End?

20-22 Establishing Shot

23-26 Fade To

27-30 Fixed Shot

31-33 Hero Shot

34-37 Hyperviolence

38-41 Insert

42-44 Introduction Shot

45-48 Jump Scare

49-52 Linger

53-55 Long Take

56-59 Match Cut

60-63 Separated Offscreen

64-66 Sight Gag

67-70 Sinister Cutaway

71-74 Sinister Point of View

75-77 Slow Motion

78-81 Smash Cut

82-85 There and Gone

86-88 Tone Montage

89-92 Ultrawide Zoom

93-96 Vertigo Shot

97-00 Work Montage

Cut Back and Forth.

Cutaway, Transition Shot

When the group is separated, we get glimpses of each story as we cut suddenly between them.

When the characters divide into groups, we cut back and forth between them at odd intervals, swapping perspective whenever the action drags. We see only a fraction of each story, with the offscreen moments moving things along to the next exciting moment. Perhaps one party is spinning a distraction while another creeps through a window, or perhaps one group is contending with a murderous slasher while the other tries to catch up with a fleeing victim. What is each group doing and what do we see when we cut to them?

Dutch Angle.

Perspective Shot

The camera pivots a few degrees, making the world feel off-balance and precarious.

As uncertainty and tension creeps in, the world itself feels like it's leaning to one side. A feeling of unease consumes the scene and alters our perception of it. We might creep down a dark hallway, catch a fleeting glimpse of a monster, or simply hear some terrible news. How does the world feel unbalanced and why?

The End?

Cutaway Shot

After the conflict ends, the camera focuses on the defeated foe, whose eyes flick open!

After the characters limp away from their final battle, the camera reveals that the villain's defeat may not be final. Be it an eye, a mask, a glove, a ring—some part of the monster or its influence lives on, biding its time to return. What object does the camera show, and what does it promise for the future?

Establishing Shot.

Transition Shot

We gain a faraway glimpse of the location, whether it's a single house, a city's skyline, or a sweeping landscape.

Before arriving with the characters at a location, we first see the setting itself, establishing where we are. We might see the outside of a farmhouse with peeling white paint or an entire city of metal and glass, lit by neon signs. Cutting to an establishing shot of the same location communicates merely that time has passed. Where is the cast when we join them?

Fade To.

Transition Shot

The screen smoothly fades from one scene into another.

As we fade, we understand that an indeterminate amount of time has passed. Perhaps we fade to the same farmhouse in the early rays of morning, or perhaps we fade some distance away to a hospital after a character has healed. Where do we fade, and how much time has elapsed?

Fixed Shot.

Spectacle Shot

The camera remains fixed, even as the action continues around it.

We see a fixed perspective of the scene, even as the cast continues unabated. Perhaps we can only see down a dilapidated hallway, but not into any of the rooms, or maybe we see only a security camera's view of the scene, from a high up, but limited view. The characters might see more, but we gain only claustrophobic glimpses into the scene. Where is the camera mounted, and how do we view the scene?

Hero Shot.

Cast Shot

The camera frames up one character, the music swells, and they deliver a dramatic line.

One character in particular enjoys a moment in the spotlight. Perhaps they stand triumphant after dealing a blow to a supernatural beast, or perhaps they have taken a villainous turn and pause to remove their sunglasses. Ask the player what they do while taking center stage and if they say anything cool. Give the player Advantage on any rolls they narrate during their close up.

Hyperviolence.

Spectacle Shot

Blood! Gore! Violence!

We see something shocking, whether it's the violent aftermath of a killing or an action sequence with dizzying or upsetting results. We might linger on the gory details or cut away in short order. What does the camera give us a lurid glimpse of?

Insert.

Cutaway Shot

The camera zooms in one element of the scene.

We see a single element in the scene in particular detail. We might glimpse a ticking bomb unseen by the characters or see the light glisten off of a dagger, the most important object in the scene. What does the camera linger on, and why is it important?

Introduction Shot.

Cast Shot

In a few moments, we learn everything there is to know about a character.

Ask a player to explain to narrate their character's actions over the span of a shot that shows them in their element. A sly trickster might palm someone's wallet while uttering a string of bold-faced lies, whereas a shy recluse might go to comical lengths to avoid a confrontation. Give the player Advantage on any rolls they narrate during their introduction shot.

Jump Scare.

Spectacle Shot

Bam! Screech! Something sudden and jarring leaps into frame!

During a lull in the story, something crashes against your perception. A terrified cat could shriek, a bus might blast its horn over an otherwise quiet neighborhood, or an ax might crash through the door as the violins shriek. What interrupts the quiet? Is it benign or malicious?

Linger.

Transition Shot

You leave the scene, but the camera lingers. Shortly after, someone else enters the frame.

As the characters move on, the camera fails to follow them, instead waiting to reveal someone or something else entering the scene shortly thereafter. Perhaps, a detective on their trail arrives to find a critical clue, a snarling werewolf catches their scent, or mysterious black vans arrive to comb the scene. What does the camera catch when it lingers on the scene?

Long Take.

Spectacle Shot

The camera refuses to cut as the scene plays out in an unbroken screed.

For a minute or more, the camera trains its unblinking eye on the scene. Describe everything in

a string of actions as it plays out, stopping only to petition the players for a response when the chaos has subsided. A chase scene through the woods might play out in excruciating detail or an elaborate action scene might unfurl in front of us. What happens in the long take and why does it command unbroken attention?

Match Cut.

Transition Shot

We cut away, landing on an image of near-identical composition.

The cut moves us from one image to another with an eerily similar composition. In the space of a second, we might confuse the two or draw a relationship between them. We might match cut from a bone flying overhead to a similarly-shaped spacecraft, or from a toy sports car on the floor to a real one cruising down the highway. What two elements do we focus on?

Separated Offscreen.

Cast, Spectacle Shot

One of you leaves offscreen and your fate hangs in the balance.

One player leaves the frame, and we don't see what happens to them. Perhaps they are dragged into the shadows by an unseen figure, or they fall some distance out of sight. The camera remains with everyone else and the missing person's fate remains a mystery until both parties are reunited.

Sight Gag.

Spectacle Shot

Shenanigans ensue, physics optional.

The tone briefly pivots into comic relief. We see a hallway full of doors you can enter and exit at random, a heavy object suspended on a string, or a character wearing headphones oblivious to their impending doom. These outlandish moments pay off the tension of the scene like a scare. What's the joke in this shot?

Sinister Cutaway.

Cutaway Shot

Somewhere, we see a monstrous creature at work.

The scene cuts away and we watch the villain undertake its grim work. It might capture its latest victim, stalking through the shadows of a small town, or dive upon a helpless bystander with teeth and

claws. This shot is seen only by the players—not the characters in the scene. What does the camera reveal about the threat?

Sinister Point of View.

Cutaway Shot

We pull back to beyond your field of view. From the shadows, we join an onlooker watching your every move.

Undetected by the players, someone or something is watching them. The camera might linger on a shadowy figure on the ridgeline, predatory eyes in the trees, or the flickering image of a security camera capturing the characters walking by. Who is watching the characters, and what do we see?

Slow Motion.

Cast, Perspective Shot

The action slows to a crawl.

When every second matters, time itself slows down to show the action in breathless detail. This might underline a slick action moment with guns and explosions, or it might reveal inciteful details about what characters do within the span of a few seconds. What do we see when time slows down?

Smash Cut.

Transition Shot

Suddenly, we are somewhere else.

We abruptly cut to another time and place. As we shift, the whiplash contrast between the two scenes can serve as the punchline of a joke or a logical conclusion in the plot. We might smash cut from a bartender pouring shots to the stark morning light of a jail cell, or from car keys being placed in the ignition to an interstate highway halfway across the country. Where do we cut?

There and Gone.

Spectacle, Cutaway Shot

The camera reveals something menacing—perhaps just out of view—which vanishes instantly in the next shot.

An ominous figure stands behind you in the bathroom mirror, or a flickering street light reveals a shadowy form for just a moment. When you turn to look, the threat disappears inexplicably. What does the camera see and why do the characters miss it?

Tone Montage.

Spectacle, Transition Shot

The action pauses as the camera drifts around independently to establish, above all, the tone.

Very occasionally, the plot takes a backseat to the texture. The camera drifts away from the cast, indulging in the sights and sounds of the setting until its tone has filled the screen. We watch the rain and neon lights of a cyberpunk city, or the buzzing insects and peeled paint of a rotting small American town. When the montage concludes, we join the cast once again. What does the camera focus on, and what tone should it impart?

Ultrawide Zoom.

Spectacle, Perspective Shot

The camera zooms out and continues to zoom until you are just dots in the distance.

The camera slowly zooms out, showing first the immediate surroundings, then the wider terrain, and finally a sweeping landscape. This demonstrates the extent of a setting and underlines how small (and sometimes powerless) the characters might be. We might zoom from the inside of a haunted house to an entire mountainside of pine trees, or from the outside of a space capsule until the ship is but a dot among an abyss of stars. What do we see as the camera departs?

Vertigo Shot.

Perspective Shot

The world pivots around in a disorienting spin.

As a realization, mind-altering substance, or supernatural event overwhelms a character, the camera captures their very perspective shifting around them. Close objects whizz away until the character stands far apart, isolated in that moment. What overwhelms them and how does the world shift around them?

Work Montage.

Transition Shot

The camera flits between vignettes of a task being completed, step-by-step.

When we don't need to follow the gritty detail of a character repairing a car or going to the gym, the camera can show us snippets, with the whole being inferred. These montages should never skip anything critical to the narrative, but speed us through the downtime. What do the characters accomplish and what does the montage show?

HORROR RULES

This section contains a quartet of optional rules designed to enhance the experience of horror in your game. Each of these are crafted to address facets of the core 5th Edition system that mesh poorly with the horror genre. For example, Lingerin Scar serves to provide a range of meaningful failure apart from the deaths of the entire party, and Brink of Death reinforces that dropping to 0 hit points is a desperate situation, even when healing magic is readily available. Armed with these rules, your players should never feel fully empowered or in control, exactly as planned.

Brink of Death.

Returning from the brink of death is no small feat, and those who manage to do so are seldom unharmed. When a creature regains hit points after dropping to 0 hit points, it remains on the brink of death for 1 hour, during which time it has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

Furthermore, each subsequent time the creature drops to 0 hit points while it is on the brink of death, it automatically gains a death saving throw failure. These death saving throw failures are cumulative; if the creature drops to 0 hit points twice while on the brink of death, it begins with two death saving throw failures. If it drops a third time before it recovers, it automatically dies.

d6 Death Saving Throws.

A dying character is circling the drain of imminent death, yet death always arrives slowly, if at all. To ratchet up the tension around death saving throws, use this variant rule.

Instead of rolling a d20 for death saving throws, roll 3d6. Each 6 rolled on a die counts as a success and each 1 counts as a failure; as normal, a character dies if they accumulate 3 failures and stabilizes if they accumulate 3 successes. If they gain their third failure and third success at the same time, they stabilize.

Lingerin Scar.

This variant rule simultaneously avoids character death and injects narrative consequences for failure. Note that this rule best applies to campaigns in which spells such as *revivify* and *regenerate* aren't readily available.

When a character dies, ask the player if they would like to instead survive and continue their character's story. If they choose to survive, the player chooses to either gain an irrevocable physical injury or a psychological scar. You choose the specific injury or scar and justify how the character survives.

Physical Injuries.

The following injuries are life-altering consequences of a monstrous altercation.

Deaf. You can no longer hear.

Eye Loss. You lose an eye. You have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks which rely on sight. Additionally, you can't add your proficiency bonus to a ranged attack you make using a weapon beyond half its normal range.

If you lose both eyes, you are blind.

Internal Injury. Your spine, nerves, or organs have been damaged in a way that can't be easily healed. The GM chooses Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution. This ability score decreases by 4.

Lower Limb Injury. One of your legs or feet is dismembered, mangled, or critically weakened. Your movement speed is halved and you have disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws and Strength and Dexterity checks which require you to move.

Additionally, you rely on some sort of aid to stand and move. This can include, but is not limited to, crutches, a wheelchair or similar wheeled contraption, or a mechanical or magical apparatus that helps support your weight. Work with the GM to decide which sort of aid works best in the campaign world.

Mute. You can no longer speak or perform the verbal components of spells.

Scars. Your injuries linger in obvious, gruesome marks. You have disadvantage on Charisma (Deception), Charisma (Performance), and Charisma (Persuasion) checks you make to interact with creatures that can see your scars. This disadvantage doesn't apply if a creature is familiar with you or familiar with similar injuries.

Upper Limb Injury. One of your hands or arms is dismembered, mangled, or critically weakened or uncoordinated. You can only use one arm effectively. As a result, you can't fight using a two-handed weapon, perform two-weapon fighting, or wield both a weapon and a shield at the same time.

Additionally, if you are missing an arm or hand, you can still manipulate objects (but not weapons or shields) with both hands through the use of prosthetics or a mechanical or magical apparatus that helps you grasp and hold objects.

Psychological Scars.

The following psychological scars are character-defining changes that occur in response to life-or-death confrontations with a monster.

Amnesia. Your character gains one of the following Flaws: "I don't know who I am" or "I don't remember my past."

You lose proficiency in three skills of the GM's choice. Additionally the GM can choose that you lose proficiency in a tool or a weapon, or forget up to three spells that you know.

Insomnia. Your character gains the following Flaw: "Sleep eludes me."

Whenever you take a long rest, roll any die. On an odd roll, you recover hit dice as normal, but otherwise only gain the benefits of a short rest.

Lethargy. Your character gains the following Flaw: "I always feel exhausted and melancholy."

Whenever you roll a 1 on the d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, you can't add your proficiency bonus to rolls that you make until the end of your next turn.

Obsession. Your character gains the following Flaw: "A specific thought roots itself in my mind."

The GM chooses a number from 10 to 19. Whenever you roll that number on an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, the d20 roll becomes a 1.

Paranoia. Your character gains the following Flaw: "I trust no one, and constantly look over my shoulder."

Whenever you finish a long rest, the GM randomly chooses a creature, or chooses no creature at all. Until you finish a long rest, you are secretly convinced this creature is an enemy, and you conspire against it. If you are given an opportunity to undermine, injure, or endanger this creature, you must take it.

Selfish. Your character gains the following Flaw: "Nobody else matters."

You can't take the Help action, restore hit points to other creatures, or cast spells that benefit creatures other than you. If you make an ability check that primarily serves to aid another creature, the GM can impose disadvantage on the roll.

Reckless. Your character gains the following Flaw: "It doesn't matter if I live or die."

You have advantage on melee weapon attack rolls, but attack rolls against you have advantage.

Alienation.

If the players confront an eldritch incursion, you can use the Alienation score to invoke the creeping dread and tenuous sanity that is essential to cosmic horror.

The **Alienation** ability score represents a character embracing eldritch truths and the deranged perspective that follows.

In contrast to other ability scores, a high Alienation is not necessarily a good thing. As such, each character starts out with 10 Alienation. An Alienation score can't be higher than 20 or lower than 10. A character with a 10 in Alienation is considered ignorant; they are perfectly sane and have never encountered something from beyond reality. Such a character will refuse to even believe in the pseudonatural without irrefutable evidence. By contrast, a character with a high Alienation has deep insight into the pseudonatural, and bears the weight of that perspective on their psyche. A character with the highest Alienation score has embraced some part of true understanding, which irrevocably divorces them from sanity as we know it.

You can grant characters an additional point of Alienation when they encounter an aberration for the first time, decipher an eldritch secret pertaining to the nature of the universe, make direct contact with an alien creature, or peer beyond reality. Any event that calls for an Alienation check or saving throw might also bestow a point of Alienation on a failure, as you choose. Greater Alienation should walk in lock-step with the story; the characters Alienation grows as they come closer to discovering the lingering eldritch truths of the campaign.

Alienation scores are divided into the following tiers, each of which grants a unique feature while your Alienation score is in that range.

Alienation Score	Tier
10	Ignorance
11-12	Awareness
13-14	Obsession
15-16	Paranoia
17-19	Dread
20	Revelation

Ignorance (10).

You know nothing of the terrors of the world. Sleep soundly, child, for there is nothing that can harm you.

Awareness (11-12).

You have experienced the unthinkable, learned a scrap of forbidden knowledge, or seen something from beyond the mortal world. Your eyes have been opened to the fathomless terrors of the universe and they can never be closed. Once your Alienation score reaches 11, it can't decrease back to 10.

Unsettled. You have disadvantage on saving throws you make to avoid or end the charmed or frightened conditions.

Obsession (13-14).

You have supped of forbidden knowledge and crave even more. Your every thought slides down spiral chasms of implications, but dreadful secrets at the center of it looms large in your mind. Wherever you look, new patterns take shape, and with few exceptions, they spell doom for yourself and the world at large.

Conspiracy. When you score a critical hit or roll a 1 on an attack roll, roll any die. On an odd roll, a critical hit becomes a roll of 1, and vice versa.

Paranoia (15-16).

You wake every night in a cold sweat, terrified of the consequences of what you have learned. Horrors don't simply await you in far-flung realms, but around every corner, and inside every cupboard, waiting to rend you asunder for your trespasses.

Mania. Whenever you deal damage with an attack, you can add your Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier to the damage roll, if you don't already add it. However, your Armor Class decreases by 2.

Dread (17-19).

You can feel the weight in your gut with every moment of apprehension. The secrets you bear have eroded your psyche, wearing deep ravines of terror in your everyday life. The normal patterns of the world have grown foreign, replaced with alien designs and esoteric forms. Worse still, you now know that the terminus is inevitable: when the stars are right, everything shall come to a monstrous end.

Despair. You have disadvantage on initiative rolls. Additionally, the first attack made against you in the first round of combat has disadvantage.

Revelation (20).

Your mind reels as the totality of perspective comes crashing in like a wave. You have achieved a revelation, a fragment of wisdom from beyond the stars.

Whatever hope you once held of maintaining your grip on reality is lost. Everything you previously knew was but shadow puppets on a cave wall, and now, stepping into the cold, bright light of understanding, you can see vistas more terrifying than humanity was meant to know.

Once you gain 20 points of Alienation, you can't lose them. Nothing short of a *wish* spell can repair your psyche.

Doom. When you make an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, you add your Alienation modifier to the roll. Once you use this ability, you can't use it again until you roll initiative or finish a short or long rest.

Additionally, whenever you finish a long rest, your hit point maximum decreases by 1d4. You die if this feature reduces your hit point maximum to 0.





Alienation Saving Throws.

You can call for a Alienation saving throw at any time a character is confronted by the fathomless wisdom of the elder gods or the surreal inhabitants of the Far Realm. Some creatures might also call for a Alienation saving throw to resist the mind-altering effects of madness. You might call for an Alienation saving throw in the following scenarios:

- Experiencing a apocalyptic or prophetic dream
- Touching a corrupted artifact
- Resisting the spells of a pseudonatural warlock
- Withstanding the pseudonatural corruption near an otherworldly gate
- Glimpsing an elder god's true form

You decide the consequences of failing an Alienation saving throw. The following are some easy-to-implement examples:

- The character gains 1 point of Alienation, to a maximum of 20.
- The character takes 1d10 psychic damage for each of their character levels.
- The character becomes disoriented and has disadvantage on ability checks for 1 hour.
- The character becomes stunned for 1 round, spending the duration screaming, laughing, or weeping.
- For 1 hour, the creature suffers from aphasia. It can't speak and is incapable of spellcasting or understanding others.
- Intense vertigo washes over the creature for 1 hour. The creature falls prone at the end of each of its turns if it isn't leaning against something.
- The creature becomes frenzied for 1 minute. A frenzied creature loses the ability to distinguish between friend and foe, regarding all creatures it can see as enemies. While frenzied, the creature chooses the targets for its attacks, spells, and abilities randomly from among the creatures it can see within range, and it must make an opportunity attack if any creature provokes one.

Losing Alienation.

Too much Alienation has disastrous effects on a mortal mind. As such, a character can spend the downtime between adventures sleeping restlessly, pitching and turning each night with fitful dreams. The character loses one point of Alienation, to a minimum of 11.

Alienation Checks.

You might call for an Alienation check when a character seeks to understand or interact with pseudonatural creatures or items. You might call for a Alienation check for the following activities:

- Perceiving almost unrecognizable patterns in everyday events
- Completing a ritual dedicated to an elder god
- Seeing an otherwise invisible eldritch sign or creature
- Solving an eldritch puzzle using circular logic and fractal geometry
- Understanding a madman's motivations, or the behavior of a corrupted creature
- Knowing the chants and incantations dedicated to specific otherworldly entities

SETTINGS OF DREAD

Insomnia isn't a sprawling campaign setting with lore and history that you're expected to memorize. Instead, this book contains flexible outlines for three settings, giving you all the elements you need to paint and populate a world with enough modularity to run your campaign in any way you like. Furthermore, every setting (including your own) is compatible with every monster in this book.

Something is Wrong Here.

The best horror settings are monsters in their own right. The paint peeling on a once-opulent country home, the stench of rotten food seeping into the air, and the hostile stares of complete strangers signify that something is deeply wrong—you just can't put your finger on it. Even comfortable settings, like a sleepy midwestern town, can be made horrific with the implication that something terrible lingers just under the surface, waiting to swallow you whole.

Nobody Can Hear You Out Here.

The settings presented in this book share one important commonality: they are all divorced from the world beyond by sheer distance. This isolation carries a sense of threat all on its own: nobody can come help you, vital resources are out of reach, and the threat could be hiding anywhere around you. And of course, your cell phone doesn't have any signal.

Not every horrific setting needs to or should share this oppressive isolation, but in *Insomnia*, this is a vital element that helps contain the threat and the characters, so as to facilitate a bone-chilling story.

Dwelling Within.

Everything included with the settings in this book is designed to sharpen your storytelling and facilitate a spine-tingling experience. There are no lore bibles or street maps to memorize, because every element is optional and modular. When a setting comes off the page and springs to life on your desktop, it becomes your own bespoke version, and requires enough versatility to adapt to your adventure and the whims of your players. Therefore, use the following elements as you please, whether improvising to suit the terror of the moment, or meticulously planning floor plans and histories.

Locations. Each setting is accompanied by a catalog of horrific locations: dilapidated manors, pitch-black forests, haunted caverns, and worse. The rest of the map is probably filled with decidedly less haunted streets and homes—places that people live and work—but you can fill in these mundane locations as the needs of the story demand. The locations with each setting should prove useful in a monster investigation: corners that might conceal a lair, act as a suitable trap, or lodge a number of key characters. Feel free to add or subtract from this list as you see fit.

Factions. Schemes, alliances, and above all, secrets are the tissue of an investigation. Is an organization of monster hunters at work, or a deranged cult with delusions of grandeur? Who is watching the characters everywhere they go, and who has decided to stand in the way of their investigation?

The factions of each setting can link together characters you introduce in subtle or obvious ways. You only need a few factions to flesh out the dynamics of a story, so your adventures can offer a surplus of conspiracy boards for the players. Moreover, factions are crucial as you expand a single *Insomnia* investigation into an incursion campaign, as some invisible hand should be at work causing the monsters to appear.

SETTING PARALLELS

The three settings in this book are woven with intentional parallels, both in small details and larger concepts, which you can leverage to connect your campaign between them, or simply imply an eerie synchronicity.

The 1212. The best way in and out of the setting is the 1212, which arrives but once a month.

The Deep Presence. Deep below the earth lies an invisible, malevolent presence, an aspect or a source of the larger incursion.

The Erebus Conspiracy. An organization of unethical scholars have undertaken an experiment into the supernatural, perhaps aiding the wider incursion.

The Old Guard. Someone in town has been fighting monsters since before you were born, and they're looking for new blood to continue their legacy.

Toothless Protectors. The official law and order is feckless at best, and unprepared to face the supernatural threats that bear down upon them.

Eccentric, but Harmless. A single individual knows that supernatural forces are at work, and works to recruit new arrivals.

Finley West. A drifter musician knows more than they're letting on. It's always the same person—Finley West—in each setting. How are they connected to these different worlds?

Abandoned, but Not Empty. An abandoned building rots not far from the setting, an unwelcome reminder of past opulence and future, inevitable decline.

The Rundown Lodge. Those new to the city can find temporary accommodations in an unfriendly motel, tavern, or bar.

Nonplayer Characters. When the players saunter into a bar and start asking questions, you are struck with the Game Master's greatest and most stubborn challenge: generating an entire person on the spot, replete with memories, motivations, and a cohesive name. It's the biggest stumbling block for new GMs and one that poisons many roleplaying games with threadbare casts and cardboard-cutout interactions.

Therefore, each setting in *Insomnia* comes with a cast of NPCs which you can use in any arrangement you please. Pick them out of a hat to populate a bar, rename or reimagine them, supplement them with characters of your own imagination, or kill them to raise the stakes. This army of chess pieces is yours to control, without the fuss of dreaming them up. And remember: a story without characters is no story at all.

Rules. No matter what setting you choose, *Insomnia* uses 5th Edition rules. You don't need to learn a new system or dig through a new set of classes. Settings outside the fantasy adventure mold, however, also include a smattering of optional rules to expand 5th Edition to new genres; specifically, modern horror and science fiction. These include weapons like firearms and blasters, new skills, character creation options, and a set of subclasses. Furthermore, you can take these rules and use them elsewhere; they enable you to leverage 5th Edition rules for a staggering variety of stories.

As with everything else, these rules are modular and optional. If you want a modern setting that includes fantasy races, like dwarves and elves, simply skip the Human Characters rule. Likewise, if you want to drop a few science-fiction blasters in a fantasy village, feel free to implement the Futuristic Weapons in another setting.

Page 37. Nowhere

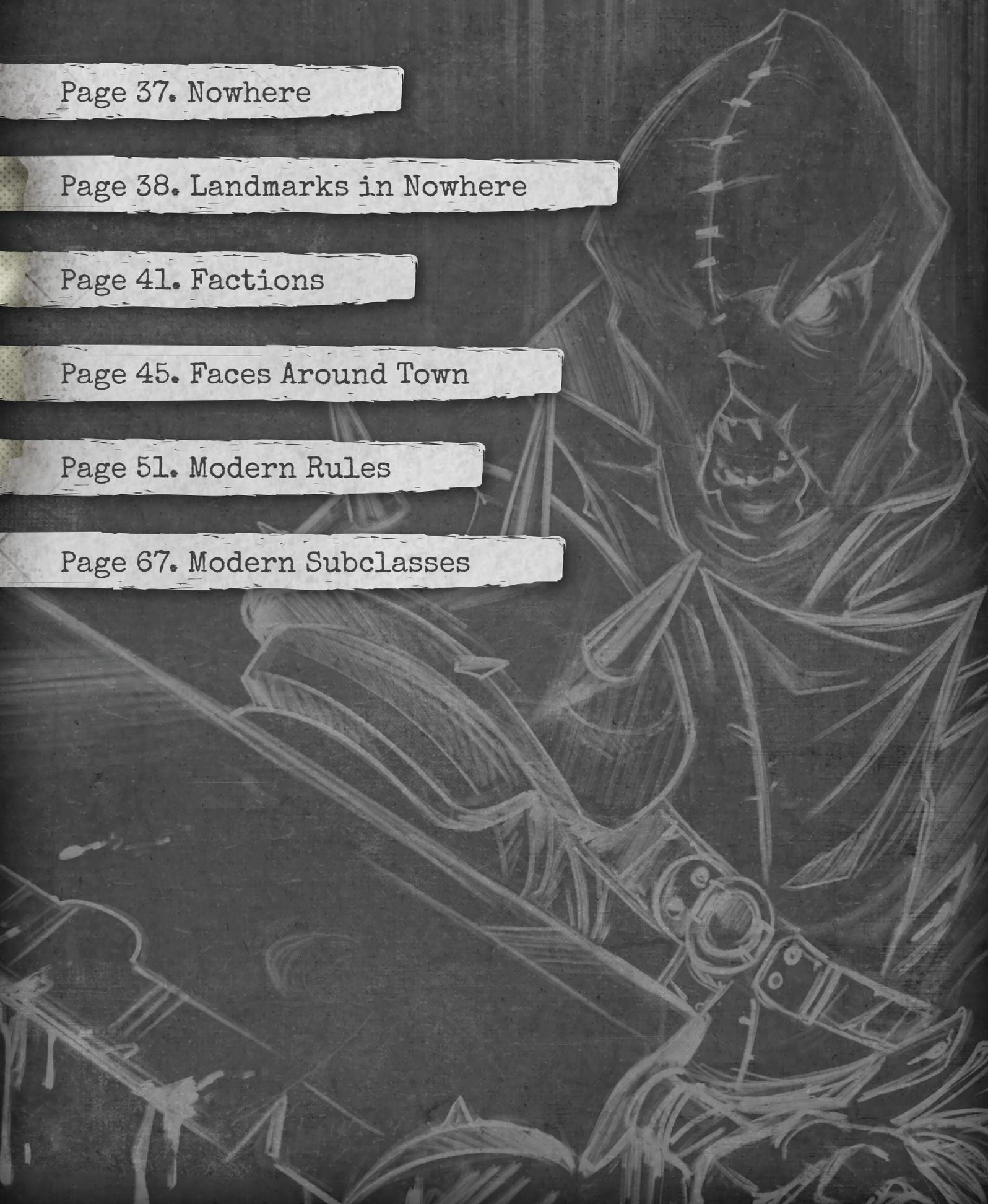
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CHAPTER 2: NOWHERE, USA

NOWHERE

The American West and Midwest are places defined by vast, open nothingness: empty prairies as far as the eye can see, beautiful rock formations breaking up the monotony of dry weeds and cacti, and above all else, roads. Long, serpentine highways and interstates weave together the lonesome western towns dotting the otherwise featureless landscape. Innumerable rural towns, each with the bare essentials to call themselves a town, serve as mile-markers along the main roads, with even more remote towns down less trafficked roads, and more remote towns down even smaller roads, and so on, ending in towns as lonely as Nowhere—no less than 70 minutes from its nearest neighbor.

Towns like Nowhere have a sense of being liminal, connected to a vague state of decaying rural Americana and separate from the rest of the world. Perhaps that is why strangeness seems to aggregate in towns such as it. An oral tradition of spotting monsters out in the desert and seeing strange lights in the night sky pervades Nowhere, not in a weak bid to attract tourists, but as a persistent note in the town records. Perhaps people there are just bored, or perhaps, strangeness is easier to spot when there's nothing else around.



Around Nowhere.

As its name implies, even the people who founded Nowhere knew that it was as far from the world as a place could be. On the state map, there are only two towns near Nowhere: Weatherby and Chiron. Weatherby is a scant 40 miles away, but to the people of Nowhere, it might as well be across the state, for there is no direct route between the two cities taking less than two hours of detours on the interstate and lonely backroad driving. Curiously, not a single person in Nowhere can attest to visiting Weatherby, but everyone agrees that Nowhere is much nicer in every respect. Chiron, on the other hand, is a phantom city—a fictitious entry on maps probably meant to deter map plagiarists, which has nonetheless been copied countless times into every map of the area. Where the town of Chiron supposedly stands is instead a bare field of sun-scorched earth and dry weeds.

Only two paved roads lead into Nowhere: Route 91, heading south, and Black Pine Road, heading East. Responsible for connecting the two, there is but a single red stop sign in the town, a landmark all its residents can navigate by. The remaining roads crisscrossing the desert outside of Nowhere are forgotten unofficial paths, leading from places abandoned to remote dead-ends.

A single charter bus, the Schedule 1212 (the “twelve-twelve” to the locals), treks out to Nowhere monthly, passing dozens of small towns on the way.

Almost nobody takes the 1212 unless they're trying to leave the world behind.

Magic in Nowhere.

True magic in the real world is almost unheard-of, solely the domain of fantasy and theatrical card tricks. It is a forgotten art, a remnant of bygone civilizations that is only now being rediscovered. However, in Nowhere, a place far from the normal, magical forces are on the rise, much to the chagrin of stage magicians everywhere.

Arcane Distortion.

Nearly all magical effects create an invisible aura, a distortion in the arcane field of the universe, visible only with spells such as detect magic. These auras also interfere with most technology, causing lights to flicker, machines to momentarily malfunction, and images and video to distort with a characteristic warp and distorted hues. As such, photographing or video recording magical occurrences is extraordinarily challenging, usually resulting in out of focus or corrupted footage.

Unintuitively, even analogs of spells, such as diagrams and complete descriptions, undergo arcane distortions that smudge the ink on pages or burn the underlying paper. Only a custom blend of inks can convey a spell's complexity, and only a small collection of antique books are inked in the same fashion. These scraps of forgotten knowledge are fueling the rediscovery of true magic.

To mitigate the effects of arcane distortion, arcanists have long communicated via obscure ciphers that require foreknowledge of the text to decipher. Most magical knowledge, therefore, is encoded in layers of symbolism and mysticism—

impenetrable to an outside observer, but invaluable to a mage in training. Modern arcanists utilize a bevy of similar schemes to share their spells, usually with mixed results. Improperly encoded, the geometry of a spell can corrupt hard drives, crash servers, and even burn the image onto a monitor, so only fragments of true magic can be found stashed in libraries or floating around on obscure message boards.

Landmarks in Nowhere.

Like many small towns, Nowhere carries the slow rot of a place abandoned by time. Businesses never come to town, and people only seem to leave. The few shops and landmarks that remain become stagnant for generations, somehow untouched by the march of time.

The following locations could prove fruitful when crafting a story or engaging in a monster hunt.

The Bostwick Place.

The rotting structure, with its boarded-up windows and peeling paint, is a festering sore on the town of Nowhere. For three generations, children have been told to “stay out of the Bostwick Place,” mostly to no avail. Teenagers are fond of daring one another to venture within the building after sundown, staying there as long as they can bear the sounds of rodents underfoot and the structure groaning overhead. Rumors abound about why the home—larger than many around it—was abandoned in the first place, but that fact may have been lost to local history. Apart from the atmosphere of the structure, the people of Nowhere worry about the Bostwick Place for the



same reason they worry about their town: the old building stands as an ever-present reminder of the fate which could eventually befall every home and business as the town stagnates.

Camp Baloak.

After a half-hour of driving, the featureless landscape outside Nowhere gives way to hills and greenery surrounding a small lake. This oasis plays host to the only summer camp in the area: Camp Baloak. Over summer vacation, the children of Nowhere are bussed out to Baloak by the dozens to learn the staples of survivalism, engage in arts and crafts, and swim in the lake.

Nestled among the pines and hills around the lake are a number of cabins, seven of which belong to the camp, and many more which do not. Some are extravagant getaways for wealthy folks from well outside Nowhere with a desire to get far away from the world, whereas others are dilapidated and apparently abandoned.

The Dairy Prince.

A legally-distinct version of a popular ice cream and burger franchise, the Dairy Prince is the sole fast food restaurant within Nowhere. For all its idiosyncrasies, the Dairy Prince is clean, inexpensive, and family-friendly. Its menu is also inexplicably large, listing everything from burgers, to tapas, to shrimp, to teriyaki chicken. With few other food options (and no other quick ones), the Dairy Prince is a common meeting place for the people of Nowhere, a neutral ground where everyone from Ol' Mariam Webster to the mayor himself come to grab a quick bite to eat.

Last Stop Motel: Free Wifi.

The weathered door of the Last Stop Motel is illuminated only by a flickering lightbulb and the dim glow of the motel's neon sign. Incidentally, the word "Motel" on the sign is perpetually out, causing the sign to read "Last Stop (Free Wifi)." The rest of the building is in a similar state of disrepair: rooms have cracked windows, dingy furniture, and the occasional cockroach. The motel's owner, a venerable former mechanic, will only incoherently growl at complaints from his desk and point at prices on a poster behind him. Despite the inhospitality, visitors to Nowhere will likely find no other place to stay—for as long as the Last Stop manages to remain open, it has something of a monopoly on the small town.

Nowhere High.

From 6th to 12th grade, the children and teens of Nowhere attend the rundown but serviceable Nowhere High. Each graduating class hovers between 75 and 100 students, and usually manages to field an entire football team, which is bussed multiple hours in any given direction to compete (and usually lose) against other small town teams. Their mascot, Argo the Astronaut, is a begrudging hometown symbol, even though the costume has historically been terrible.

Whenever odd (or indeed, supernatural) happenings crop up in Nowhere, chances are that a group of high schoolers have caught onto it early. This might be simple precociousness at work, for students often have little better to do than spread rumors and scary stories, or it might be that weirdness collects in a few students at Nowhere High each year.



Ol' Jeb's Place.

The ominous creaking of a rusted windcatcher cuts the silence over this lone barn and farmhouse. The specter of abandonment hangs over everything on the farm: tractors sit unused, the chicken coop collects dust, and the unplanted corn fields have become overrun with weeds. Yet as locals will attest, the farm isn't abandoned—Ol' Jeb is just a recluse, and will meet any visitors to his homestead with a shotgun and a short temper. Though some people speculate about Ol' Jeb and his farm, most people just steer clear. After all, privacy and property are king this far from polite society.

Owljay Caverns.

The howling maw of this cave system might have been a tourist attraction in any place other than Nowhere. Instead, despite its shimmering array of stalactites and stalagmites, its only marks of human visitation are a string of lightbulbs hanging in its very entrance, connected to a generator outside. The winding caverns twist and turn in the pitch black within, plunging deep within the earth to new and undiscovered chambers and tunnels that no human being was meant to walk. Every few years a daring spelunker goes missing in the caverns, searches are conducted, and nobody is found. Without any better recourse, a new sign proclaiming that the cavern is "strictly off limits" will be erected, and swiftly ignored.

Salt Crater.

A baffling natural phenomenon, salt crater is a deep, circular gorge outside of town. Inside, a thick layer of salt lies cracked atop the stone, as if a shallow, spherical salt lake dried up on the spot. Residents of Nowhere regard the crater with a measure of superstition and annoyance, as it invites attention from a wide audience of U.F.O. conspiracy theorists whenever a new article is written about its existence. Geologists, for their part, have a few potential explanations for the crater, ranging from the straw-grasping theoretical to the inconceivably complex.

Seven's Bar.

If drinking beer counts as recreation, Seven's Bar enjoys a tidy recreational monopoly in Nowhere. Out front, its sign bears the solid maroon and bold numeral of its namesake "7" pool ball. Within, Seven's is the standard American dive bar, built exactly to specification, if there were a specification for such a thing. Patrons can expect the standard amenities: a jukebox, pool table and dart board, several neon signs advertising domestic beers of questionable quality, stale nuts, a sturdy wooden bar, and three taps.

A weekly cast of regulars files in after their workdays or only on weekends, as is their respective customs, always filling about half the bar. The company might not be particularly warm, but is always a known quantity. Embellished with the right number of drinks, the folks of Nowhere are downright pleasant in Seven's, and perhaps even willing to reveal a secret or two.

Still Waves Church.

The narrow structure of Still Waves Church narrowly avoids being a one room chapel by virtue of its attached parsonage.

When the seasons change and the old maple tree out front is consumed with a riot of colors, the church might look picturesque, until one examines it closely. The white paint is peeling a little more every year, in parallel with the dropping attendance of its congregation. Its heavy oak doors and pews were built to last, and bear the scratches and scuffs of long service; perhaps too many scratches and scuffs for a place of worship. Inside, a stained glass window portrays a familiar scene of a saint calming an ocean, but a spiderweb crack has spread through it, casting innumerable dark edges into the holy scene. A sense of unease pervades the place, as if it were not only neglected by a long line of preachers, but also forsaken by some higher power as well.

Factions.

In places like Nowhere, the frothing waves of small town politics infect events small and large. Beyond the quaint drama of he-said-she-said arguments and petty legal disputes, larger factions of allegiances and rivalries drive the town in obvious and invisible ways. Sometimes this represents generations-long feuds between families or the messy fallout of a workplace argument, but other times it manifests in secret societies and behind-closed-doors dealmaking.

You can include some or all of the following factions in Nowhere to aid or hinder the characters' ongoing investigations. You can also introduce your own factions, omit some or all of this list, or merge factions together in the service of your story.

THE BARTLEBYS

Nobody in Nowhere speaks to the Bartlebys. The extended Bartleby family, numbering in the dozens, dwells in an isolated farm a few miles from town surrounded with a rusted fence and barbed wire.

The "Keep Out" signs perforated with buckshot holes complete the message. Once a month Margaret Bartleby treks into town for supplies, sparing no pleasantries on the way. The only Bartleby that will speak to outsiders is the family patriarch, Ol' Eustace, a man of prodigious, maybe impossible, age.



BUNKER LIGHTS

The sight of mushroom clouds and apocalyptic rhetoric scarred generations of Americans, from small towns to coastal metropolises. In Nowhere, this anxiety manifested in an ad hoc club of preppers, folks who stockpile emergency supplies in fallout shelters for any given disaster—just in case. Nobody is sure who coined the name Bunker Lights, but given that preppers sometimes work in their bunkers until long after dark, the name stuck. Some members keep a rational stock of supplies, whereas others entertain paranoid end-of-the-world scenarios and build their bunkers into elaborate second homes. A few even had an inkling of something sinister lurking in the dark expanse beyond Nowhere, and built their bunkers with extra study doors to deter intruders, natural or otherwise.



THE CAVERNEERS

A ragtag coalition of spelunkers, bird-watchers, and hikers, the Caverneers have created a pastime out of warding folks away from Owljay Caverns. Whenever someone roams too close, they register on a collection of game cameras, and activate a Halloween's worth of special effects: spooky noises on repeat, a fog machine, and even a string of lights rigged to sputter out. This usually does the trick of frightening away teenagers, but the Caverneers are prepared to intercept serious spelunkers with tales of chemical leaks. When that fails, they keep a replica police uniform on hand to issue threats.

The Caverneers believe there is a presence lingering in the depths of Owljay Caverns, responsible for spiral carvings on the cave walls and abducting anyone who ventures too deep. Most Caverneers have witnessed minor supernatural events around the caverns, but above all, they can sense something down below. A few reckon they can feel it dreaming down there. Naturally, the plan is to prevent anyone from disturbing it.



CHAIN OF SORCERERS

Andrew Staples fancies himself a magician—not a stage magician, but a true wielder of arcana and a link in the Chain of Sorcerers tracing its authority back to Merlin. Naturally, Andrew has tried repeatedly to secure a magician's apprentice for himself, to continue the historic Chain of Sorcerers into another generation, but everyone from children to septuagenarians have rebuffed his offer of mentorship. And for his trouble, Andrew has earned the ire of the Sheriff's Department, who threatens to charge him with disturbing the peace whenever he makes a scene of his magical apprenticeship.

Sadly, Andrew Staples *is* a true magician, but a terrible one, commanding a few cantrips that resemble clumsy magic tricks more than true arcana. His master, a venerable wizard, was claimed by pancreatic cancer mere days after recruiting the impressionable young Staples into an apprenticeship. Perhaps if he could find an apprentice with true magical potential, Andrew could redeem himself as a sorcerer. Or perhaps, Andrew Staples will die an anonymous death alongside the nearly-forgotten Chain of Sorcerers.

SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Depending on who you ask, the sheriff's department for the Nowhere-Weatherby area is entirely hapless or corrupt. The county supports only the sheriff himself and a half-dozen deputies, of which three or so are stationed in Nowhere at once, so officers are stretched thin at the best of times. When tragedy strikes, a sheriff's deputy is usually late, ill-prepared, and sleep-deprived. Such is the life of rural law enforcement. However, most of the deputies mean well. They're integral to the community and strive to improve it whenever they can, even if that means looking the other way on small infractions to keep folks out of trouble.



EREBUS CORPORATION



A few dozen miles down Route 91 stands a featureless gray office building, the type that litters the backdrop of office parks across the country. Since no locals have ever even entered the building, the only clue to its providence is the sign reading “Erebus Corporation” at the edge of the parking lot. Bespectacled office workers arrive and depart at the usual hours, driving out to Weatherby or beyond each day when their work is done. For their part, the locals Nowhere don’t pay the miscellaneous corporation much mind. It might be an obscure government contractor, a confounding digital service, or something as benign as accountancy.

The truth is far more mysterious, however. Erebus Corporation surveils every corner of Nowhere with a hidden network of ears and eyes, wired directly back to their office. Even the workers don’t know what they’re searching for, but it could be related to the high-security sub-basement under the building. As long as the salaries and benefits remain generous, they won’t question a thing.

NOWHERE GAZETTE

A distinguished two-story brick building near the center of Nowhere houses the Gazette, the town’s sole newspaper, which is thrown weekly by bicycle-riding children onto front lawns across town. Each week, the paper delivers snapshots of the municipal government, summaries of national topics, and puff pieces about high-achieving local students. The paper’s modest ambitions are facilitated by a staff of only four: an editor, a typographer, an archivist, and the town’s solitary reporter, who most folks have learned to regard with incendiary frustration.

Unbeknownst to one another, the reporter and archivist of the Nowhere Gazette have begun pulling on strings pointing toward the same mystery: something strange—even supernatural—is happening in Nowhere. The reporter chases down leads with each passing monster attack, while the archivist finds records of strange occurrences going back decades. Will they crack the biggest case that Nowhere has ever seen, or will their story go up in smoke?





SILVERHEAD LODGE

Out in the country, there are few more popular hobbies than hunting deer (though squirrel and turkey hunting are close runners up), so hunting clubs like the Silverhead Lodge are perfectly at home in Nowhere. An old brick farmhouse on the edge of town has played host to the lodge since before anyone can remember, and has seen its membership decline to perhaps six silver-haired hunters. Without new blood, the lodge will certainly close its doors someday soon.

The Silverhead Lodge keeps a secret, however. There's not much game around Nowhere, but nightmares have lurked in the darkness since before the town was founded. With rifles and silver-tipped crossbow bolts in stowe, members of the lodge meet twice weekly to plan and conduct clandestine hunts to banish these horrors. When all goes well, they return before sunrise with their "game" and no one's the wiser. Decades of experience have made each member of the lodge a deadly expert in the art of monster slaying, but none are invincible. With age comes sluggishness, the few remaining members have lost their edge. A single supernatural threat could end the lodge once and for all.

However, recruiting new members is no small task. New hunters must survive an encounter with a supernatural threat in complete secrecy before beginning training. Only then can they inherit the coveted insignia of the lodge—an arrowhead of three intersecting lines—and call themselves hunters.

THISTLE AND THORN SOCIETY

Ostensibly, the Thistle and Thorn Society is a small-town gardening organization of a dozen members with aspirations of town beautification. In practice, it is nothing of the sort. For a hundred years, Thistle and Thorn members have endeavored to pacify the supernatural forces around Nowhere and conceal evidence of supernatural events. As their members include the mayor of Nowhere and the editor of the Gazette, they have been remarkably successful.

To the Thistle and Thorn Society, ethical considerations are secondary to the greater good; after all, appeasement sometimes requires concessions. If a few teenagers are devoured every few decades, it's a small price to preserve the town as a whole. Such dilemmas define the society, but they have always chosen secrecy over panic, and sacrifice over disaster. Whenever someone begins to untangle the supernatural happenings around the town, the members of the Thistle and Thorn gently redirect investigations, or forcefully intercede when necessary.



Faces Around Town.

Most folks from Nowhere were born there and will die there, perhaps with a sojourn in a “big city” before settling back down in their hometown. Generations of families maintain their plots and houses, even as the town shrinks around them.

You can introduce the following nonplayer characters (NPCs) into your investigations as suspects, allies, antagonists, and innocents to be protected. Like everything else in *Insomnia*, you can omit some or all of this list, supplement these NPCs with those of your own creation, and modify them as needed in the service of your story.

Alex the Archivist.

Alex Dewitt (*she/they*) is a paranoid archivist, easily recognized by her wheelchair and bottle cap glasses. Almost ten years ago, a tragic accident ended their career as curator of a big city museum. Alex moved back to her family home in Nowhere, but to this day no one knows what caused the deaths of over a dozen people at the Mediterranean Ceramics Exhibition.

These days the back rooms of the Nowhere Gazette have become Alex’s museum, trinkets from around the world arranged between boxes of back issues and rolls of microfilm. The accident, or perhaps her research leading up to it, rattled Alex to her core, enough to spend the last decade gluing a small fortune of pennies to the walls. Is it to keep something out, or to contain something within?

Ava Powers.

Ava Powers (*she/her*) is a sarcastic kid who knows too much. Ava spends as much of her time as possible on the seat of her candy apple red bike with tassels and a silver bell on its handlebars. Adults in Nowhere either don’t seem to notice her or assume she’s not important, and Ava has no interest in disabusing them of either notion. Everyone 12 and under, however, knows Ava is a force to be reckoned with: faster, smarter, and braver than people more than twice her age. When Ava gets that look on her face, it’s best to get out of her way.

Brandon, Ava’s dad, used to work for the Erebus Corporation before a mysterious accident left him with a broken leg and fits of rambling incoherence. Although the workman’s comp settlement gave the Powers family enough to set them up for life, Ava doesn’t want their money—she wants her father back.

Though Ava is adamant that she’ll bring the corporation to justice, she is secretly worried about the voice she occasionally hears whispering clues to her in the dead of night. The voice seems friendly, at least for now.



Coach Bell.

Kevin Bell (*he/him*) is a loudmouth gym teacher that insists on being called Coach at all times. Once the greatest athlete Nowhere High had ever seen, Coach tore an ACL his senior year, and the college scouts who would have been his ticket out of this little town never called back. Coach hasn't left the halls of Nowhere High since, becoming its janitor, substitute teacher, then gym teacher, all while watching the records he set and trophies he earned be slowly replaced by Nowhere High's next generation of athletes.

Coach rules the gym with an iron clipboard. (Metaphorically speaking, that is; like his battered, ancient whistle, the clipboard is brushed aluminum.) Neither implement is ever far from his hand. With these tools, he forges Nowhere High's students into successful athletes, hoping that they will get the chance he never had to leave Nowhere and play on the national stage. There is almost nothing he won't do to make that happen. After all, if even one of them makes it, Coach will finally know he wasn't a failure.

Danté Brown, Editor-in-Chief.

Danté Brown (*he/him*) is the cynical editor of the Nowhere Gazette who conceals the town's most damning secrets. With a nosy reporter, an agoraphobic archivist, and an unpredictable typographer on his payroll, Brown has his hands full keeping the Gazette from poking more hornet's nests than it can handle. Dante will always choose secrecy over panic, and appeasement over antagonism. The paper shredder under his desk is his most faithful friend.

As if keeping the secrets of Nowhere wasn't enough, Danté has a few of his own. After a stressful day at the office, Danté loves nothing better than to relax and unwind with a homemade wine brewed in the tornado shelter in his basement. Sometimes, when he's deep in his cups, he visits the unmarked graves behind his home and pours one out to those he's buried there.





Deputy Dankowski.

Fresh out of Nowhere High, Deputy Billy Dankowski Jr. (*he/him*), known around town as “Junior,” joined the Sheriff’s Department less than a year ago as his father stepped down, making for a mostly-seamless transition. However, whereas his father was a confident if rough-edged veteran of small-town affairs, Billy is mousey and fumbling, spending his days hanging around the Sheriff’s Department until a call comes in. Usually, he needs some urging from the department’s lone secretary to intervene in uncomfortable, dangerous, or even just irksome situations. Billy is in top form only on the rare occasions that Sheriff Chuck Beecher ventures from Weatherby to Nowhere to check in on the oft-forgotten town.

When off duty, Deputy Billy isn’t drinking at the Seven’s Bar or fishing in the creek; he’s at his small trailer watching anime from the 1990s on VHS and replaying *Final Fantasy VII*, passions which he could never share with his colleagues or anyone in town.

Finley West.

Finley West (*he/him*) is a guitar-playing drifter with a beautiful voice and his hat in his hand. For the past few weeks he’s been doing odd jobs around town during the day and playing for tips in the evening. Everything about Finley, from his RV behind the Last Stop Motel to his crisp accent, says he’s Not From Here™, and that means everyone in town regards him with a mix of fascination and disdain. Finley can write a song about anything, or so he claims. Between taking requests for country standards and covering classic rock hits, Finley’s shows include a smattering of originals whose raw poetry and powerful performance move even the saltiest farmer to misty-eyed reflection. Reading between the lyrics proves Finley is more familiar with arcana than Andrew Staples and knows more about the malevolence around town than he lets on.

Finley claims he’s on his way to California eventually, but he never seems to give a straight answer about where he’s coming from, and he seems pretty nervous around the Sheriff’s Department.

Granny Myrtle.

Granny Myrtle (*she/her*) is a lovable arborist who treats everyone in town like a grandchild, or else. Generations of her family have lived and died Nowhere, and Granny Myrtle enjoys the benefits of social capital laid up over nearly the whole of the town's history. Everyone knows Granny, Granny knows everyone, and everyone is happy to see her tending the trees and flower beds along Nowhere's main drag. If she isn't happy to see you, it's time to check your closet for missing skeletons.

Every woman in the Thistle and Thorn Society is an equal, and Granny Myrtle is the most equal of them all. Her roses have won first prize at the Nowhere Summer Festival for eleven years running, and at this point no one dares run against her. The fertilizers and gardening methods that produce these brilliant blooms are a jealousy guarded, perhaps otherworldly secret.

Pastor Kerri.

The Still Waves Church in Nowhere has seen three preachers depart—two of them to the grave—in the last year. Carolyn Kerri (*she/her*) is the fourth and most recent, and has understandably seen plummeting attendance of her congregation, as nobody seems to know who will be delivering the sermon this Sunday. Rumors have it that the church is cursed, and that Pastor Kerri is sure to abandon her post or die within a few months, just like Pastor Winslow and Pastor García before her. Undaunted, Carolyn has laid down roots in the small town and prepared for the long haul. It seems she had few other seminarian prospects after the “exorcism” incident that prompted her removal from her previous church in Ohio. Thankfully, not a soul in Nowhere has heard of her or discovered the article from the Ashtabula Star-Beacon that outlines the scandal.



Mac the Mechanic.

Colin “Mac” Macyntire (*he/him*) is an obstinate mechanic who can fix anything. His coveralls are thick with grease and shop dust, and his battered “big bucket o’ tools” bristles with an inscrutable assortment of rusty implements. Despite an otherwise oil-stained first impression, Mac looks like an angel to anyone stranded by the interstate or stuck in the mud. Given how often things break down in Nowhere, about half the town owes Mac a favor. His neon sign and incandescent shop lights stay lit on Nowhere’s main street until late in the night. Perhaps the only relationships Mac doesn’t manage well are with his wife and kids.

The huge drum of used oil in the back of Mac’s shop hasn’t been emptied since anyone can remember, but always has room for another gallon of whatever fluid Mac drains into it. Though it’s hard to be sure in the deafening rock music blaring in the shop, it seems like Mac talks to the drum. Occasionally, it burbles back. And Mac has been a lot more insistent about regular oil changes lately.

Reporter Julie Hargrave.

Julie Hargrave (*she/her*) is a curious reporter with a chip on her shoulder. As the Nowhere Gazette’s only on-staff journalist, Julie is always on her way to or from an assignment, and at least half the time she’s mad about it. So much about Nowhere doesn’t add up, and the furious rattle of keys on her laptop or smartphone is the sound of her doing the math. The events that fill her schedule are either too mundane to give her the answers she desperately seeks, like Granny Myrtle’s third blue ribbon for pumpkin rolls at the fair, or too uncanny to provide anything but more questions, like the lights spotted over Salt Crater. If she can just connect everything on her office’s cork board with red thread, she might finally figure out what happened to her brother all those years ago.



Seth the Metal Detector.

Seth Williams (*he/him*) is a skittish local who carries a metal detector everywhere he goes. From frontier-era artifacts to pieces of electronic devices no one recognizes, Seth has filled his hatchback's muddy trunk with the fruits of his labors. He knows an awful lot about history, electronics, the US Mint, and the radiation-blocking properties of aluminum foil, but not a lot about polite behavior or why people seem to avoid him. He's single-handedly responsible for more "No Trespassing" signs than anyone else in Nowhere, which he disregards nonetheless. Usually found magnet fishing off the bridge or combing the creek behind the Nowhere Gazette, Seth can provide an endless supply of varyingly-useful information and evidence for the low price of a grape soda. The one object he'll never talk about is hidden behind the locked door of his garden shed, where he spends most weekends tinkering.

Simon Bauer the Silverhead.

Simon Bauer (*he/him*) is a no-nonsense farmer whose Sunday best is overalls and camo. A white-haired barrel of a man, Simon's arms and shoulders are thick with muscle from coaxing a living out of the cornfields around Nowhere. Simon buried his wife somewhere in the back forty acres last winter and now eats at the Dairy Prince practically every night, where he doesn't talk much but overhears everything. Twice a week, Simon unlocks the doors of the Silverhead Lodge for its handful of members and takes the rifle out of his truck rack to clean it for the hunting season. Despite the brand new tires on his tractor and the shiny new siding on his farmhouse, Simon is (like most farmers) always one bad harvest away from financial ruin.



MODERN RULES

Like many great horror films, *Nowhere* doesn't exist in an abstract fantasy setting or science fiction dystopia—it's in the here and now, just a few miles down a lonely road. As such, you might require some supplemental and replacement rules to adapt 5th Edition from medieval kingdoms to rural Americana. This section contains variant rules for human character creation, new skills, non-armor-based AC, firearms, improvised weapons, and modern equipment. You can use these rules to transport any 5e game in a modern setting by simply layering them on top of the core 5e rules.

Don't feel restricted by these options, however. Once *Nowhere* leaves the pages of this book and enters your campaign, it's entirely yours. If you prefer a version of this setting with elves and dwarves, feel free to eschew the Human Characters rules. If you would rather place *Nowhere* in a place where firearms aren't readily accessible or a time in which they don't exist, simply ignore the firearm rules.

Modern Skills.

Replaces Tools

In the modern day, many existing skills take on new, prominent roles, whereas others are relegated to afterthoughts. Animal Handling, for example, was simply more important when horseback was the principal means of travel, but Sleight of Hand is arguably more important than ever. This setting introduces three new skills: **DRIVING**, **HANDYWORK**, and **TECHNOLOGY**, to supplement the existing framework of skills and offer new, innovative ways to interact with the world.

Dexterity (Driving).

Your Dexterity (Driving) check covers how well you can drive in poor conditions or pull off complicated maneuvers behind the wheel. You don't need Driving proficiency to be able to drive an automobile (or most boats, for that matter), and being able to drive doesn't automatically give you proficiency in this skill. Rather, the GM might call for a Dexterity (Driving) check when you weave through traffic on a motorcycle, when you make a handbrake turn on a sports car, or when you fight to maintain control over a speeding car in difficult circumstances.

This skill can alternatively be called Piloting when it applies to flying aircraft. A Dexterity (Piloting) check and a Dexterity (Driving) check are identical; modifiers which apply to one also apply to the other. You don't need proficiency in Piloting to keep a plane aloft in calm conditions, but you do need it to make tight turns or land successfully.

Wisdom (Handiwork).

The Handiwork skill replaces the wide and antiquated swathe of tools and proficiencies used in fantasy settings. It governs your knowledge and experience of various repair, construction, and modification tasks. Using a Wisdom (Handiwork) check, you can hang drywall, fix a leaky toilet, repair a tractor, construct makeshift weapons, or rig up an alarm system. At the GM's discretion, you might require a set of general or specific tools to use this skill with proficiency. This skill covers purely practical skills learned through experience, but doesn't cover knowledge of computers or electronics beyond the basics of wiring and providing power.

Intelligence (Technology).

This skill encompasses your knowledge of computers, software, and the internet. You don't need Technology proficiency to use a computer or cell phone, but the GM might call for an Intelligence (Technology) check when you scour the internet for obscure information, attempt to crack a computer or phone's password, or assemble or repair a piece of technology. Note that this skill doesn't govern certain practical technology skills, such as rewiring a light socket in your home. As a rule of thumb, if it requires more experience than knowledge, the task uses Handiwork.



Modern Skill Proficiencies.

At 1st level, characters can choose to gain proficiency with these new skills, as shown on the following table:

Class	Skills
<i>Base Classes</i>	
Barbarian	Driving, Handiwork
Bard	Driving, Handiwork, Technology
Cleric	Handiwork
Druid	Handiwork
Fighter	Driving, Handiwork
Monk	Driving
Paladin	Driving, Handiwork
Ranger	Driving, Handiwork
Rogue	Driving, Handiwork, Technology
Sorcerer	Technology
Warlock	Driving, Technology
Wizard	Technology
<i>Mage Hand Press Classes</i>	
Alchemist	Driving, Handiwork, Technology
Captain	Driving, Handiwork
Craftsman	Driving, Handiwork, Technology
Gunslinger	Driving, Handiwork
Investigator	Driving, Technology
Martyr	Handiwork
Necromancer	Technology
Warden	Driving, Handiwork
Warmage	Driving, Technology
Witch	Technology

CHARACTER ROULETTE

Are you feeling lucky? Uninspired? Reckless? Roll d100 three times and assign the results to your character's Personality, Identity, and Quirk however you please. The resulting character may or may not be cohesive, but is sure to be utterly unique.

Human Characters.

Replaces Fantasy Races and Backgrounds

Few modern American towns are inhabited by elves, orcs, and halflings (renaissance fairs notwithstanding). Therefore, you can use this variant rule during character creation to help craft compelling human characters that feel at home in modern stories.

You can write an evocative, bespoke character with one sentence using the following structure:

I'm a [Personality] [Identity] who [Quirks]

You might play an "Outspoken librarian with a heart of gold" or a "Blunt programmer who believes in every conspiracy theory." Personalities, identities, and quirks are described in the following sections.

Personality.

First, pick a personality trait off the following list. Each personality is associated with two ability scores—you increase one of these ability scores of your choice by 2, and the other by 1. Alternatively, choose any word for your personality and increase any two ability scores.



d100	Personality	Ability Scores
01-03	Articulate	Intelligence, Charisma
04-06	Athletic	Strength, Dexterity
07-09	Blunt	Strength, Constitution
10-12	Boisterous	Strength, Charisma
13-15	Compassionate	Strength, Wisdom
16-18	Competitive	Strength, Intelligence
19-21	Courageous	Strength, Charisma
22-24	Cowardly	Dexterity, Charisma
25-27	Cunning	Dexterity, Intelligence
28-30	Curious	Dexterity, Intelligence
31-33	Cynical	Constitution, Intelligence
34-36	Daring	Dexterity, Constitution
37-39	Dashing	Dexterity, Charisma
40-42	Decisive	Strength, Wisdom
43-45	Devout	Wisdom, Charisma
46-48	Earnest	Constitution, Wisdom
49-51	Easygoing	Dexterity, Charisma
52-54	Folksy	Strength, Dexterity
55-57	Impulsive	Dexterity, Constitution
58-60	Insightful	Intelligence, Wisdom
61-63	Intrepid	Strength, Wisdom
64-66	Meticulous	Intelligence, Dexterity
67-69	Outspoken	Strength, Charisma
70-72	Plucky	Dexterity, Charisma
73-75	Pragmatic	Constitution, Intelligence
76-78	Quirky	Constitution, Charisma
79-81	Refined	Intelligence, Charisma
82-84	Sarcastic	Constitution, Charisma
85-87	Savvy	Intelligence, Wisdom
88-90	Self-Assured	Dexterity, Wisdom
91-93	Stoic	Strength, Constitution
94-96	Sexy	Wisdom, Charisma
97-00	Worldly	Constitution, Wisdom

Identity.

Next, choose an Identity from the options below. Each identity is akin to your background, as a one-word label for how your character might be viewed by others. In particular, this list avoids characters with exceptional qualities, such as “neurosurgeon,” “billionaire,” and “ambassador” in favor of more relatable characters.

Each identity grants proficiency with two skills and grants a feat from a list detailed at the end of this section. You can make your own Identity by picking any two skills and any feat.

Note that some of the following identities use the Modern Skills variant rule.

d100 Identity

- 01-03 **Accountant.** *Skills:* Investigation, Technology. *Feat:* Intellectual.
- 04-06 **Chef.** *Skills:* Nature, Sleight of Hand. *Feat:* Creative.
- 07-09 **College Student.** *Skills:* History, Perception. *Feat:* Dilettante.
- 10-12 **Con Artist.** *Skills:* Deception, Persuasion. *Feat:* Subtle.
- 13-15 **Contractor.** *Skills:* Handiwork, Perception. *Feat:* Salt of the Earth.
- 16-18 **Farmer.** *Skills:* Animal Handling, Handiwork. *Feat:* Salt of the Earth.
- 19-21 **Felon.** *Skills:* Athletics, Sleight of Hand. *Feat:* Survivor.
- 22-24 **Firefighter.** *Skills:* Athletics, Medicine. *Feat:* Survivor.
- 25-27 **Hacker.** *Skills:* Deception, Technology. *Feat:* Subtle.
- 28-30 **Influencer.** *Skills:* Performance, Persuasion. *Feat:* Creative.
- 31-33 **Journalist.** *Skills:* Insight, Persuasion. *Feat:* Creative or Empathetic (your choice).
- 34-36 **Librarian.** *Skills:* History, Investigation. *Feat:* Intellectual.
- 37-39 **Magician.** *Skills:* Performance, Sleight of Hand. *Feat:* Creative.
- 40-42 **Mechanic.** *Skills:* Athletics, Handiwork. *Feat:* Salt of the Earth.

- 43-45 **Medium.** *Skills:* Arcana, Insight. *Feat:* Empathetic.
- 46-48 **Musician.** *Skills:* Acrobatics, Performance. *Feat:* Creative.
- 49-51 **Nurse.** *Skills:* Medicine, Insight. *Feat:* Empathetic.
- 52-54 **Paramedic.** *Skills:* Medicine, Survival. *Feat:* Technical.
- 55-57 **Park Ranger.** *Skills:* Animal Handling, Nature. *Feat:* Salt of the Earth or Technical (your choice).
- 58-60 **Pilot.** *Skills:* Driving (Piloting), Perception. *Feat:* Technical.
- 61-63 **Podcaster.** *Skills:* Performance, Persuasion. *Feat:* Creative.
- 64-66 **Prepper.** *Skills:* Handiwork, Survival. *Feat:* Survivor.
- 67-69 **Priest.** *Skills:* Insight, Religion. *Feat:* Empathetic.
- 70-72 **Professor.** *Skills:* History, Investigation. *Feat:* Intellectual.
- 73-75 **Programmer.** *Skills:* Perception, Technology. *Feat:* Technical.
- 76-78 **Retiree.** *Skills:* History, Intimidation. *Feat:* Salt of the Earth.
- 79-81 **Stand-Up Comedian.** *Skills:* Performance, Insight. *Feat:* Creative.
- 82-84 **Teacher.** *Skills:* History, Insight. *Feat:* Empathetic.
- 85-87 **Therapist.** *Skills:* Insight, Perception. *Feat:* Empathetic.
- 88-90 **Trucker.** *Skills:* Driving, Intimidation. *Feat:* Salt of the Earth.
- 91-93 **Unemployed.** *Skills:* Perception, Persuasion. *Feat:* Dilettante.
- 94-96 **Veteran.** *Skills:* Athletics, Intimidation. *Feat:* Survivor.
- 97-00 **Writer.** *Skills:* Investigation, Perception. *Feat:* Creative.

Quirks.

Lastly, pick, roll on the following table, or write a quirk. Your quirk has no mechanical benefit, but helps make your one-sentence character memorable and engaging.

d100 Quirk

- 01-03 Always Wears Sunglasses, Even Indoors.
- 04-06 Believes Every Conspiracy Theory.
- 07-09 Blows Up At the Slightest Inconvenience.
- 10-12 Can't Tell Anyone "No."
- 13-15 Dabbles in the Occult.
- 16-18 Easily Gets Distracted—Oh Look a Bird!
- 19-21 Falls in Love At First Sight At Least Once a Day.
- 22-24 Fidgets Constantly.
- 25-27 Forgot Everything You Just Told Them.
- 28-30 Has Exclusively Problematic Takes.
- 31-33 Has a Complicated Past.
- 34-36 Has a Heart of Gold.
- 37-39 Identifies as a Pyromaniac.
- 40-42 Insists on Being Called a "Paranormal Investigator."
- 43-45 Insists on Doing Things the Hard Way.
- 46-48 Is Cool as Ice.
- 49-51 Is Deeply Superstitious.
- 52-54 Is Getting Too Old for This.
- 55-57 Is Having a Midlife Crisis.
- 58-60 Is Probably Too Young to Be Here.
- 61-63 Is Terrified of Clowns.
- 64-66 Is Utterly Unremarkable.
- 67-69 Is a Certified Sociopath.
- 70-72 Is a Terrible Liar.
- 73-75 Loves Animals.
- 76-78 Never Backs Down From a Challenge
- 79-81 Never Forgets a Face.
- 82-84 Relentlessly Champions a Cause.
- 85-87 Sleeps with One Eye Open.
- 88-90 Speaks in Movie References.
- 91-93 Swears Like a Sailor.
- 94-96 Won't Go Back to Prison.
- 97-00 Won't Stop Talking.

Identity Feats.

When you choose your character's identity, you also gain a feat from the following list associated with it. The GM can also allow you to pick a different feat for your identity, other than the ones provided below.

Creative.

Imagination and innovation are your greatest weapons. You gain Inspiration whenever you finish a long rest. Additionally, if the GM awards you Inspiration while you already have it, you can have two instances of Inspiration at one time.

Dilettante.

With a few minutes of preparation, a bit of improvisation, and some talent, you can appear proficient in just about anything. When you finish a long rest, you can spend 10 minutes practicing with a simple or martial weapon, skill, or tool, or in the use of a cantrip from the wizard spell list. You gain proficiency with that weapon, skill, or tool, or you learn that cantrip and can cast it using Intelligence as your spellcasting ability until you finish a long rest.

Empathetic.

You naturally resonate with the emotions of others. When a creature you can see within 30 feet of you misses an attack or fails an ability check or saving throw, you can use your reaction to let the creature reroll the d20. The creature must use the new roll.

Once you use this feat, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Intellectual.

Your principles are anchored in high-minded reasoning, and everything else follows. You gain proficiency in your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throws.

Additionally, if you spend at least 1 hour conducting research on a specific topic, you can make an Intelligence check pertaining to that topic with a +5 bonus.

Salt of the Earth.

You are rooted in honest work and firm values. Your hit point maximum increases by 1, and it increases by 1 again whenever you gain a level. Additionally, you regain one expended Hit Die when you finish a short rest.

Subtle.

You might break the rules, but you're never caught. Even if you're caught, you're never guilty. When you fail an ability check or saving throw using Dexterity or Charisma, you can reattempt the check or save and must use the new roll.

You can also use this feat when you are hidden and a creature discovers you with a successful Wisdom (Perception) check to reattempt your Dexterity (Stealth) check to hide. On a success, you silently reposition yourself and the creature doesn't notice you.

Once you use this feat, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Survivor.

You have stared down death and returned. When you are reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, you can drop to 1 hit point instead. Once you use this feature, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Additionally, when you pick this feat, choose the charmed, frightened, or poisoned condition. You have advantage on saving throws you make to avoid or end the chosen condition on yourself.

Technical.

No matter how intractable the problem, no matter how primitive the tools at your disposal, you can always engineer a solution. When you roll a 1 on an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw in which you have proficiency, you can reroll the d20 and must use the new roll.

Additionally, choose one skill in which you have proficiency. You gain expertise with that skill, which means your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make with it. The skill you choose must be one that isn't already benefiting from a feature, such as Expertise, that doubles your proficiency bonus.

Variant Armor Class.

Replaces Armor

Characters in a modern setting won't walk around festooned in heavy armor, even modern ballistic armor like that worn by SWAT teams. As such, characters can opt to use the following Armor Class calculation. A character with levels in two or more classes can pick a calculation from any of their classes. Some calculations improve as the character reaches higher levels in the class, as noted in the appropriate column:

Shields.

If a character has proficiency with shields, they can use a bonus action to fight defensively, gaining a +2 bonus to their Armor Class until the start of their next turn. To do so, the character must be holding a sturdy object that is not a weapon in one or both hands.

Class	Armor Class (1st Level)	4th	8th
<i>Base Classes</i>			
Barbarian	10 + your Dexterity modifier + your Constitution modifier	—	—
Bard	12 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Cleric	13 + your Dexterity modifier (max 2)	14	15
Druid	13 + your Dexterity modifier (max 2)	14	15
Fighter	16	17	18
Monk	10 + your Dexterity modifier + your Wisdom modifier	—	—
Paladin	16	17	18
Ranger	13 + your Dexterity modifier (max 2)	14	15
Rogue	12 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Sorcerer	10 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Warlock	12 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Wizard	10 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
<i>Mage Hand Press Classes</i>			
Alchemist	12 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Captain	13 + your Dexterity modifier (max 2)	14	15
Craftsman	17	18	19
Gunslinger	12 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Investigator	12 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Martyr	13 + your Dexterity modifier (max 2)	14	15
Necromancer	10 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Warden	13 + your Dexterity modifier (max 2)	14	15
Warmage	12 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Witch	12 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—

Other Variant Armor Class.

If you're playing a class that doesn't appear on the table above, or your class later grants you improved armor proficiencies, you can use the following general calculations, based on your armor proficiencies:

Proficiencies	Armor Class (1st Level)	4th	8th
None	10 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Light armor	12 + your Dexterity modifier	—	—
Medium Armor	13 + your Dexterity modifier (max 2)	14	15
Heavy Armor	16	17	18

Suits.

Even if using this variant rule, characters might acquire modern defensive equipment, from firefighter gear to bulletproof vests, that could prove useful in their confrontations with a monster. Once donned, these special suits usually provide a bonus to Armor Class, and a special benefit, such as a damage resistance, that applies only while worn.

Special suits aren't inconspicuous in the slightest, and wearing them renders most social interactions and investigation scenes nigh-impossible. As a rule, characters should be suiting up only when they suspect combat is imminent, or if a suit's special effect is required.

Suit	AC Bonus
Bulletproof Vest	+2
Firefighter Suit	+2
Hazmat Suit	+1
Improvised Armor	+2
Scuba Suit	+0
Sports Gear	+1

The effects of special suits are as follows:

Bulletproof Vest. While wearing this suit, you have resistance to piercing damage from nonmagical weapons.

Firefighter Suit. While wearing this suit, you have resistance to fire damage. Additionally, this suit protects you from smoke and toxic fumes and other airborne poisons.

Hazmat Suit. While wearing this suit, you have resistance to acid and poison damage. Additionally, this suit protects you from toxic fumes and other airborne poisons.

Improvised Armor. Perhaps built from pots and pans, this suit might fail when you least expect it. If you are hit by an attack that deals damage in excess of twice your level, this armor breaks and provides no benefit to your Armor Class against subsequent attacks.

Scuba Suit. While wearing this suit, you have a swimming speed equal to your walking speed and you can breathe underwater.

Sports Gear. Resistance to bludgeoning damage from nonmagical weapons.



Modern Weapons.

Supplements Melee and Ranged Weapons

In the modern world, firearms have supplanted bows, swords, and spears as weapons of war and self-defense. However, that doesn't render a crowbar to the back of the head less effective.

The rules in this section represent the modern paradigm of weapons, from pump-action shotguns and hunting rifles, to broken bottles and baseball bats. You can use this table of weapons to replace the 5th Edition's standard arsenal, or to supplement them for a hybrid medieval-modern setting.

The improvised weapons presented in this section follow the normal rules for improvised weapons: no character has proficiency in their use, unless otherwise stated.

Furthermore, note that firearms follow slightly different rules to conventional ranged weapons, and also generally use two or more damage dice.

Firearm Damage Rolls.

Unlike other weapons, you don't add your ability modifier to the damage roll of a firearm unless otherwise stated.

Two-Weapon Fighting With Firearms.

When you engage in two-weapon fighting with two light firearms, you subtract 2 from the damage roll of the bonus attack, to a minimum of 1 damage.

Firearm Ammunition.

All firearms require special ammunition. Most firearms use bullets, but some require even more specialized projectiles. The ammunition of a firearm is destroyed upon use.

Firearm Proficiencies.

In settings with widespread firearms, characters gain the proficiencies listed on the following table.

Class	Skills
<i>Base Classes</i>	
Barbarian	Simple firearms, martial firearms
Bard	Simple firearms, martial firearms that don't have the Heavy property
Cleric	Simple firearms
Druid	Simple firearms that don't have the Two-Handed property
Fighter	Simple firearms, martial firearms
Monk	Simple firearms
Paladin	Simple firearms, martial firearms
Ranger	Simple firearms, martial firearms
Rogue	Simple firearms, martial firearms that don't have the Heavy property
Sorcerer	Simple firearms that don't have the Two-Handed property
Warlock	Simple firearms
Wizard	Simple firearms that don't have the Two-Handed property
<i>Mage Hand Press Classes</i>	
Alchemist	Simple firearms
Captain	Simple firearms, martial firearms
Craftsman	Simple firearms, martial firearms, exotic firearms
Gunslinger	Simple firearms, martial firearms
Investigator	Simple firearms, martial firearms that don't have the Heavy property
Martyr	Simple firearms, martial firearms
Necromancer	Simple firearms
Warden	Simple firearms, martial firearms
Warmage	Simple firearms
Witch	Simple firearms

MELEE WEAPONS.

Name	Damage	Weight	Properties
<i>Improvised Melee Weapons</i>			
Bottle	1d4 bludgeoning	1 lb.	Light, special
Bowling Ball	1d10 bludgeoning	15 lb.	Heavy, thrown (10/30), two handed
Cane	1d4 bludgeoning	1 lb.	Light, finesse
Chain	1d6 bludgeoning	4 lb.	—
Chair	1d8 bludgeoning	15 lb.	Two-handed
Firearm, One-Handed	1d6 bludgeoning	—	—
Firearm, Two-Handed	1d8 bludgeoning	—	Two-handed
Flashlight	1d4 bludgeoning	2 lb.	Light
Frying Pan	1d6 bludgeoning	5 lb.	—
Golf Club	1d6 bludgeoning	1 lb.	Versatile (1d8)
Guitar	1d8 bludgeoning	8 lb.	Two-handed
Pipe	1d6 bludgeoning	5 lb.	—
Pool Cue	1d6 bludgeoning	1 lb.	Versatile (1d8)
Rock	1d6 bludgeoning	—	Thrown (30/90)
Scissors	1d4 piercing	1/4 lb.	Finesse, light
Screwdriver	1d4 piercing	1/2 lb.	Finesse, light
<i>Simple Melee Weapons</i>			
Baseball Bat	1d6 bludgeoning	2 lb.	Versatile (1d8)
Brass Knuckles	1d4 bludgeoning	1/2 lb.	Fist, light
Crowbar	1d6 bludgeoning	4 lb.	—
Hammer	1d4 bludgeoning	2 lb.	Light
Knife	1d4 slashing	1 lb.	Light, finesse
Machete	1d6 slashing	4 lb.	Special
Pipe Wrench	1d6 bludgeoning	5 lb.	—
Shovel	1d8 slashing	5 lb.	Two-handed
<i>Martial Melee Weapons</i>			
Axe	1d12 slashing	4 lb.	Heavy, two-handed
Chainsaw	1d10 slashing	15 lb.	Heavy, two-handed, special
Sledgehammer	2d6 bludgeoning	10 lb.	Heavy, two-handed
Telescopic Baton	1d8 bludgeoning	2 lb.	—

RANGED WEAPONS.

Name	Damage	Weight	Properties
<i>Improvised Ranged Weapons</i>			
Baseball	1d4 bludgeoning	1/4 lb.	Thrown (range 30/90)
<i>Simple Ranged Weapons</i>			
Slingshot	1d4 bludgeoning	1/2 lb.	Ammunition (range 30/120)
<i>Martial Ranged Weapons</i>			
Compound Bow	1d8 piercing	5 lb.	Ammunition (range 150/600), heavy, two-handed
Hunting Crossbow	1d10 piercing	6 lb.	Ammunition (range 100/400), heavy, loading, two-handed
Taser	1d6 lightning	1/2 lb.	Ammunition (range 20/80), loading, special

FIREARMS.

Name	Damage	Weight	Properties
<i>Simple Firearms</i>			
Double-Barrel Shotgun	2d6 piercing	8 lb.	Ammunition (range 10/30), reload (2), scatter (2d8), two-handed
Handgun	2d6 piercing	3 lb.	Ammunition (range 60/240), reload (10)
Hunting Rifle	2d6 piercing	8 lb.	Ammunition (range 80/320), reload (5), two-handed
Revolver	2d6 piercing	3 lb.	Ammunition (range 60/240), reload (6)
<i>Martial Firearms</i>			
Assault Rifle (Civilian)	2d6 piercing	7 lb.	Ammunition (range 80/320), automatic, reload (20), two-handed
Flare Gun	2d8 fire	1 lb.	Ammunition (range 30/120), loading, special
Harpoon Gun	2d8 piercing	10 lb.	Ammunition (range 30/120), loading
Magnum	2d8 piercing	6 lb.	Ammunition (range 50/200), heavy, reload (6)
Pump Shotgun	2d6 piercing	7 lb.	Ammunition (range 30/90), heavy, reload (10), scatter (2d8), two-handed



Firearm Ammunition.

For simplicity, all firearms, regardless of caliber, use “bullets,” except for weapons with the Scatter property, which use “shells.” The only exceptions to this rule are the flare gun and harpoon gun, which fire flares and harpoons, respectively. Bullets are typically sold in a box of 50 rounds, whereas shells are typically sold in boxes of 25.

New Weapon Properties.

The following weapon properties are utilized by the new modern weapons in this chapter.

Fist. Attacks made with this weapon are treated as unarmed strikes.

Reload. This weapon can be used to make a number of attacks before it must be reloaded. If you are proficient with the weapon, reloading it takes a bonus action; otherwise, reloading it takes an action. Some weapons require an action or longer to reload, even if you have proficiency, which is specified in the Reload property. If reloading a weapon requires longer than one action, the weapon can't be used to make attacks until reloading is finished.

Scatter. If you make an attack against a target that is within half this weapon's normal range, you deal the damage value listed in parentheses instead of the weapon's normal damage dice.

Special Weapons.

Weapons with special properties are described here.

Bottle. When the bottle hits a target, it breaks and gains the Finesse property. Subsequent attacks using the bottle deal slashing damage instead of bludgeoning damage.

Chainsaw. This weapon deals two additional dice of damage on a critical hit.

Flare Gun. A flammable object hit by this weapon ignites if it isn't being worn or carried.

Machete. This weapon deals double damage to Plants and vegetation.

Taser. A creature hit by this weapon can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.

MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

This chapter only presents firearms that a party of characters might have readily accessible in a horror campaign. For a wider host of weapons, including rocket launchers, muskets, gatling guns, and harpoon guns, see *Valda's Spire of Secrets* by Mage Hand Press.

Modern Equipment.

Walk into a department store and scan the walls of goods: your character can use anything you see for the prices advertised. If we presented an exhaustive list of everything your character might find useful in a modern setting, we would quickly lose the forest for the trees. Instead, this section assumes a few baselines and provides some robust rules of thumb for all your modern equipment needs. It then presents a list of useful “kits:” bundles of equipment that characters might choose at character creation.

GM Decides Availability.

When you play a campaign in Nowhere, USA, you might play an investigative crew of ghost hunters, as if the Scooby gang was dropped into an actual haunted town. Alternatively, you might play students attending Nowhere High, attempting to balance their awkward school lives with protecting the town from monsters. Furthermore, your game might be set in the modern day, or the mid-1980s.

Because of this variance, the GM has the final say on whether items are available in your game, and how difficult items are to acquire. Flamethrowers and landmines might be readily accessible, or firearms might be entirely off-limits. To be clear with what's available, ask your GM for what to expect when shopping for items at the start of the game.

Prices are Real.

Note that tables in this chapter don't include typical prices. That's because Nowhere is set in the real world, where costs are sometimes a fuzzy, fluctuating thing. Instead of consulting an exhaustive table, use some common sense or do a quick online search to find the appropriate price for an item. If all else fails, ask the GM to improvise a number.

Similarly, rewards should be tied to your understanding of money. Up to a few hundred bucks might be acceptable for a day's work, but tens of thousands of dollars probably isn't. As always, the GM has the final say.

Nobody Likes Encumbrance.

Meticulously tracking the total weight of your character's gear is boring. If you take umbrage with that idea, at least one person playing with you probably doesn't. Therefore, this chapter includes weight only for weapons, and encourages you to eschew it entirely for equipment. A dash of common sense and a generous interpretation of how much you can fit inside a backpack is more important than weight thresholds most of the time.

Modern Classes.

Prevailing types of fantasy characters, such as the fearless paladin, charming rogue, and brilliant wizard, persist in the modern day, albeit under different labels and contexts. Rather than dwelling in mighty towers festooned with animated objects and illusory traps, wizards might be more akin to reclusive magicians studying rare and esoteric texts, or gifted scions of a rare forgotten art.

The following entries explore how to adapt the classes of 5th Edition for modern adventures in Nowhere, USA and campaign settings of your own creation.

Barbarians.

An ember smolders in the guts of a barbarian. When they sit still for too long, the ember smolders like heartburn, and it grows white hot when fed excitement and risk, especially if they find themselves in a good fight. This ember—this rage—doesn't fit in well with modern society, yet there's always a need for barbarians in the world. They might find work



fighting wars or bouncing bars, or even as aggressive salespeople. A bit of aggression always has value.

However, most barbarians also know bloody knuckles and broken bones all too well. They might have had run-ins with the police, even if they've never crossed the lines of the law. For understandable reasons, regular folks tend to distrust contemporary barbarians; the ember just never cools down.

What I Can't Stand. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I can't stand bullies of any variety.
- I have no patience for braggarts and know-it-alls.
- Every time I meet someone named Kyle, I punch them square in the face.

Bards.

Artists of all persuasions count themselves as contemporary bards. Most start on this path early, lured by the magnetic pull of novels, music, poetry, theater, dance, or any other medium that tugs at the soul. Each follows their artistic passions in their own direction, spurred to pioneer new means of expression or master those of antiquity.

As most bards eventually understand, their art and passions bear a type of magic that resonates in the world around them. A talented bard can instill inspiration in the minds of others, send the cold chill of fear down the spine, or even spark romance in those they meet. Greater bards realize that their art is but a fragment of the larger picture, a Universal Tapestry or Song of Creation, and by echoing elements of that grand work, they can drain sound from the air or flood it with a thundercrack. Bardic magic is art, and vice-versa. Perhaps all art is.

My Artistic Expression. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- Live music performance is my passion. Whenever I find a new instrument, I have to pick it up and master it.
- I see the world as a canvas, splattered with watercolor, acrylic, and oils.
 - All life is theater, and I'm playing but one character. Until, that is, I put on the mask of another.

Clerics.

Divinity is all around us, like an invisible thunderstorm that blows through with high winds and occasionally lets forth a bolt of lightning. Clerics are their lightning rods.

Clerics possess a connection to an inscrutable deity, a being indifferent to worship, apathetic to suffering, and possessed of cataclysmic power. When they focus on this connection, miracles flow through them, usually influencing the world in subtle ways, but occasionally demanding attention and reverence. It's not clear if clerics channel these miracles of their own volition, or if divine power simply flows unabated. Regardless, the divine forces are mercurial, and leave little guidance for those who command its power.

Whatever the source of a cleric's power, it cares little for religions of today. Atheists are as likely to serve as divine conduits as hindus or wiccans. Perhaps, a cleric's deity is too ancient to ascribe a title to itself; perhaps such concepts are beneath it.

When I Discovered a Divine Connection.

When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I heard a voice from above that deafened me for hours.
- My heart stopped, and I glimpsed the other side before I was resuscitated.
- I had a dream that lasted for hours or days in which I saw the end of days.

Druids.

Speaking their dead language and assembling under cover of night, druid circles have persisted from prehistoric times as secret societies, embedded in civilizations around the globe. Their beliefs are unspeakably ancient, harkening back to the forgotten, primordial gods of the early world and the immutable spirits that permeate the natural world. Inductees to a circle learn their secret Druidic language and ancestral rituals, but only the most devoted adherents learn to command the anima of flora and fauna. Perhaps only a few in each circle learn the ancient art of assuming Wild Shapes.

The conspiracy of druids pervades the background of history, influencing the world order and ensuring that their practices are never discovered. With their ability to assume animal forms, partial discoveries and probing investigations have been easy to remedy. These druidic circles see themselves as custodians of the natural world, and by extension, shepherds of civilization. After all, it is only natural that the world's most ancient order should guide it into a new age.



How I Discovered a Druid Circle. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- My family has secretly been druids for generations, and I was inducted into their ranks when I was young.
- I stumbled upon a circle gathered in the dead of night and witnessed a woman become a panther.
- I uncovered the outline of a conspiracy of druids at the highest level of government before joining their ranks.

Fighters.

Fighters represent the everyman, the common person thrust on a path of adventure. As such, they're not uniquely defined by magical prowess, expert skills, or even combat training. Instead, a fighter assumes their mantle when the need is great and the time is right, prompting them to raise a weapon to protect the defenseless. Though military veterans, police, and security personnel seem like the most archetypal contemporary fighters, anyone from a grade school teacher to a stay-at-home parent can become a fighter when the need is great.

Why I Fight. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- My family and my community are threatened.
- I fight for survival. I refuse to die here.
- When the defenseless called out, nobody was there to help except for me.

Monks.

Just as in centuries past, a life of asceticism defines a monk, but in the modern day, asceticism looks more like a strict diet and a rigorous work routine than training on a mountaintop. Monks never skip a day at the gym, never sleep in late, and never slouch. It is this discipline that defines them, hardening their minds and bodies until they can manipulate their innermost energies.

Some monks believe in the pseudoscientific flow of energy within the body and the power of crystals, whereas others believe solely in running ten miles every day before sunrise. Though none practice in a sequestered monastery, the spirit of asceticism lives on in their homes and lives, a testament to their dauntless focus.

My Strict Routine. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I spend six hours training in the gym every day. No exceptions.
- My diet is a calorie-restricted, itemized list of healthy options in every food group.
- I've hiked the Appalachian Trail, swam hundreds of miles in the ocean, and ran ultra-marathons through Death Valley.

Paladins.

Activists, revolutionaries, and idealists, paladins believe in a better world, one motivated by high-minded ideals and fair rules, rather than self-serving interests. Every paladin latches onto a cause early, whether that entails battling for conservation or pursuing a personal vendetta. This path is an

arduous one, and inevitably meets roadblocks, but paladins aren't easily daunted, and form strong alliances with like-minded allies. Associations of paladins are a thing to be reckoned with, having the momentum and tenacity of a freight train, directed at whatever causes they have in their sights.

Alas, the world is full of nigh insurmountable challenges but has only a finite number of paladins. But with each victory, each measurable change, paladins work to right the world through strength of conviction alone.

My Cause. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- We must stop global warming and the extinction crisis before it's too late.
- Too many criminals evade justice. That's where I come in.
- I have a list of ten people who wronged me. I'll make them pay.

Rangers.

Rangers are defined by their pragmatism and fierce independence. They can't be pinned down or fit into a single box, but there are some characteristic throughlines. Most rangers have an affinity for the great outdoors and a skepticism for cities and their sprawling accoutrement. Though some are surprisingly tech savvy, many are more comfortable with a set of power tools than a smartphone. Rangers tend to chafe against the interconnected systems of modern society, as being "on the grid" stands in opposition to their unspoken code of self-sufficiency and individuality.

Despite this disposition, many rangers dwell in urban centers, trending towards practical vocations such as manufacturing and construction. They're no stranger to grease-stained overalls and calloused hands, or the satisfaction of a job well done.

Rural rangers have more than a passing familiarity with hunting and firearms; camouflage is something of a uniform for them. In many ways, rural rangers live up to the ranger's platonic ideal: that of a log cabin, a hunting rifle, and an unspoiled wilderness before them.

My Personal Motto. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- Man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated.
- Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.
- He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.

Rogues.

For every ten thieves, con artists, and hackers, there's perhaps one rogue, a criminal that has raised their illicit expertise to the level of artform. Rogues specialize in one or two lucrative and illegal schemes, honed through years of practice, thousands of jobs, and innumerable close calls with the law. Lining their pockets is certainly a perk, but even after earning a king's ransom, most rogues simply can't (or won't) retire. The satisfaction in performing a faultless job and the confidence that accompanies expertise are a rogue's opium, and ensures they're always planning the next, and increasingly risky grift.

My Grift of Choice. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- My regular crew performed petty burglaries and elaborate heists with the same speed and attention to detail.
- I've stolen more identities than I can count.
- We're friends, right? I would never lead you astray. I just need your signature on this paperwork...

Sorcerers.

Sorcerers are born with a spark of magic, a glimmer in their minds that flares to life in moments of crisis. Once that spark blossoms into magic, it never truly goes back to sleep. Usually, the effects of a sorcerous awakening are explainable as a momentary hallucination or spectacular coincidence, but occasionally they resemble nothing so much as arson.

Once a sorcerer is awakened, they must leverage all their willpower to control their spark of magic. The spark is as alive as they are, and its whims are capricious, but with enough willpower and insight, a budding sorcerer can channel their spark into full fledged spells. Doubtless, it is like living with a wild rhinoceros: an immensely powerful, if unpredictable ally.

How My Powers Awakened. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- My fingertips lit in candle flames and my feet sank into the floor.
- I heard hundreds of voices—the thoughts of everyone around me—and couldn't stop for days.
- Lightning struck me, scorching away my hair and clothing, but leaving me otherwise unharmed.



Warlocks.

Incomprehensible entities dwell just beyond the veil of our reality, beings so inexorably ancient or titanic that their very existence boggles the mind. Reaching out to such entities requires little more than the proper ritual, venturing to a forgotten fringe of the world, or simply focusing one's mind on the being in question. That's all it takes to snatch a mote or otherworldly power and become a warlock.

Yet the cost is far greater. To return from such a delve into oblivion demands that a warlock sacrifice something invaluable: years of their future, their body, their family, or even their soul. This is less a pact and more a desperate flight from the horrors outside our reality, but the cost is the same. No warlock can measure the cost of their pact, but it is always catastrophic when fully unveiled.

What I Sacrificed for My Pact. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I struck my pact in the 1960s and was thrust forward into the present day.
- My memories have been corrupted, such that I only partially know my own past.
- I acquired a disease of unknown origin that wracks me with pain.

Wizards.

True magic is a relic of bygone civilizations, the rules and techniques used to create it long forgotten. However, a few individuals have begun to poke at the hole left behind in our understanding of science and philosophy, uncovering the shape of ancient arcana. These contemporary wizards are part experimentalist, part archaeologist, reconstructing the theory and practice of magic from loose documents and shrewd conjecture. For every ounce of real arcane knowledge, they must sift through veritable mountains of misinformation. Feeling their way through this blackened maze, however, the archival research, obscure message boards, and meticulous experimentation has borne fruit: a system of magic once thought lost.

Every wizard must contend with arcane distortion, however. All magic bears an invisible aura that warps photographs, causes technology to malfunction, and fizzes out lightbulbs. Strangely, this distortion extends to any representation of a spell, including descriptions and diagrams—even pictures of such diagrams. Contemporary wizards, therefore, collaborate through message boards and obscure ciphers, always careful not to corrupt the magical power by describing it completely. Though contemporary wizards might one day form something like an arcane society, they are for now a collection of recluses united by methodical research.

Where I First Learned Magic. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- The conspiracy rabbit hole of secret societies led me to a web forum from the early days of the internet populated by a handful of real wizards.
- A mentor taught me the fundamentals of magic through a single cantrip that took hundreds of hours to master.
- A clandestine society of old-world wizards taught me the secrets of the arcane, before ousting me from their ranks.



MODERN SUBCLASSES

Class	Subclass	Description
Barbarian	Path of the Drifter	A lone wanderer with an untamed reckless streak
Cleric	Occult Domain	A mystic armed with a deck of tarot cards to divine the future
Rogue	Scoundrel	A criminal running a sophisticated array of schemes, grifts, and rackets
Warlock	The Magician	A master of stagecraft that mixes magic tricks and wizardly knowledge

The adventuring types that investigate mysteries around Nowhere, USA and other corners of the country are usually some combination of aggressive, nosy, conspiratorial, superstitious, or criminal—in other words, rough around the edges. Sometimes, these characters see the end-of-the-road of Nowhere as a blank slate to rid themselves of a blemished past; other times, they have an inkling of the supernatural threat bearing down on the town, and hope to save it. Rarely are they received as welcomed guests.

The following modern subclass options are available for campaigns in Nowhere, USA, or any other setting.

Path of the Drifter

Barbarian Subclass

Barbarians that walk the Path of the Drifter call nowhere home. Propelled by grief, betrayal, or a sense of unfettered freedom, these barbarians drift between seedy dive bars and cheap motels, never placing down roots or making too many friends. They work best alone, or so they like to claim.

These barbarians conceal a well of rage just under the surface, erupting forth to meet any threat or provocation. For some, this rage serves as a justification to wander, as their hot temper can quickly erode relationships. For others, rage serves as a tool for vengeance or protecting the defenseless, as their journey propels them down one endless vendetta after another.

Barfighter.

When you choose this path at 3rd level, you are proficient with improvised weapons and your unarmed strikes use a d6 for damage.

Lone Wolf.

Also by 3rd level, you work better alone. When a creature makes an attack roll against you while you are raging and no friendly creatures are within 5 feet of you, you can use your reaction to impose disadvantage on that attack roll.

Reckless Outburst.

Beginning at 6th level, once on each of your turns, when you hit a creature with a Reckless Attack and deal damage, you can choose to reroll the damage die and deal an extra 1d6 damage to the creature. You must use the new roll of the damage die, even if it is lower.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Never Outnumbered.

By 10th level, you excel at fighting entire groups. When a creature hits you with an attack, you gain a +4 bonus to AC against all subsequent attacks made by that creature for the rest of the turn.

Additionally, other creatures don't gain advantage on attack rolls against you as a result of the Ambusher, Blood Frenzy, Grappler, or Pack Tactics traits, nor do they gain advantage as a result of the Help action. Furthermore, circumstances such as enemies flanking or surrounding you don't grant other creatures advantage on attack rolls against you.

Guts and Grit.

Beginning at 14th level, when you use your Lone Wolf feature to impose disadvantage on an attack roll, you can also roll a d12. If the attack hits you, you reduce the damage taken by the amount rolled. If the attack misses, you gain a bonus equal to the number rolled to the next damage roll you make before the end of your next turn.

Occult Domain

Cleric Subclass

The Occult Domain is that of secrets and mysteries, of reading the cards to catch glimpses of the future. Clerics of this domain rarely ply their trade as healers or miracle workers, but as fortune tellers and mystics, for they possess a rare, unfiltered link to the future itself. Through their tarot cards and other works of mysticism, these seers can plot a roadmap of coming events and manipulate them, both for good and for ill.

Occult Domain Spells.

Cleric Level Circle Spells

1st	<i>detect magic, protection from evil and good</i>
3rd	<i>augury, detect thoughts</i>
5th	<i>dispel magic, séance</i>
7th	<i>banishment, divination</i>
9th	<i>dream, scrying</i>

Initiation.

At 1st level, you are indoctrinated into occult knowledge. You gain proficiency in one of the following skills: Arcana, History, Nature, or Religion. Additionally, you learn one cantrip of your choice from the wizard spell list. This cantrip counts as a cleric cantrip for you.

Additionally, you have advantage on Intelligence checks you make to recall or understand legends, myths, or lore.

Premonition.

Also at 1st level, when you finish a short rest or long rest, you can gain a premonition. When you do so, write down a phrase of three or more words, and keep this phrase secret. Common mechanical phrases, like “roll for initiative” can’t be used as this phrase. If the GM at any time says aloud the phrase you recorded, you can reveal the secret phrase to gain one of the following benefits of your choice:

- You gain Inspiration.
- You gain a +5 bonus to AC until you are hit by an attack or take a long rest.
- You or a creature you can see within 30 feet of you regains a number of hit points equal to 1d6 for each level you have in this class.
- You regain one expended spell slot of 5th level or lower.

This recorded phrase lasts until you reveal it or finish a short or long rest.

Channel Divinity: Cartomancy

Beginning at 2nd level, you can use your Channel Divinity to perform a fortune telling ritual using a deck of tarot cards. You perform the ritual over the course of 1 minute, and can read your own future or that of a willing creature present during the ritual. When you do so, roll on the Cartomancy Fortune table three times, rerolling duplicates, and choose one result. The resulting card grants a benefit that the target can gain once during the next 24 hours (no action required).

Occult Domain Spells.

d20 Card

- 1 **The Fool.** The creature gains advantage on an initiative roll.
- 2 **The Magician.** The creature casts the *counterspell* spell, using your spellcasting ability modifier.
- 3 **The High Priestess.** The creature regains one expended spell slot of 5th level or lower.
- 4 **The Empress.** The creature gains temporary hit points equal to twice your cleric level.
- 5 **The Emperor.** The creature gains resistance to all damage until the start of its next turn.
- 6 **The Hierophant.** The creature automatically succeeds on a saving throw.
- 7 **The Lovers.** The creature, as well as each creature it chooses within 30 feet of it, regains hit points equal to 1d8 + your Wisdom modifier.
- 8 **The Chariot.** The creature gains a +10 bonus to an attack roll that it makes.
- 9 **Strength.** The next attack the creature makes deals extra damage equal to your cleric level + your Wisdom modifier.
- 10 **The Hermit.** The creature becomes invisible, as per the invisibility spell, until the start of its next turn.
- 11 **The Wheel of Fortune.** The creature rolls again on this table, ignoring this result.

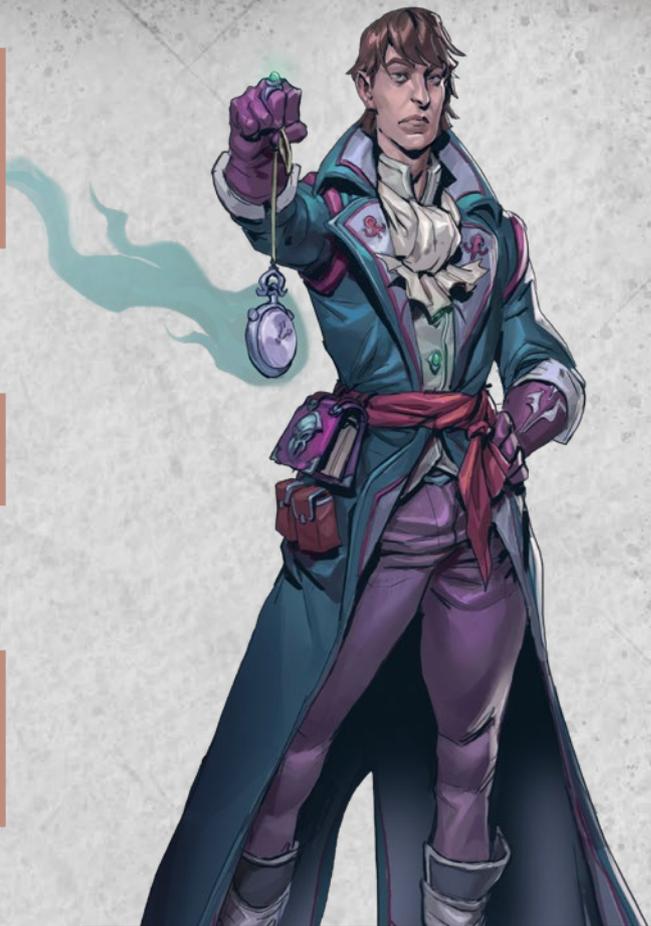
- 12 **Justice.** Immediately after the creature takes damage from an attacker within 30 feet of it, the creature can use its reaction to deal radiant damage to the attacker equal to the damage it just dealt, up to a maximum of twice your cleric level.
- 13 **The Hanged Man.** The creature casts the *levitate* spell without expending a spell slot or material components, using your spell save DC.
- 14 **Death.** If the creature drops to 0 hit points but doesn't die outright, it can choose to drop to 1 hit point instead.
- 15 **Temperance.** When the creature would have disadvantage on an attack roll or ability check, it can choose to have advantage instead.
- 16 **The Devil.** The creature casts the *hellish rebuke* spell without expending a spell slot, using your spell save DC, when it is damaged by a creature it can see within 60 feet of it.
- 17 **The Tower.** The creature, as well as each creature within 60 feet of it, rolls a d20. On an odd roll, a creature takes necrotic damage equal to the number rolled. On an even roll, the creature regains hit points equal to the number rolled.
- 18 **The Sun.** The creature regains hit points equal to twice your cleric level.
- 19 **Judgment.** When the creature deals damage to a target and the target's remaining hit points are lower than twice your cleric level, the target drops to 0 hit points.
- 20 **The World.** The creature teleports to an unoccupied space that it can see within 120 feet of it.

True Reading.

Beginning at 6th level, when you use your Cartomancy Channel Divinity to roll three times on the Cartomancy Fortune table, you can choose two options instead of one.

Potent Spellcasting.

Starting at 8th level, you add your Wisdom modifier to the damage you deal with any cleric cantrip.



PHRASE LOG

If the same trigger phrases are used too often as part of the Rite of Premonition feature, the GM can incentivise variety by implementing the following variant rule:

Whenever the GM says aloud your secret phrase, record that phrase in a permanent log. You can't use that secret phrase again for this feature.

Inversion of Fate.

By 17th level, you can invert your tarot cards to corrupt another creature's fate. When a creature you can see within 60 feet of you makes an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, you can use your reaction to flip the d20 the creature rolled and use the number on the bottom for the roll. (Note that for a balanced d20, the top and bottom numbers add up to 21.)

You can use this feature twice, and regain all expended uses when you finish a short or long rest.

Scoundrel

Rogue Subclass

All scoundrels are rogues, but not all rogues are scoundrels. The archetypal scoundrel is a virtuoso criminal, practiced in a wide variety of illegal rackets and accustomed to running multiple schemes at once to make ends meet. Nearly all scoundrels see the inside of a prison cell during their careers, which often serves to introduce them to valuable partners and to teach them new unlawful skills. As a rule, if a scoundrel is caught in the act, it's never pursuing the same crime as last time.

Crime.

When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, you gain one of the following features of your choice:

Burglar. You have a special skill for nabbing valuables and getting away unscathed. The first 5 feet you move on each of your turns doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

Mugger. Once on each of your turns, you can gain advantage on a melee weapon attack if you are within 5 feet of the target and no other creatures are within 5 feet of the target. Once you use this feature to gain advantage against a creature, you can't use it again against that creature until you finish a short or long rest.

Enforcer. Acting as the muscle for some criminal faction, you've become quite skilled in bludgeoning others with your fists. Your unarmed strikes deal 1d6 bludgeoning damage. This damage increases as shown on the table below.

You can use Dexterity instead of Strength for the attack and damage rolls of your unarmed strikes and count as finesse weapons for the purposes of Sneak Attack.

Additionally, when you take the Attack action with an unarmed strike on your turn, you can make one unarmed strike as a bonus action.

Rogue Level	Damage
3rd	1d6
5th	1d8
11th	1d10
17th	1d12

Racket.

At 9th level, you gain one of the following features of your choice:

Blackmail. You have advantage on any ability checks you make to investigate a person's illicit activities, uncover evidence of said activities, or threaten a person with said evidence. You also gain proficiency with forgery kits, if you didn't have it already.

Counterfeiting. When you finish a long rest, you can produce a number of false gold coins equal to five times your rogue level. A creature can use its action to inspect the coins and make an Intelligence (Investigation) check (DC equals 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Dexterity modifier). On a success, it determines the coins are fraudulent.

Impersonation. You can spend 24 hours observing someone to perfectly adopt their mannerisms, speech, and demeanor. Thereafter, you have advantage on any ability check you make to disguise yourself as that person. While disguised, other creatures believe you to be that person unless given an obvious reason not to.

You only know how to impersonate one person at a time. If you choose to observe a new person to impersonate, you forget how to perform important details relevant to impersonating the previous person.

Criminal Trick.

By 13th level, you've learned a few ploys known only to master thieves and the heads of crime families. You gain one of the following features of your choice:

Coin Trick. When a creature you can see within 30 feet of you makes an attack roll, you can use your reaction to distract the creature with a coin you are holding, imposing disadvantage on the attack roll. This ability has no effect on a creature with an Intelligence score of 4 or less or one that is immune to being charmed. Once you use this ability to distract a creature, you can't use it again against that target until you finish a long rest.

Dagger Trick. When you use the Ready action to prepare an attack with a ranged or thrown weapon, you can make two attacks instead of one, if the attacks are triggered after the end of your turn.

Hat Trick. Whenever you roll damage for Sneak Attack and three or more of the dice have the same number, you can add an extra 3d6 to the damage roll.

Kingpin.

Beginning at 17th level, you've refined your criminal skills to legendary status. As such, you gain the following uses of your Cunning Action:

- You can use your bonus action to command a willing creature within 5 feet of you to make a weapon attack using its reaction, if available.
- You can use your bonus action to use a magic item which can normally be activated as an action. You can't activate two magic items that require an action on the same turn.
- When you hit a creature of Large size or smaller with a Sneak Attack, you can use a bonus action to knock that creature prone.

The Magician

Warlock Subclass

While all warlocks are skilled in the art of magic, very few are what most people would consider "magicians," skilled in the arts of physical illusion, sleight of hand, and showmanship. Those with such talents might find themselves drawn to the mysterious Magician, believed to be a minor trickster deity (who most often takes the form of a white rabbit), long forgotten and bereft of worshipers. Under the Magician's patronage, warlocks command an amalgamation of real and fake magic, such that it's never clear if they're casting spells, performing a ruse, or putting on a show.

Magician Expanded Spells.

The Magician lets you choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a warlock spell. The following spells are added to the warlock spell list for you.

Spell Level	Circle Spells
1st	<i>find familiar, fog cloud</i>
2nd	<i>knock, rope trick</i>
3rd	<i>blink, speak with dead</i>
4th	<i>freedom of movement, secret chest</i>
5th	<i>creation, mislead</i>

Abracadabra.

Starting at 1st level, you gain proficiency in the Sleight of Hand skill, and you learn the *card trick* and *prestidigitation* cantrips, which do not count against your number of cantrips known.

Additionally, you can attempt to cast any cantrip that you don't know from the wizard spell list by succeeding on a DC 10 Charisma check. While being cast, the cantrip counts as a warlock spell for you. On a failure, the spell fails.

Impressive Escape.

Starting at 6th level, you can use your Charisma modifier instead of the normal modifier for Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) checks, and you can add your Charisma modifier to all skill checks involving picking locks, escaping ropes or manacles, or other similar feats of escape artistry.

Additionally, as a bonus action, you can vanish in a puff of smoke, a shower of confetti, or a number of released doves, teleporting to any unoccupied location you choose within 120 feet. You can only choose a destination from which no conscious creature can see you appear.

Once you use this ability, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Alakazam.

When you reach 10th level, you learn to alter your spellcasting in a number of ways, both to hide it from your audience and to expand your magical repertoire. Whenever you cast a warlock spell of 1st level or higher using a warlock spell slot, you can manipulate it in one of two ways:

Conceal. You can cast the spell without using spell components by succeeding on a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. The DC for this check equals 8 + the spell's level. On a failure, the spell fails and its spell slot is wasted. You can't use this ability on a spell with material components that have a cost.

Transmute. You can attempt to cast any other spell from the wizard spell list of the same level or lower instead of the spell you initially cast. When you do so, you must succeed on a Charisma check with a DC equal to 12 + the spell's level. Otherwise, the spell fails and its spell slot is wasted.

Master of Illusions.

Upon reaching 14th level, you gain a mastery over illusion magic. You can cast the spells *silent image* and *major image* at will without using a spell slot or spell components, and you can concentrate on one of these spells in addition to another spell.

Page 73. The 'Verse

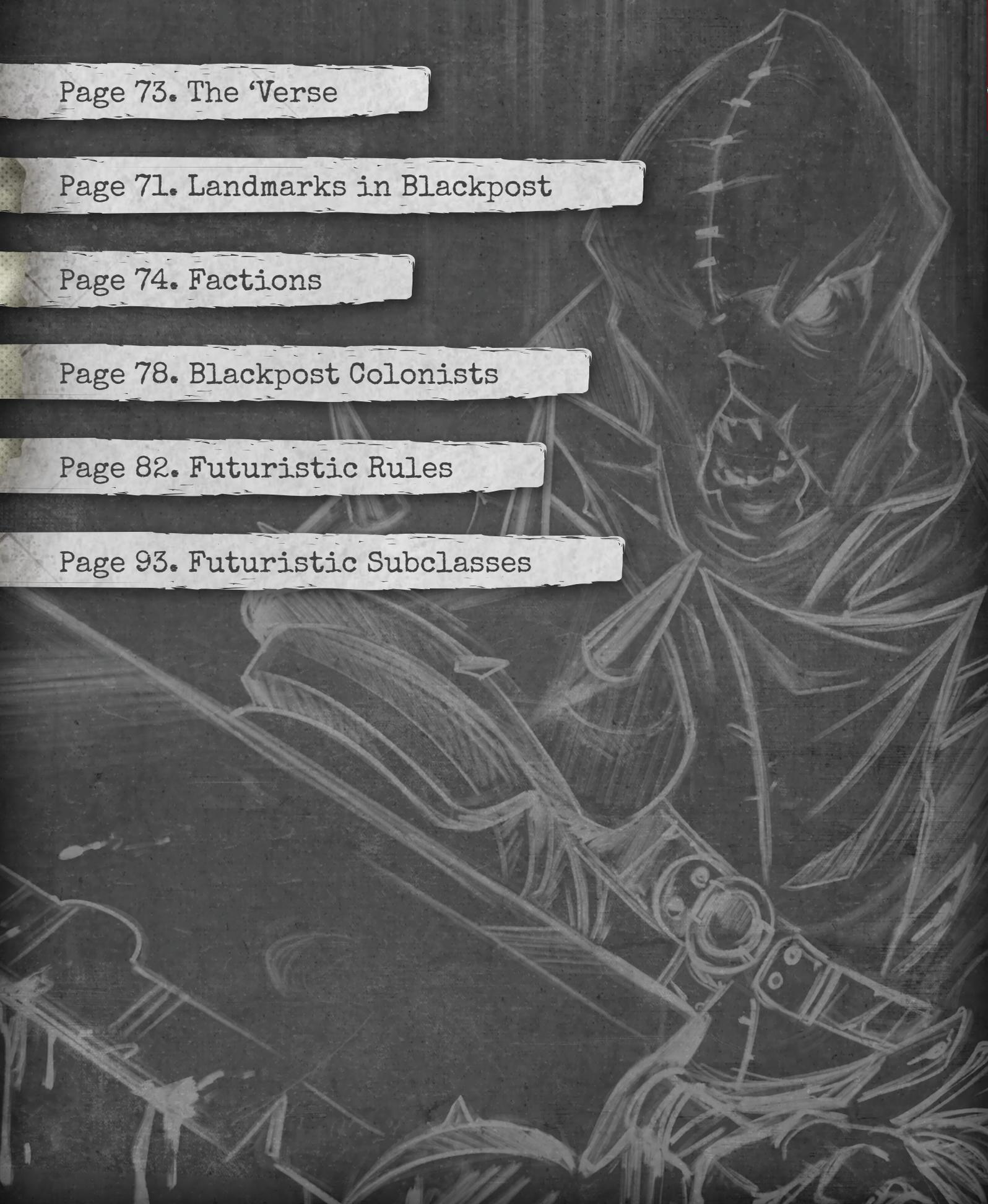
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CHAPTER 3: BLACKPOST

BLACKPOST

Humans often gaze up at the night sky and wonder if someone else is gazing back. Yet, whenever we find eyes staring back at us from the darkness, we feel nothing but a sickly pit of fear forming in our guts.

Perhaps, this is why the Hegemony of Man founded Blackpost. The remote colony was established as far as possible from the faction's magnificent mega-cities, industrial starship docks, and interstellar trading hubs—on the very edge of the 'Verse. Ostensibly, the colony is a listening station directed toward an ocean of endless, lonesome nothingness. Its directive is to collect data from distant galaxies to paint a better picture of the universe as a whole. but it's no secret that Blackpost also acts as a first-warning system for intergalactic threats, as improbable as that may be. If something more distant and terrible sets its gaze on the Milky Way, humanity will be the first to gaze back.

The 'Verse.

Blackpost is but a remote corner of the sprawling *Dark Matter* campaign setting. This science-fantasy universe ("the 'Verse") is filled to the brim with starships, alien creatures and planets, and blasters, jetpacks, and power armor. Moreover, it plays host to dragons, demons, giants, and strange alien creatures that defy description. Axe-wielding barbarians clad in furs can stand alongside machine-gun toting androids, facing down alien horrors on the deck of a derelict space cruiser.

In this setting, sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology. Magical devices have become as commonplace as torches, pitchforks, and horses once were. While most people still can't banish a demon or rain fire from the sky, they have ready access to hardlight-projecting consoles, levitating hovercars, and other wondrous devices. Magic is no longer at odds with technology; it has become technology.

Secrets of the 'Verse.

Though the galaxy's foremost arcanists have mastered the intricacies of magical technology, they have yet to penetrate some of the 'Verse's most disquieting mysteries. There are facets of arcana they will never understand, depths of chaos too mindless and terrible to even consider. Yet, these mysteries pose themselves in broad daylight, tempting curious minds to plunge their depths and be horrified at their discoveries.

These secrets are fundamental to the setting of *Dark Matter*, and might provide fertile ground for the cosmic horrors you can unleash on Blackpost.

The Void.

Faster-than-light travel in the 'Verse relies on tunneling through the Void, an incomprehensible dimension that is infinitely small, a pinpoint adjacent to every other point in reality. The nature of this plane of existence baffles scholars, even as engineers have constructed Dark Matter engines to traverse the galaxy. Furthermore, direct examination of the Void is impossible, for even a small opening into it releases a stream of hideous lights that warps or kills those who witness it.

Maw Stations.

The whole of galactic trade relies on the Maw stations, an ancient network of portals that connects the far sides of the 'Verse and predates any galactic civilization. Stranger still, the maw stations are constructed out of bones. The colossal, antediluvian bones have been reinforced with machinery, and each clutches a massive Void portal within their jaws (hence the name). Nobody is completely certain how the maws work or who created them—though Old Un is usually credited. Furthermore, nobody is certain why maw stations on the Galactic Frontier regularly lose connection to the network.

Today, each maw station acts as a vibrant trade city and spaceport, playing host to creatures of all sizes and shapes from across the 'Verse. If something is to be bought or sold (legally or illegally), it is likely to be found on a maw.

Old Un.

At the very center of the galaxy, an utterly massive star—the Sepulcher Star—sits in a slow, orbiting dance with an equally large black hole. To the avia-ra, this star is the holiest site in the 'Verse, the seat of the First God, the Carver of the Maws, the True Being of Creation: the Old Un.

Indeed, sophisticated scans have verified that some structure of incomprehensible exotic metals exists in the core of the star. The contents of the so-called sepulcher are indiscernible, however, some thread of divinity might dwell within. Lone warlocks and an order of paladins draw power from within the star, but the being within is completely mysterious.

Perhaps Old Un is a being of light and creation, retired in its venerable age to rest within the star, or maybe Un is a malicious creature of the Void, or an Old God of the Far Realm, imprisoned within the star until the universe's end. Or perhaps the truth is stranger still; all that is known for certain is that Un is powerful and inexorably ancient.

On Blackpost.

Blackpost was originally discovered by Lakshayan explorers who dubbed its faint, red dwarf star Yomi. Therefore, the planet's official designation is *Yomi I*, though most spacers call the entire planet Blackpost.

The planet is frigid, its atmosphere is thin, and its soil is barren—habitable, but just barely. In fact, it is perhaps the furthest habitable planet from the galactic core. An endless desert, whistling with a cold wind stretches out in every direction from the Blackpost colony, interrupted only by plateaus and jagged mountain ranges that dot the horizon like a set of teeth.

Days stretch on for weeks on end, exacerbating the planet's surface temperatures. Nights coat everything in a layer of frost, while days transform the surface into a sun-baked desert. For comfort alone, most colonists wear lifesuits while outdoors.

Worse still, the surface of Blackpost is ravaged by occasional Wild Magic Storms, sandstorms that kick up churning magic auras in their howling winds. These storms knock out communications and occasionally cause “spell strikes”—lightning imbued with magical fire, frost, or force. The colony is hardened against these storms and long-term colonists pay them little heed, but they pose a serious risk to anyone who would take a hover car far from the colony.

The Colony.

In addition to its scientific facilities and conspicuous antenna dishes, Blackpost is equipped with the fundamentals of any human colony: a starport, homes, shops, a school, and a guard post. However, most of the colony is submerged underground, with individual structures just peeking out above the dusty surface. Beneath lies a gloomy maze of interconnecting corridors perpetually cast in artificial illumination. Gunmetal steel, accented by specks of rust and cheaply produced plastic paneling is the decor of choice, both above and below the surface.

Unlike other colonies, Blackpost isn't self-sustaining. Monthly supply deliveries from the 1212 Freighter provide Blackpost with critical components, provisions, and personnel. Without it, the colony would starve within months. Few vessels ever trek for months through the hostile, barren space of the far galactic frontier to reach the colony, and nearly all of Blackpost's residents arrived via the 1212.

This harsh, oppressive environment demands a certain type of colonist, one that is willing to wait out the bitter weeks of night and endure the scorching days; one preoccupied with solutions using whatever at hand, rather than dwelling on problems; one that finds comfort, rather than dread, at being at the very edge of space. Unsurprisingly, Blackpost has a monumental challenge in retaining colonists. Those unprepared for the colony's rigors are dubbed “monthers” for how long they are likely to last before taking the 1212 back to the core worlds.

Landmarks in Blackpost.

The austere colony is flanked but majestic, nearly untouched vistas on all sides, offering a few points of interest to colonists.

Epsilon Station.

The locals would rather forget the early days of Blackpost, before the World Engine mediated the weather and steadied the temperatures. The foremost colonists arrived with little more than prefab structures and a flag—and unspeakably dark times followed. One such window into that period of Blackpost’s history lies in the skeleton of the Epsilon Weather Station, almost an hour from the current colony.

Half-buried by dust and high winds, the rubble of steel and composite walls somehow stands defiantly against the hostile landscape, though every antenna dish has been blown to the ground. The small Epsilon Station was an outpost from the outpost, intended to gather data for terraforming efforts that would follow in the decades to come.

However, resupply shipments to Blackpost failed for a full year after the colony’s establishment. Most of the main colony survived on the dregs of emergency rations and desperate agriculture efforts, but Epsilon Station has no such luck. Nobody dares imagine the station’s final days as starvation gripped the colonists, and now only bones tell the story of the ghastly choices that followed.

Head’s Lodge.

Embedded in a crater at the edge of the colony, a pair of enormous steel eyes flicker with firelight. Decades ago, the head of an Ashigaru battleframe crashed on the desolate planet, evidently scrapped by the pilot and simply dumped from orbit, narrowly missing the colony below. Today, it plays host to a surprisingly cozy inn.

Renovated by a halfling couple who aspired to own a Hearthstation, the cranium proved to be a spacious and robust framework for an inn. The interior of Head’s Lodge bears the neutral colors, natural wood, and warm atmosphere of any halfling Hearthstation, and boasts not one but two roaring hearths—one in each of the battleframe’s eyes.



However, the inn also bears a menacing servant: a silver mechanical skeleton, dubbed “Tarnish.” The undead machine is programmed exclusively to protect (in order), the staff, the inn, and the clientele, so guests are advised to tread lightly.

Though visitors to Blackpost are sparse, they consistently stay for a month or longer, owing to the 1212 Freighter’s infrequent schedule. Thus, the little lodge on the edge of the ‘Verse makes a tidy profit.

Monomachus Pawn.

When credits get tight, the colonists of Blackpost turn to the nautilid Monomachus, a hulking figure whose suit is embellished with more gold accessories than anyone needs. Their pawn shop is stocked with everything from custom blasters, to enchanted arcane heirlooms, to true oddities, like the taxidermied thwirrel that resides on the counter. Naturally, everything is marked up to ensure profits.

Though no more predatory than his peers, Monomachus strikes a singularly intimidating figure. He’s never been robbed, and doesn’t anticipate that happening anytime soon. Despite appearances, the nautilid is well-versed in galactic history and has astute insights into whatever item enters his shop, even if he doesn’t end up buying it.

Ol’ Boomer.

Despite its size and remoteness, Blackpost isn’t entirely defenseless. Alien raiders such as the dreaded wrothians roam the Galactic Frontier, so among the first constructions on the colony was a Bombard-class Emplaced Railgun, capable of shooting almost any vessel short of a cruiser out of the sky. The gun-structure looms over Blackpost like a steel sundial, and test-fires a single blast into the night sky each month, earning it the moniker “Ol’ Boomer.”

The railgun facility is cordoned off from the rest of the colony by reinforced doors and barbed wire fences. Only the small force of marines from the Hegemony Defense Force are allowed inside, and they rarely venture into the colony beyond. Most space marines consider being stationed at Blackpost a punishment, and those assigned to this remote post often carry the grim countenance of those who have left their worlds behind.

Oren’s Greenhouse.

A geodesic jewel standing several miles away from the colony, Oren’s Greenhouse is a veritable wonder on the nearly dead planet. From the colony, the shining dome on the horizon conceals its true scale: over 500 feet tall and containing an entire forest from High Terra. The grand greenhouse was conceived as a science experiment, but now that data collection has broadly finished, it acts as a serene park just outside the colony. The aged amoeboid caretaker works wonders to prune the flora under their care, and takes special care of the flourishing rose gardens that stand at the greenhouse’s opening.

Rathaus.

Established in a cellar beneath the commissary, the Rathaus or “rat house” looks like it was plucked from a maw station nightclub or the rowdiest hearthstations around High Terra. Though unofficial policy frowns on such drinking establishments, especially on scientific outposts, the remote nature of Blackpost means there’s little anyone can do about it. The Rathaus enjoys its status as both an open secret and a tidy monopoly. A surprisingly vast array of drinks can be ordered from the neon and glass bar for a steep markup, and practically any local can be found pulling up a stool.

The Scrapyard.

In a field adjacent to the starport, rusted shells of ships form untidy rows alongside piles of components: a graveyard and abattoir for many vessels that make the long journey to Blackpost. The rigors of the Galactic Frontier tax hulking freighters and diminutive planet hoppers alike. However, spare parts are a rarified commodity on the edge of space, so many vessels missing one or two vital components simply join the scrapheap, where they might grant a second lease of life to another ship in need.

The World Engine.

A sprawling mass of pipes and smokestacks called the World Engine billows a stream of gasses into the atmosphere. The Engine dominates a forlorn mountaintop, one of the tallest peaks on Blackpost, and works endlessly to terraform the planet beyond with its grayish smog. For its efforts, the winds are slackened and the extremes of temperatures are marginally less lethal—enough to call the planet habitable, but nothing more.

The World Engine is the largest terraforming engine of its kind, an entire automated facility with mechanized caretakers and a fastidious AI overseer. No living thing has set foot in the Engine since its activation, for maintenance or otherwise. Voyaging there would require a specially-developed ship, capable of withstanding the unpredictable gales, or a lengthy trek up the unexplored mountains.

The colonists sometimes ponder what would happen if the World Engine stopped working entirely, but such exercises tend to spiral toward certain doom. As such, it's easier to ignore the tenuous thread of safety that secures the colony and reckon with that scenario only if it arises.

Void's End.

Only the most volatile and heinous inmates are transferred to Void's End, a forsaken prison on the Verse's outermost edge. The monolithic concrete and steel penitentiary rises from the waste of Blackpost's south pole like a colossal upturned brick. No roads lead there or back. With some regularity, shuttles from orbiting craft land atop the cell blocks to deliver prisoners; nobody leaves.

Layers of security encircle the prison, but no fences or walls beyond that of the cell blocks. Automated plasma cannons watch the prison from all sides, vaporizing unauthorized individuals or craft that pass an invisible hemispherical boundary. A vicious minefield of dog-shaped automatons also lie outside the prison, ready to break into a sprint at a moment's notice and rend anyone nearby. Even if an inmate could evade these levels of security, beyond is an inhospitable waste that extends halfway around the planet. As such, few attempt to escape their sentences on Void's End.

Within, a few dozen guards oversee a force of automaton officers and a mass of inmates. Prisoners remain in their cells at most hours, unless they choose to work the mines that lie beneath the penitentiary. Every wheelbarrow of adamantine ore reduces their sentence by a day, and even backbreaking labor beats the inextricable madness of starting at four walls.

The ore shipments pay for the warden's impressive salary, so the automaton taskmasters always push for harder work and fewer breaks.

Wreck of the Valkyrie.

A jagged line on the horizon, the desolate shell of a once-proud avia-ra cruiser lays wrecked against the Blackpost mountains. History shrouds much of the Valkyrie's story in mystery, but this much is clear: at the onset of humanity's race to claim the Galactic Frontier, a zealous avia-ra admiral sought to beat the Hegemony of Man to the galaxy's edge. The Valkyrie's crew, accustomed to the comforts of the galactic core, were ill-prepared for the predators of Frontier space, especially the merciless wrothians. Their brutal voyage pitted the ship with holes and consumed its crew until only a handful remained at the helm. At the last possible hurdle, before reaching the Black Ocean—the endless expanse between galaxies—the Valkyrie crashed on Blackpost and beached against its mountain peaks.

The abandoned vessel has gone mostly unexplored for centuries, despite being a short flight from the Blackpost colony. None who venture there and explore within return. Perhaps the vessel plays host to a slumbering alien threat, a vicious force that once devoured the avia-ra crew wholesale. Or perhaps a few defense systems remain active and vigilant, placing blaster bolts into any craniums within sight.

Yomi's Ribs.

As if the world itself had fallen dead and rotted on the spot, a set of enormous, geological ribs extend skyward from a desolate valley. The view from orbit paints an even more convincing picture: a bulbous hill to the north grants the appearance of a skull, while outlying ridges complete the outline of an unearthed grave.

Lakshayan explorers named the stone formation to personify the planet, but it would be decades before anyone saw the ribs up close and discovered its secrets. Sandy tunnel mouths within the valley plummet down into the bowels of the planet, leading to a series of labyrinthine caverns. An explorer to these caverns once emerged—frostbitten and starving—with ravings of cyclopean ruins beneath the ribs, possessed by an invisible, alien sentience. He died shortly thereafter, and none have returned to the Ribs or Bowels of Yomi since.

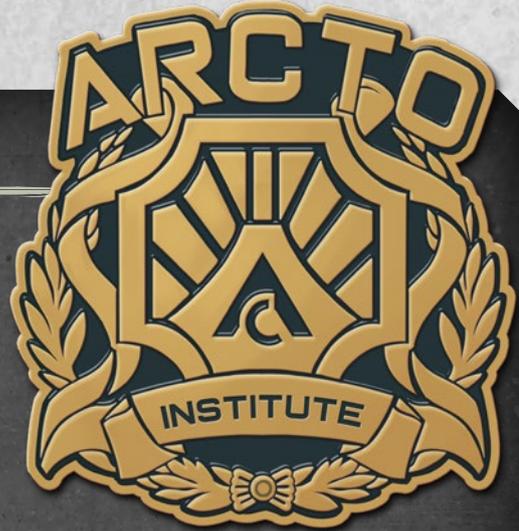
Factions.

Though dozens of factions, from the mighty Elven Empire to Astrogations Inc., vie for control over the core worlds of the 'Verse, significantly fewer turn their attentions to the distant Galactic Frontier and Blackpost in particular. In the isolated colony, local interests dominate the powers-that-be and help steer Blackpost's fate.

ARCTO INSTITUTE

The remote colony of Blackpost has not one, but two schools: the public Blackpost Academy attended by most of the young colonists, and the private, reclusive Arcto Institute with only a few dozen students. From the outside, the Arcto Institute looks like any other cluster of buildings peeking out from the sand, but inside, the halls resemble a refined Victorian manor, with hardwood floors and a resplendent chandelier adorning the entry hall. Students are polite, if quiet, and dressed in uniforms complete with suit jackets. The institute is a curious anomaly in the otherwise working class colony, but few pay the reclusive school any mind; after all, none of their children have ever been invited to attend.

Only a select roster of gifted students have been invited to the school—students gifted with psionic or magical talents. Between classes, their powers are measured, practiced, and experimented upon, all in service of the headmaster's and the Hegemony's cryptic ends.



THE EREBUS PROJECT

The impetus for Blackpost's creation, a listening device powerful enough to scan distant galaxies, is a thin, impossibly tall tower called the Deep Antenna, standing at the center of the colony. Designed to act in coordination with hundreds of smaller stations spread out over a thousand-mile radius, as well as a set of orbiting satellites, the antenna has a resolution high enough to peer at the rough outline of worlds in distant galaxies. It is an astounding feat of engineering, truly understood only by a handful of experts across the 'Verse.

The scientists working on the antenna have a grander, more cryptic goal in mind, codenamed the Erebus Project, for which the antenna was but the first step. In a sub-basement beneath the antenna facility, they are rapidly underway on the top-secret second phase: a radical type of interdimensional gate designed to leverage chronomancy and Void-science to warp spacetime to its limits. Each experiment flutters the lights on the colony above and punches miniscule holes in the fabric of space, inching the scientists toward their inscrutable final goal. Perhaps, the gate's operation will open up new passageways to other worlds, or perhaps it will grant a window into new, unthinkable realms.

FREELANCER CORPS



The only reliable way to move something across the Galactic Frontier is by hiring a freelancer. Attuned to the prolonged treks and hazards of the outermost edge of the ‘Verse, these spacers share a loose confederacy—little more than agreed-upon rates for common cargo—that unites them under a common banner.

Vessels like the 1212 Freighter that travel to and from Blackpost regularly always have a freelancer at the helm, as Astrogations Inc. long ago abandoned the outer worlds to the Freelancer Corps and the ever-present threat of wrothians.

At a glance, freelancers stand out from the common crop of spacers, appearing like Old West ranchers plunked down in their cockpits. Practically eschews most else to a freelancer: they tend to prefer wide-brimmed hats, quick-draw holsters, and hand-stitched clothing. The Galactic Frontier offers few luxuries, but it offers unfettered freedom in vast abundance. That’s usually enough for a freelancer to get by.



GRAX'S GUYS FOR CHEAP

The Blackpost chapter of Grax’s Guys for Cheap, the ‘Verse’s premiere do-anything-for-a-buck mercenary company, is operated by a slim orc named Jrax (no relation). Though ostensibly mercenaries, Grax’s crews on the edge of the ‘Verse are usually hired for delivery across the frontier, bounty hunting, and occasionally fending off alien threats. The company is hardly prestigious, but assignments to Blackpost carry a particular stigma. It’s safe to assume that every Grax’s crew on Blackpost contains at least one escaped felon or out-of-control warlock, so colonists typically give them a wide berth.

HAZARD DISPOSAL

Vessels bearing the orange and white of Hazard Disposal dock at the Blackpost spaceport every few months, transporting towering black canisters to a fortified warehouse a few miles from the colony. Officially, Hazard Disposal works to decontaminate and dismantle “exotic hazards,” like A.I. cores infected with the N-Virus or partially-imploded Void crystals, and uses the remoteness of Blackpost to minimize the risk.

In actuality, Hazard Disposal keeps a stockpile of things too dangerous to destroy: artifacts, sentient constructs, extra-dimensional materials, and fragments of eldritch power. Core-world research facilities categorize and perform experiments on the titular Hazards, so each canister is accompanied by reams of paper containment procedures, which disposal specialists must follow to the letter. Over the decades of Blackpost’s operations, their containment breaches can be counted on one hand, but it only takes one of enough magnitude to spell doom for Blackpost as a whole.



THE MONITOR

Edna Kael just goes by “Eddy” or “Old Eddy” to anyone that knows her. A septuagenarian with silver hair and a steely gaze, Eddy was one of the original Blackpost colonists and survived the first terrible winter that devoured so many. Today, she spends her days with a concussion rifle in a small lookout tower overlooking the colony, watching—always watching.

This eccentric monitor has observed the colony for decades, and unbeknownst to all, shielded it from uncountable horrors from the blackness of space. Decades of vigilance has honed her senses and monster-slaying techniques, but slowed her in other respects. Perhaps one more encounter with a monstrous threat will claim Old Eddy once and for all, and no one will be the wiser. Knowing that her days are numbered, one way or the other, Old Eddy keeps an eye on new colonists as they arrive in Blackpost. For all the “monthers” and exiles, some have the potential to fill the role her husband once did and help her keep watch over the long, bitter nights.



HEGEMONY DEFENSE FORCE

All too often, space marine cadets of the Hegemony Defense Force (HDF) that expected a life of excitement and explosions draw the short straw and receive a thankless assignment on Blackpost. The colony’s entire detachment of space marines, rarely exceeding two dozen, sequester themselves in their railgun facility and perform patrols of the colony only when a commanding officer demands it. Monotony is the rule; excitement is as rare as a warm day on Blackpost.

The colonists of Blackpost have become adept at navigating minor disputes and altercations, as enlisting the HDF to investigate crimes or disputes means inviting the heavy hand of bureaucracy into everyday affairs. When severe situations arise, however, the marines of the HDF respond as soldiers: locking down the entire colony and brute-forcing whatever problem they find. Detained individuals are launched off-world on the 1212 for investigation, a process which takes months, if not years to resolve.



THE NIGHTSHIFT

The most hardened colonists on Blackpost are on the Nightshift—stationed above ground during the colony’s bitter weeks of night. The interminable blackness and frigid temperatures change a person in the same manner that isolation in the wilderness does. As such, Nightshift workers are usually a stoic and reserved bunch.

Furthermore, they share an understanding that the Nightshift sticks together, no matter what happens. They wordlessly split the workload and share supplies, even when there’s not enough to go around. And when one of them is harmed, retribution is more of a foregone conclusion than a pursuit.

The Nightshift shares another important understanding that few others on Blackpost recognize: that there is something else out there in the black of the bitter night. While we search the stars for unblinking eyes, we ignore the nightmares looming just behind us.



OTHER FACTIONS IN BLACKPOST

A number of other factions from the *Dark Matter* campaign setting might have dealings in Blackpost.

DD&D. Wherever antiquities and magic items can be acquired, the “artifactors” from DD&D are not far behind.

The Firm. Criminal dealings, heists, and all manner of skullduggery are spearheaded by the business-minded Firm, who relies on an army of Contractors to carry out specific, deniable jobs.

The S.S. Saint Vincent. A lone battleship patrolling the Galactic Frontier, the Saint Vincent’s crew, known as archons, seek to single-handedly stamp out instability, especially the wrothian threat.

The Tower. Inexplicably hiding in plain sight in the colony, the Tower is a secret society of mages that purportedly controls the universe via an intricate conspiracy.



Blackpost Colonists.

The faces around Blackpost are a surprisingly diverse slice of the 'Verse: humans, amoeboids, elves, dwarves, nautilids, and others that have washed up like flotsam at the galaxy's outermost edge. Some conceal sordid histories; others prefer the solitude. Before long, however, the stunning vistas of Blackpost converted them all to permanent residents—fixtures on the rock.

You can introduce the following nonplayer characters (NPCs) into your investigations as suspects, allies, antagonists, and innocents to be protected. Like everything else in *Insomnia*, you can omit some or all of this list, supplement these NPCs with those of your own creation, and modify them as needed in the service of your story.

Annie Cobbletop.

Annie Cobbletop (*she/her*) is the very picture of a scatterbrained gnomish inventor, more absorbed with puzzles and challenging projects than chasing scientific breakthroughs. By day, Annie collates reams of data from the Deep Antenna at the center of the colony and analyzes their patterns. Her work is as tedious and unmerciful as most scientific endeavors. By night, however, Annie builds wildly impractical inventions to solve everyday tasks, her blueprints and prototypes littering her small workshop. She is relentlessly optimistic and reflexively imaginative, often concocting mecha-magical solutions to problems that already have conventional, and much easier, answers. That's part of the fun, as Annie will happily attest.

Annie is always accompanied by two wizmos—tiny mischievous scrap robots hailing from the Feywild—named Bitt and Bott. When the pair aren't playing practical jokes or rearranging the tools in Annie's workshop, they puckishly assist Annie in building tiny electronic gadgets. On balance, they're more of a help than a hindrance, a miracle in wizmo terms.

Blob Belcher.

To say that the amoeboid chef Blob Belcher (*he/him*) has an unconventional personality would be an understatement. Amoeboids always have flexible self-identities, but after being stranded on a human-dominated low-world for two decades, Blob Belcher has adopted an uncannily humanlike voice and demeanor. Working at the Head's Lodge, he cooks human foods—chiefly burgers—wears a chef's apron, and sports a floppy jelly mustache. Blob might not be much of an asset in combat, but if a problem needs a perfectly-cooked burger, he's got you covered.



Brimstone, P.I.

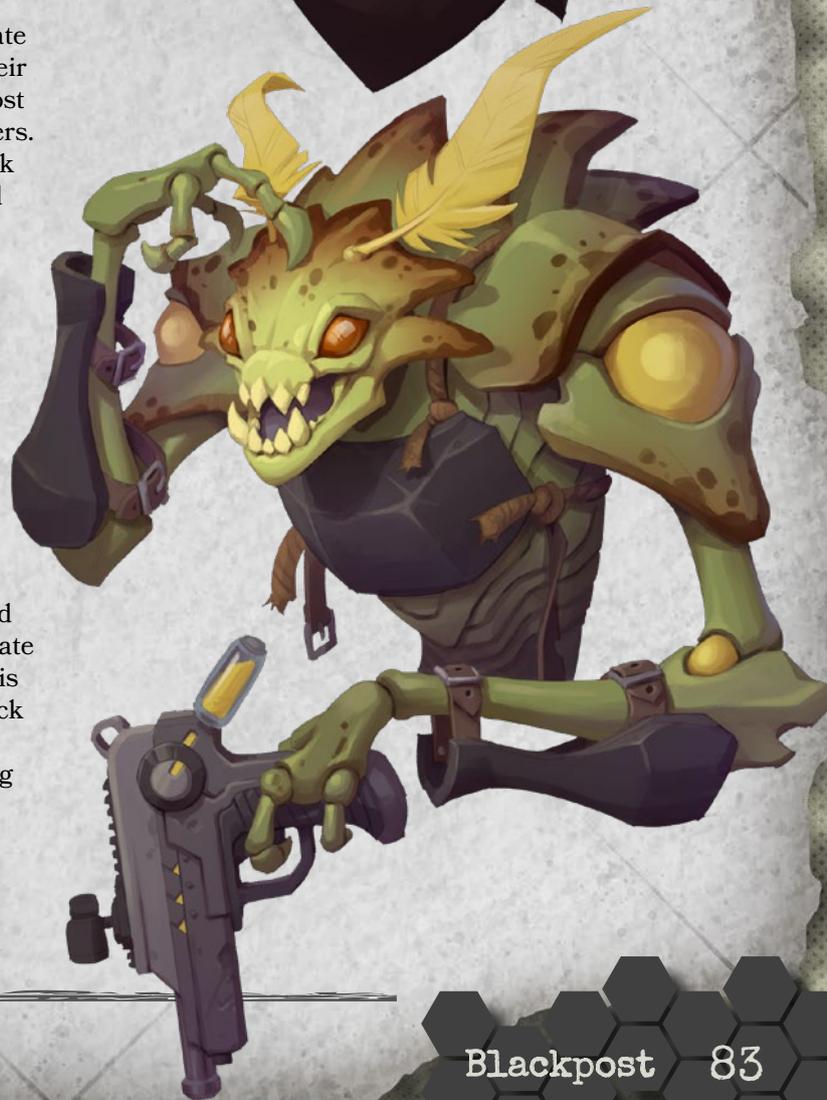
Sidney Vallith (*she/her*), is a relentless private investigator running an office on Blackpost in the hopes of cracking her only unsolved case. Having spent decades on High Terra and Alden Val finding missing persons and dredging up leads on long abandoned investigations, a mysterious case led Sidney to Blackpost, where she earned the moniker “Brimstone” with equal measures of respect and ire. She never discusses the particulars of this case, but it clearly dominates her attention and ticks on in the back of her mind. By now, she has realized the shape of a vast and treacherous conspiracy, but intends to dig ever deeper.

The detective cuts a menacing figure: a trenchcoat and leather gloves, leathery red skin, one red mechanical eye, and her namesake odor of brimstone wafting from a specialty cigar chomped in her teeth. She keeps a copious array of magical trinkets and holy symbols on her person, but the most powerful tool in her arsenal is a leather-bound notebook in which she jots down notes and pieces together larger mysteries. With enough time, Brimstone cracks the case.

Buck Private Flikk.

The skathári Flikk (*he/them*) is, unusually, a private in the Hegemony Defense Force, as ill-fitted to their role as is possible. When the colonists of Blackpost face trouble, the Hegemony Defense Force answers. Usually, this answer is underwhelming: send Buck Private Flikk, or one of his similarly disinterested peers. Flikk bears the standard-issue blaster and components of a standard-issue impulse frame, but is comically inaccurate with both. Having never quite understood how to use the blaster’s sights or the impulse frame’s controls, he leaps about randomly and peppers the sky with blaster bolts whenever danger draws near.

Most often, however, Flikk does nothing. Abiding by the adage that objects at rest tend to stay at rest, Flikk resists doing even the smallest legwork for the colonists of Blackpost. His fearsome skathári silhouette quells most minor disputes, but investigations and inquiry are just out of the question. When legitimate danger rears its head, Flikk “receives a call” on his assuredly deactivated comms set and books it back to the HDF base at Ol’ Boomer. From that walled base of safety, nobody apart from his commanding officers can compel him to help.



Finley West.

Finley West (*he/him*) is a human musician with a synthesizer on his back and his hat in his hand. To the colonists, Finley is just another “monther,” someone who’ll last no more than a month and leave with the next 1212 Freighter. Since his arrival, Finley has been splitting his time between Head’s Lodge and the Rathaus, helping to recycle electronics by day and playing shows for the colonists by night. Magic, music, and technology weave together in Finley’s performances as illusions fill the tap room alongside his voice. Reading between the lyrics proves that Finley knows much more about the malevolence around Blackpost than he lets on.

Finley claims he’s just passing through, but he never seems to give a straight answer about where he’s coming from, and he seems pretty nervous around the Hegemony Defense Force.

Governor Milroy.

Everyone on the colony knows that their administrator, Governor Milton Milroy (*he/him*), is little more than a stuffed suit from High Terra, but they couldn’t begin to comprehend his terrible secret. Short statured, dark skinned, and monotonous, Governor Milroy is akin to human white noise. People fall asleep in his meetings and rush away to avoid exchanging pleasantries, lest they be trapped in an unending anecdote. Despite this, Milroy makes for an efficient administrator, if an uninteresting one.

Little do the colonists of Blackpost know, however, that Governor Milroy doesn’t exist—hasn’t existed for decades. What stands in his stead is an android, a nimble and fearsome killing machine designed to look and behave exactly as a human does. But when was Milroy replaced, and why? What is the android programmed to achieve? And to what lengths will it conceal the metal hiding underneath its skin?

Kiyoko.

Kiyoko (*she/her*) is a precocious human child from Lakshay concealing untold depths of psionic power. An attendee of the Arcto Institute, Kiyoko is always seen in her neatly tailored school uniform wearing her black hair in curtains punctuated only by a pink ribbon. She is perhaps the only attendee of the Arcto Institute seen by most colonists, as the other students obediently remain in their classrooms and dormitories. However, the walls and regulations of her esteemed school can’t contain Kiyoko—perhaps literally.

A fearsome maelstrom of psionic power dwells just beneath Kiyoko’s otherwise impassive exterior. Glimpses of the future and of other dimensions, monologues of other people’s innermost thoughts, and rumbles of events from across the ‘Verse echo through Kiyoko’s mind at all times. Only the truly threatening or bizarre rise to her attention any more, though the instructors at the Arcto Institute seem keenly interested in unlocking her potential further.





Kiyoko has thankfully suppressed memories of the true extent of her power: her first psionic awakening leveled a city block on Lakshay in a telekinetic explosion. Ever since, she has been in the care (or custody) of Tower agents and the professors of the ArcTo Institute, who consider her more of a bomb or a test subject than a little girl. Maybe they're right.

Nebula Jo the Smuggler.

Jo Watermane (*she/her*) is a paranoid human smuggler always looking over her shoulder. Her last job—a contract from the Firm—involved running weapons across the dwarven conclave. Unfortunately, her ship ran afoul of a wrothian raiding party and her cargo of illegal and experimental blasters ended up jettisoned in deep space. She escaped with her life but not her cargo, and now the Firm has placed a price on her head, dead or alive. Thankfully, Blackpost is a great place to lay low, and “Nebula Jo” intends to do just that.

As the saying goes, good fences make good neighbors, and even on Blackpost, Nebula Jo acts as a fence for stolen goods. Of course, everything she acquires “fell off a freighter,” so everything she sells out of her trench coat comes with a discount. A corner table of the Rathaus almost always features Nebula Jo with a rotating cast of “customers” playing cards and ordering drinks late into the night.



Old Greggory the Scrapper.

Greggy Ironsmelt (*he/him*) is a reclusive dwarf obsessed with the Wreck of the Valkyrie. The old dwarf fills his days surveying the outside of the ship, probing the structure for entries and weaknesses, and planning methods to reach the vessel's core. Though no one who has ventured inside the derelict hulk has ever returned, Greggory has spent three years preparing for a successful expedition, for reasons perhaps only known to himself.



The colony seems to regard Old Greggry as something of a project, and he survives on a combination of salvage and charity. His home is a shack on the edge of the scrapyard where he disassembles components retrieved from the Valkyrie and prepares for the next phases of his exploration. Every so often, he visits the Rathaus with a new trinket of avia-ra tech from the old wreck, a harrowing story, and a few more pages in his ever-expanding map of the ship.

Professor-Janitor Grunch.

The Blackpost Academy hired the orc veteran Grunch Backslash (he/him) as a custodian, but when the 1212 Freighter arrived without the new mechanical engineering teacher, Grunch was pressed into service as a substitute. This temporary position seems unlikely to end any time soon. Insisting that students call him “Professor-Janitor,” Grunch has embraced his dual role with gusto, despite being underqualified for both. His engineering courses involve surprisingly effective hands-on demos like hammering the heaters at the Academy into working order and re-wiring the communications arrays that scan for Wild Magic storms.

Grunch is a workaholic. If he’s not tutoring a beleaguered student, he’s disassembling a broken coffee maker, as if determined to defeat his personal demons by ignoring them. Any gap in his schedule lets in memories of his war days, the men he killed on distant battlefields, and the eyeless, apathetic gods that watched the blood freezing to his hands. When Grunch does sleep, it’s never without nightmares.

Vrel’gohnt the Nightshift Wrothian.

Spacers tell ghost stories about the wroth, a hivemind of sleepless, unstoppable beings that harvest the biomass of other beings under cover of night. Any single wrothian who breaks free from this tyrannical, predatory collective must overcome that terrifying legacy, even as their body degrades apart from the psionic nourishment of their hive. A rogue wrothian has perhaps ten years to live and not a friend in the ‘Verse.

Vrel’gohnt (he/him) is one such rogue wrothian who has vowed to spend his few remaining years guarding the last place in the ‘Verse he can call home. His silhouette is no less intimidating for the loss of one of his horns, now a jagged stump above his toothy maw. Over many icy nights Vrel’gohnt has forged a bond with the rest of the Nightshift. He may be a monster, but he’s the Nightshift’s monster, and the Nightshift protects its own.



FUTURISTIC RULES

As a rule, if something belongs in a roleplaying game, it belongs in the futuristic universe of *Dark Matter*. Every class, race, character option, and magic item, lives in *Dark Matter*, not just in faraway corners of the universe, but in the forefront.

Armor-clad knights and elemental sorcerers can use the rules of 5th Edition unchanged, but gun-toting cyborgs and power-armored space marines will need a few supplemental rules for their new weapons, equipment, and skills.

Futuristic Skills.

Supplements Skills

Far-flung futuristic settings find ample uses for every skill available to characters, but new, additional skills will also be required to thrive. Skills such as Survival become critical for navigating unfamiliar and hostile alien environments, while Insight might be used to understand the behaviors of alien races. In addition, this setting introduces three new skills: **DATA**, **PILOTING**, and **TECHNOLOGY** to supplement the existing tools at your disposal.

Intelligence (Data).

This skill governs how well one can manipulate a technological interface and gain access to information or other functions. Your Intelligence (Data) check encompasses your knowledge of software and its exploits, more than hardware (which is covered by the Technology skill), and so will only be used when you use technology that has an interface, like a datapad, an arcane terminal, a ship's computer, or other control technology, like a door control or the computers that govern a shield generator or ship weapon. If a piece of technology doesn't have an interface, an interface rig is required to interact with it. The GM should call for an Intelligence (Data) check whenever you attempt complicated operations on a data system, when you attempt to reprogram a construct, or when you attempt to hack a device.

Any sort of illegal or unauthorized access to a technological system is called **HACKING** and requires the use of an interface rig, as well as an Intelligence (Data) check. In general, a hacking attempt requires 1 minute of work using the technology, though the GM can decide that certain tasks might take only an action. On a successful check to hack a device, you can perform operations on the system as if you had full access. On a failed check, roll a d6. On a 6, the device locks down and no further attempts can be made to hack it. More secure devices might lock on a roll of 5 or 6, or on a roll of 4 to 6, as determined by the GM. You can hack into devices to illegally access a security system, open a door, disable an alarm, or manipulate someone else's datapad to give you access to their information or bank account.

Dexterity (Piloting).

Your Dexterity (Piloting) check covers how well you maintain control over a ship in difficult circumstances. You don't need proficiency in Piloting to fly a ship (be it an aircraft or a spacecraft), but proficiency in this skill can help when you need to make a crash landing or pull off a risky maneuver in a dogfight. The GM might call for a Dexterity (Piloting) check when you attempt to fly a ship through an electromagnetic storm that disrupts the controls, or when you wish to perform a hard stop or pull a high-G turn.

Intelligence (Technology).

Your Intelligence (Technology) check measures your ability to understand the inner workings of technological devices. Most devices are powered by some form of magic, but plenty of intricate design goes into channeling that magic into useful effects. Use this skill to understand unfamiliar or complex technology or to modify or repair devices. The GM may call for an Intelligence (Technology) check when you attempt to modify a blaster, repair your ship's shield generator, disable a rogue android, or sabotage an arcane terminal.

Futuristic Skill Proficiencies.

At 1st level, characters can choose to gain proficiency with these new skills, as shown on the following table:

Class	Skills
<i>Base Classes</i>	
Barbarian	Piloting
Bard	Data, Piloting, Technology
Cleric	None
Druid	None
Fighter	Piloting, Technology
Monk	Piloting
Paladin	Piloting, Technology
Ranger	Piloting, Technology
Rogue	Data, Piloting, Technology
Sorcerer	Data, Piloting, Technology
Warlock	Data, Piloting, Technology
Wizard	Data, Piloting, Technology
<i>Mage Hand Press Classes</i>	
Alchemist	Data, Piloting, Technology
Captain	Piloting, Technology
Craftsman	Piloting, Technology
Gunslinger	Piloting, Technology
Investigator	Data, Piloting, Technology
Martyr	Piloting, Technology
Necromancer	Data, Piloting, Technology
Warden	Piloting
Warmage	Data, Piloting, Technology
Witch	Data, Piloting, Technology

FUTURISTIC RACES

The *Dark Matter* campaign setting contains any race you can find in a typical roleplaying game: elves, orcs, and dwarves, among others. Even humans from Earth can be found on Blackpost, if some means can pull them from the Dead Magic Zone around Sol.

For six new races completely original to the *Dark Matter* campaign setting (as well as a setting-appropriate version of orcs and a staggering array of Near-Human subraces), see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 2.

Futuristic Weapons.

Supplements Melee and Ranged Weapons

Weapons in futuristic settings range from antimatter carbines and laser swords to traditional swords and shields. Many folks believe that the old weapons are more elegant or civilized, while others maintain that a simple blaster is reliable enough for most any engagement. This section introduces a few of the high technology options available to players, including melee and ranged weapons. All of the following weapons count as magical technology.

BLASTERS are arcane weapons that eschew traditional projectiles in favor of energetic pulses, powered by arcane batteries and focused through specialized apertures. Because they self-recharge, blasters need not ever be reloaded, even though some are prone to overheating.

Blaster Damage Rolls.

Unlike other weapons, you don't add your ability modifier to the damage roll of a blaster unless otherwise stated.

Two-Weapon Fighting With Blasters.

When you engage in two-weapon fighting with two light blasters, you subtract 2 from the damage roll of the bonus attack, to a minimum of 1 damage.

Blaster Proficiencies.

In futuristic settings in which blasters are commonplace, characters gain the proficiencies listed on the following table.

Class Weapon Proficiencies

Base Classes

Barbarian	Simple blasters, simple melee weapons, martial melee weapons, blitz cannon, magnus, REC gun
Bard	Simple blasters, simple melee weapons, laser halfsword, laser sword
Cleric	Simple blasters, simple melee weapons
Druid	Avia-ra sunstaff
Fighter	Simple blasters, martial blasters, simple melee weapons, martial melee weapons
Monk	Simple blasters, simple melee weapons
Paladin	Simple blasters, martial blasters, simple melee weapons, martial melee weapons
Ranger	Simple blasters, martial blasters, simple melee weapons, martial melee weapons
Rogue	Simple blasters, simple melee weapons, arc baton, laser halfsword, laser sword, thermal lance
Sorcerer	Antimatter dagger, phaser, repeater
Warlock	Simple blasters, antimatter dagger
Wizard	Simple blasters, antimatter dagger, photonic lash

Mage Hand Press Classes

Alchemist	Simple blasters, simple melee weapons, arc baton
Captain	Simple blasters, martial blasters, simple melee weapons, martial melee weapons
Craftsman	Simple blasters, martial blasters, simple melee weapons, martial melee weapons
Gunslinger	Simple melee weapons, simple blasters, martial blasters
Investigator	Simple blasters, martial blasters, simple melee weapons, arc baton, laser halfsword, laser sword, thermal lance
Martyr	Simple blasters, martial blasters, simple melee weapons, martial melee weapons
Necromancer	Simple blasters, simple melee weapons
Warden	Simple blasters, simple melee weapons, martial melee weapons, blitz cannon, magnus, REC gun
Warmage	Simple blasters, simple melee weapons
Witch	Simple blasters, antimatter dagger, photonic lash



BLASTERS.

Name	Cost	Damage	Weight	Properties
<i>Simple Melee Weapons</i>				
Avia-Ra Sunstaff	150 gp	2d6 radiant	6 lb.	Blaster (range 100/400), special, two-handed
Ion Cannon	250 gp	2d6 radiant	6 lb.	Blaster (range 30/90), scatter (2d8), two-handed
Phaser	75 gp	2d4 radiant	2 lb.	Blaster (range 50/200), light, nonlethal
Repeater	100 gp	2d6 radiant	3 lb.	Blaster (range 60/240)
Standard Carbine	250 gp	2d6 radiant	7 lb.	Automatic, blaster (range 80/320), two-handed
<i>Martial Melee Weapons</i>				
Antimatter Carbine	400 gp	2d6 radiant	4 lb.	Automatic, blaster (range 30/120), foregrip
Blitz Cannon	800 gp	2d8 lightning	7 lb.	Blaster (range 10/30), heavy, scatter (2d10), two-handed
Concussion Rifle	800 gp	2d8 thunder	8 lb.	Blaster (range 150/600), sighted, two-handed
Magnus	800 gp	2d8 radiant	6 lb.	Blaster (range 70/280), heavy, overheat
REC Gun	1,500 gp	2d8 radiant	120 lb.	Automatic, blaster (range 100/400), heavy, mounted, two-handed

MELEE WEAPONS.

Name	Cost	Damage	Weight	Properties
<i>Simple Melee Weapons</i>				
Antimatter Dagger	100 cr	1d4 necrotic	1 lb.	Finesse, light
Ballistic Gloves	50 cr	1d4 force	1 lb.	Fist, light
Laser Claws	75 cr	1d4 radiant	1 lb.	Fist, light, finesse
<i>Martial Melee Weapons</i>				
Arc Baton	150 cr	1d6 lightning	2 lb.	Special
Battlefist	75 cr	1d8 bludgeoning	3 lb.	Special
Laser Halfsword	150 cr	1d6 radiant	2 lb.	Finesse, light
Laser Sword	450 cr	1d8 radiant	3 lb.	Finesse, special, versatile (1d10)
Photonic Lash	150 cr	1d4 radiant	2 lb.	Finesse, reach
Repulsor Gauntlet	150 cr	1d10 force	4 lb.	Heavy
Rocket Hammer	200 cr	1d10 bludgeoning	18 lb.	Heavy, special, two-handed
Thermal Lance	150 cr	1d8 fire	6 lb.	Versatile (1d10)

New Weapon Properties.

The following weapon properties are utilized by the new modern weapons in this chapter.

Automatic. When you make an attack with this weapon on your turn, you can choose to make two attacks instead. These attacks are always made with disadvantage, regardless of circumstance.

Blaster. A weapon with the Blaster property is a ranged weapon that requires no ammunition. Blasters are considered firearms for the purpose of class features and abilities. Like firearms, you don't add your ability score modifier to blasters' damage rolls.

Fist. Attacks made with this weapon are treated as unarmed strikes.

Foregrip. This weapon can be used with one or two hands. If used in two hands, its normal range increases by 50 feet and its long range increases by 200 feet.

Mounted. This weapon is normally used while attached to a tripod, vehicle, or other bracing mount. You can mount or unmount this weapon as an action. While it is mounted, it can't be moved. It can only be used to make an attack while unmounted if held by a Medium or larger creature with a Strength score of at least 15.

Nonlethal. When you reduce a creature to 0 hit points using this weapon, you can choose to knock the creature out, rendering it unconscious, rather than deal a killing blow.

Overheat. Once you make an attack with this weapon, it can't be used again to make an attack until the end of your next turn.

Scatter. If you make an attack against a target that is within half this weapon's normal range, you deal the damage value listed in parentheses instead of the weapon's normal damage dice.

Sighted. This weapon has disadvantage on attack rolls made against targets within 20 feet.

CREDITS

Rather than carrying hard currency in the form of gold, silver, and copper pieces, the universe of *Dark Matter* deals in a form of currency called Credits, which is more secure and convenient. One credit (cr) is worth the same amount as one gold piece (gp), and a single credit can also be broken up into hundredths, making it possible to represent copper and silver pieces as well.

Special Weapons.

Weapons with special properties are described here.

Arc Baton. When a creature is hit with this weapon, it can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.

Avia-Ra Sunstaff. This weapon can also be used as a quarterstaff.

Battlefist. This weapon acts as an oversized, articulated gauntlet. It can hold and manipulate objects, though you can't attack with your battlefist while you're holding an object with it.

Laser Sword. Depending on this weapon's construction, it can deal force, necrotic, or radiant damage. Once the weapon is created, this damage type doesn't change.

Rocket Hammer. Once per turn, when you make an attack with this weapon, you can engage its thrusters to deal an additional 1d4 bludgeoning damage on a hit.

Futuristic Equipment.

Supplements Adventuring Gear

High technology comes in a wide degree of forms, from legendary artifacts of unspeakable complexity, to the humble life suit. Practical technology might not be the most glamorous, but it's certainly indispensable: no ship could travel far in the 'Verse without functioning life suits, and explorers would literally be in the dark without flashlights. Of course, adventurers and explorers still make use of conventional gear, much of which has evolved with the march of progress: healer's kits, locks, and manacles have all changed considerably, but they still serve the same purpose. Other things, like backpacks, have hardly changed at all.

The following devices are considered magical technology: comm sets, concussion grenades, datapads, flashlights, holo-spheres, igniters, interface rig, life suits, log keepers, quadcoders, and wristwatches. All of the following gear should be considered commonplace in any science fiction setting.



Suit	Cost	Weight
Binoculars	15 cr	1/2 lb.
Comm Set	10 cr	1 lb.
Concussion Grenade	75 cr	2 lb.
Datapad	50 cr	1 lb.
Flare	1 cr	1 lb.
Flashlight	35 cr	1 lb.
Holo-Sphere	150 cr	2 lb.
Holster	1 cr	1/2 lb.
Hypodermic Needle	175 cr	—
Igniter	5 cr	—
Interface Rig	25 cr	3 lb.
Life Suit	200 cr	20 lb.
Log Keeper	25 cr	3 lb.
Omnitool	25 cr	1 lb.
Quadcorder	85 cr	1 lb.
Sling	.5 cr	—
Vent Tape	.1 cr	1/2 lb.
Wristwatch	5 cr	—

Gear Descriptions.

This section describes items that have special rules or require further explanation.

Comm Set. Using this handheld device, you can verbally communicate with any creature within 1 mile that also has a comm set. A comm set can be connected to a headset worn on the ear or can be talked into directly. Its signal can penetrate most barriers, but is blocked by 1 foot of stone, 1 inch of common metal, a thin sheet of lead, or 3 feet of wood or dirt.

FUTURISTIC ARMOR

The gradient of armor offered in the SRD is sufficient to outfit characters of any class, and most classes are designed with these statistics in mind. Therefore, to maintain the game's balance, *Dark Matter* doesn't employ any additional armor options, but rather suggests alternative names for them, in keeping with the science-fiction setting.

Concussion Grenade. This spherical device, dotted with blinking lights, explodes in a wave of concussive force. As an action, you can throw this grenade up to 20 feet, which detonates a moment after impact. Make a ranged attack against a creature or object, treating the grenade as an improvised weapon. On a hit, the target takes 1d8 thunder damage and is deafened until the beginning of your next turn. Additionally, each creature within 10 feet of the target must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or also take this damage and be deafened for the same duration.

Datapad. A common gadget that is used to store personal information, search for data on arcane terminals, communicate with others, and transfer credits. You can enter text by hand into a datapad or draw in it using a stylus as if it were a notebook with 2,000 pages. You can also search these notes with one-word queries. If the datapad is within 1 mile of an arcane terminal or ship's computer, you can use it to communicate with other datapads that are also within that range, provided both datapads have exchanged a comm number. This communication is limited to one text-based message (128 characters) every minute. Lastly, datapads are often used to access an account with the Galactic Bank, where your wealth is stored as credits on their server.

When you get a datapad, you also lock it with a password that you likely keep secret. Only someone with the password can access the datapad (barring unauthorized access, which can be accomplished with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Data) check to hack the datapad).

If the datapad is connected by cable to an arcane terminal or ship's computer, you can use it to perform advanced operations on systems connected to it. This might be necessary to operate some systems, like the research devices on a science satellite.

Flare. A flare is a foot-long, brightly colored stick with a plastic cap. You can strike the bottom of the flare as an action, causing the flare to burst into a bright, colored flame, matching that of the stick. This flame burns for 10 minutes, emitting a 40-foot radius of bright light and dim light for an additional 20 feet. A flare will still burn underwater or in a vacuum.

Flashlight. This device produces a 60-foot cone of bright light, and dim light for an additional 15 feet. It can provide light for up to 4 hours, after which it must recharge for 8 hours.

Holo-Sphere. As an action, you can activate this 6-inch wide sphere and deploy it within 15 feet of you. The sphere then captures a 5-foot cube holographic recording of the events of the next 30 seconds, which can be replayed on it later. In spite of the high technology, the image leaves something to be desired: the sphere produces a roughly one-foot high monochromatic hologram of the subject it recorded, often with a considerable amount of static. High volumes of magic disrupt recording with even more static, often creating an unrecognizable holographic mess.

Hypodermic Needle. This syringe can directly inject a substance into someone's bloodstream. You can load a liquid, such as a potion of healing, into a hypodermic needle as a bonus action, then administer it to another creature as an action on your turn. If the creature is unwilling, you must make a melee weapon attack, treating the needle as an improvised weapon, to do so.

Igniter. This device produces a small flame, which you can use to light a candle, torch, or campfire.

Interface Rig. An interface rig includes everything necessary to connect to a device without an accessible interface: a datapad accessor loaded with complicated algorithms, a plethora of wires and connectors, and a heavy magnet, in case things get dire. Such a rig is necessary to gain unauthorized access to many systems.

Life Suit. This one-piece jumpsuit comes equipped with a domed glass helmet. While wearing it, you can breathe normally and survive underwater or in the vacuum of space without ill effect for up to 24 hours at a time. The suit must be removed for 2 hours to replenish its air supply. While wearing it, you are immune to the effects of inhaled poisons, gases, and pathogens. Additionally, the suit insulates you from extreme environmental temperatures (see *Dark Matter*, Appendix E). You can wear the suit under armor.

Log Keeper. This foot-long device records and replays audio, organizing entries by date. It can store up to 72 hours of audio before it automatically begins purging the earliest entries.

Omnitool. This multipurpose gadget contains a plethora of useful tools: small knives of various sizes, a small hammer, screwdrivers, a file, a bottle opener, a small saw, a wrench, a can opener, a wire-cutter, and a small set of pliers.

EQUIPMENT PACKS

You can replace any pack you get from your class with one of the following packs, or you can purchase a pack for the price shown, which might be cheaper than buying the items individually.

Engineer's Pack (325 cr). Includes a backpack, a comm set, a crowbar, a datapad, a flashlight, a hammer, an igniter, a life suit, dozens of assorted nuts and bolts, an omnitool, 10 rolls of vent tape, and a wristwatch.

Marine's Pack (465 cr). Includes a backpack, a bed roll, binoculars, a comm set, 2 concussion grenades, a crowbar, a flashlight, an igniter, a life suit, 10 days of rations, a tactical vest, and a roll of vent tape. The pack also has 50 feet of rope strapped to the side of it.

Researcher's Pack (750 cr). Includes a backpack, binoculars, a comm set, a datapad, a flashlight, a holo-sphere, a hypodermic needle, a life suit, a log keeper, an omnitool, a quadcorder, and a wristwatch.

Surveyor's Pack (378 cr). Includes a backpack, a bandolier, a bed roll, binoculars, a comm set, a flashlight, a log keeper, an igniter, a life suit, a quadcorder, 10 days of rations, and a wristwatch. The pack also has 50 feet of rope strapped to the side of it.

Spacer's Pack (628 cr). Includes a backpack, a bandolier, a comm set, a datapad, 2 flashlights, a holo-sphere, an interface rig, 2 cans of krash, a life suit, a log keeper, an igniter, an omnitool, a quadcorder, 10 rolls of vent tape, and a wristwatch.

Quadcorder. This handheld scanning device has four prominent sensors (each looking like a small radar dish) on its operating end. When directed at an object within 5 feet as an action, the device measures and displays many of that object's intrinsic properties, including its temperature, density, boiling point, freezing point, conductivity, and viscosity.

Vent Tape. This durable, adhesive tape is useful for any application that involves sticking two things together. While more creative minds might use large quantities of vent tape for other uses, most people use it for quick repairs and to affix flashlights to blasters in a pinch. A single roll of vent tape contains 60 feet of 2-inch wide tape.

Futuristic Classes.

The many worlds of *Dark Matter* are filled with characters great and small, from the gnomish mechanics that keep the Flotilla aloft, to righteous avia-ra pilgrims proselytizing on backwater worlds, to the intrepid human explorers mapping the far reaches of the galaxy. It is from these perspectives, using the classes of 5th Edition, that players can tease out the secrets of the 'Verse and survive its myriad perils.

The following entries explore how to adapt the classes of 5th Edition for adventures among the stars and provide inspiration for your characters.

Barbarians.

Barbarians are defined by the unbridled rage that dwells within them. Even as the aeons have marched forward and warfare has evolved from swords and spears to interplanetary affairs of starships and warheads, barbarians haven't budged; they are still an embodiment of primal, furious rage. Some barbarians focus their rage through circuitry and steel, becoming the brutal warlords of a new age, while others shun this new technology, smashing any that comes within reach.

Every Time I Rage. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I go to my happy place, a field of green grass and fluttering songbirds.
- I strip down to my shorts.
- I start yelling incoherently, and don't stop until it's over.
- I pop a blood vessel in my eye.

Bards.

Bards are consummate performers and entertainers, and find that their skills have unexpected applications across the 'Verse. Any bard can play for the guests of a halfling hearthstation, but many bards can also find work as translators, ambassadors, salesmen, spies, and historians. Bards are experts at putting a smiling face on an enterprise and a skilled hand to its operation, which keeps their talents in demand no matter where they travel.

I Tell People That I'm. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I'm the captain of my very own starship, figuratively speaking.
- I'm a maestro, a virtuoso, and a sommelier. I'm a machine that converts wine into art.
- I'm a freelance fiscal consultant. I specialize in separating lots of people from their money at once.

Clerics.

The gods of the 'Verse are many and varied. Practically every inhabited world bears its own pantheon of unique deities, each of which are capable of bestowing their believers with true miracles—feats of divine magic. Therefore, faith is an important resource on the galactic stage, as many rival pantheons compete for adherents. Clerics in *Dark Matter* can worship the gods of any traditional pantheon, or they might pledge their lives to the Temple of the Chosen, the Church of the Sun Above, or even fringe beliefs which venerate the all-consuming Void.

My Holy Symbol. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- My holy symbol is carved from the bone of a long-forgotten and probably monstrous saint.
- This circuit board performs technological miracles.
- My holy symbol is a roach named Mortimer, kept safely in a small jar worn on a chain.
- You might see the activation key to an arcane warhead. I see a symbol of my god.

Druids.

Strange, alien worlds are watched over by strange, alien druids. A druid's magic is an embodiment of the natural world; however, in the vastness of space, "natural" usually means something completely unrecognizable to one's home planet. Some worlds are dominated by exotic megaflora, whereas others have hardly any vegetable life at all. Alien animals come in innumerable forms, ranging from exoskeletal monsters of claws and teeth, to unusual crossbreeds between animal, fungus, and plant.

By contrast, however, new varieties of druids align themselves with artificial environments, becoming one with machines, circuits, and steel. These druids cast off the old conventions of naturalism and embrace the new technology of the 'Verse as a way to push life forward. What is life, after all, if not adaptable?

My Hometown. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- My hometown is a vast, uninterrupted ocean, beneath which a panoply of aquatic creatures thrive.
- I hail from a sprawling metropolis-world, a jungle of steel and concrete stacked up to low orbit.
- Nothing on my hometown resembles the plants and animals found elsewhere. My pet spider-cat, for instance, is as unique as it is horrifying.
- My hometown is a pockmarked asteroid or moon, bearing hardly any natural life.

Fighters.

When battles need fought and people need killed, fighters step up to the plate. Though their methods may vary wildly from terrestrial warriors, the mercenaries and knights of the 'Verse are no less brave and mighty.

Finding fighters in the 'Verse is easy: just search through the biggest groups of people for the toughest among them. From the power-armored warriors of Lakshay, who pilot battle frames to hold back the Warhorde, to the Coalition's vast companies of space marines, fighters the galaxy over have numerous options for employment, adventure, and tests of might.

The Worst Injury I've Sustained. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I have a dent in my skull because a dragon bit my head. Nowadays, my thinking sometimes gets a little muddled.
- I once lost both my arms, not that it stopped me from fighting, though.
- You'd think I was a slice of swiss cheese after that shootout.

Monks.

Balance is key. A balanced body yields health, strength, and precision; a balanced mind grants acuity and inner peace. Monks are those who embrace balance as a practice and lifestyle, whether or not they choose to align themselves with a monastery and monastic order.

Though there are innumerable monasteries scattered throughout the 'Verse, both on established worlds and on secluded asteroids, monks can eschew traditional training and instead take guidance from other avenues. Some monks learn to fight on the



streets of elven megacities, adopting balance and focusing their ki as a means of survival. Others learn to manipulate their ki from militant organizations, such as the Lakshay defense force. No matter how a monk learns to fight and manipulate their ki, they all achieve profound spiritual balance.

My Chosen Mantra. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- "Wind in the trees. On placid seas."
- "Don't count the seconds. Make the seconds count."
- "Flesh and bone. Breath and stone."
- "Weightless, formless, endless."

Paladins.

A sacred oath is binding, no matter how far a paladin travels. Even a million light years from home on the frontier of an alien world, their oaths still propel them forward and guide their hands. Such is the strength of a paladin's devotion.

Clad in gleaming power armor and wielding blinding laser swords, paladins are known to uphold justice throughout the 'Verse. Lone paladins pursue their righteous quests across the galaxy, often falling in line with other, less holy adventurers. Among these crews, paladins are differentiated by their unwavering

honor and loyalty, as well as their penchant for protecting the innocent and slaying the wicked.

The Line I Will Never Cross. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I'll never cheat someone out of a cent.
- Whether my allies are virtuous or wicked, I will never turn my back on them.
- Murder is justifiable, but everyone deserves a proper burial.
- I will never hurt an animal.

Rangers.

Wanderlust is in a ranger's blood. These master survivalists can set foot on just about any world and scrounge up enough food and water to survive there, but that's never enough. They feel a need to keep exploring and see every new horizon. In the 'Verse, rangers feel most at home on the Galactic Frontier, planet-hopping between unseen worlds, far from the boundaries of squabbling galactic empires. Any sane adventuring party traveling that far from the galactic core counts a ranger among their number, for only an expert ranger can brave the perils of those undiscovered worlds and live to tell the tale.

My Sworn Nemesis. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I intend to kill Garfreckt the dragon. He knows what he did.
- I'm looking for an ex-oni bounty hunter named Makoto, before she finds me.
- A var'zuul colossus named Ichoram devoured my world. I'll reduce it to ash.
- The wrothian Primarch named Saluh'ark will regret raiding my village.

Rogues.

Crooks, criminals, smugglers, thieves; rogues in the 'Verse have many names, none of them kind. Perhaps the most generous name applied to many rogues is "Contractor," which signifies that they have a specific arrangement, a contract, with the Firm, the most notorious criminal organization in the 'Verse. The Firm hires Contractors of all types, from the impressively strong, to the magically talented, to those with technological know-how, and signs them on for limited-time jobs. The Firm pays its

Contractors well, and demands total compliance in return, no matter what they ask.

This association with the Firm and other criminal enterprises has soured the reputation of many rogues in the 'Verse, who would rather use their resourcefulness and talents elsewhere. So-called "independent" rogues, like many smugglers and hackers, struggle to shake the stigma that clings to everyone in their profession, due in large part to the Firm and its contracts.

Why I Can't Leave the Criminal Life Behind. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I owe a debt to financiers from the Firm. Either I take contracts, or they take my head.
- Why would I want to? When you love what you do, you never work a day in your life.
- My expensive vices require considerable cash flow, and I'm not (yet) the heir to a wealthy family's fortunes.
- I have a list of targets, each of them as wealthy as they are corrupt.

Sorcerers.

There is magic in blood; there always has been, and there always will be. Sorcerers are arcanists by heritage, tracing their magic back to noble ancestries of dragons, demons, and angels, but others still acquire their sorcerous magic in their lifetimes, becoming the first in a new line of sorcerers. Because of the sheer prevalence of strange magical effects in the 'Verse, sorcerers spawned by exposure to life-changing arcana outnumber those of magical bloodlines. Sorcerers that were bombarded by radioactive voidlights, tinged by the darkness of a black hole, or infested with a swarm of nanobots can never return to their old lives, and instead turn to adventuring, exploring, and mercenary work to practice their new magic and make ends meet.

The Trick to Summoning Up My Magic. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- My magic flows most freely when I'm hyped up on Krash energy drinks.
- I find vast reserves of magical power when my life is in peril.
- When I'm daydreaming or meditating, I can cast spells I never thought possible.
- I'm way better at spellcasting when I'm jamming out to my favorite tunes.

Warlocks.

When most people of the 'Verse stare up at the night sky, a twinkle of wonder and curiosity glistens in their eyes. Warlocks, however, shudder at that black chasm, for they have seen what dwells in the great beyond and know the horror that awaits travelers to the stars. Warlocks that travel the 'Verse in search of eldritch secrets often uncover things far more terrifying than they bargained for. Out among the stars, the antediluvian patrons are more ancient and more enigmatic, than mere fiends or fey, and offer darker secrets in exchange for their pacts. These patrons include colossal alien beasts, strange entities sequestered away within stars or black holes, or the everpresent Void itself.

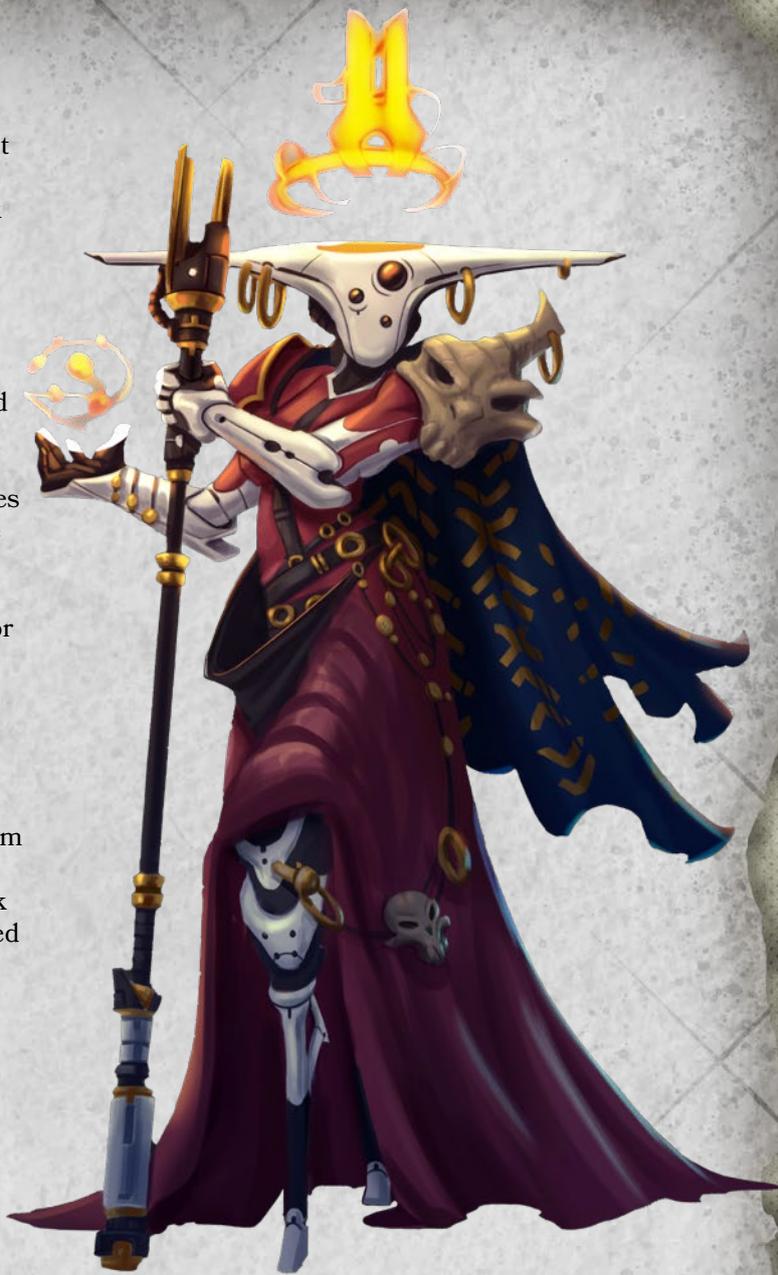
The Thing I Can Never Unsee. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:

- I witnessed a star opening its maw. So many teeth, down into an abyss brighter than any heaven, more terrible than any hell.
- I saw the stars of the night sky replaced by opening eyes. Millions of beady pupils, all of them inhuman, staring down at me.
- Beyond the event horizon, in the heart of a black hole, I saw the edge of time. All of it was smeared distortions of a grim apocalypse that will arrive sooner than anyone realizes.

Wizards.

Nearly all of the cornerstone inventions—arcane batteries, Dark Matter engines, starships, and intelligent constructs—were pioneered by brilliant engineer-wizards, long before gadgeteers and more traditional arcanist-wizards parted paths. In *Dark Matter*, wizards can have any one of a myriad of roles, and can focus their magic on hundreds of subschools and specialties, but they largely fall into those two main categories: engineer-wizards, which study practical applications of magic, especially as it relates to groundbreaking technologies, and arcanist-wizards, which are concerned with the practice of magic itself in the purest sense. Regardless of their specialty, all wizards push the envelope of arcane understanding through research and experimentation, and are a force to be reckoned with.

My Yet-Unproven Theory. When you choose this class, pick one of the following origins or write one of your own:



- There must be an undiscovered counterpart to hardlight: hardshadow. Perhaps by manipulating the tides of a black hole, we might discover it.
- Perhaps the maws aren't intended as a warp network. Maybe they serve a more important purpose: keeping something out of the 'Verse, or perhaps, containing something within it.
- Chronomancy has been discovered perhaps hundreds of times, but is suppressed by some organization operating outside of time.
- There are locations in deep space where the planes of different worlds intersect like tectonic plates, allowing one to planeshift to hitherto-unknown worlds.

FUTURISTIC SUBCLASSES

Class	Subclass	Description
Bard	College of Cyberwave	Uses a high tech synthesizer/blaster to jam/blam
Monk	Way of the Warped	Irreversibly mutated by voidlights, can stretch limbs at will
Paladin	Oath of the Doomforged	Bears horrible mechademon implants, as well as a demon passenger
Wizard	School of Hardlight	Uses hardlight for weapons, armor, and potent spellcasting

Spacers choosing to be stationed at Blackpost, on the very edge of the 'Verse, usually have a reason. Some prefer the total isolation afforded by the lonesome colony; others are hiding from something or someone. Others still washed up on the edge of the 'Verse like so much debris washing up on shore. Not everyone who arrives on Blackpost is a hardened adventurer, but the demands of that unforgiving rock can inspire adventuring grit in anyone that sticks it out long enough.

The following modern subclass options are available for campaigns in *Dark Matter*, Blackpost, or any other science fiction setting.

College of Cyberwave

Bard Subclass

Bards that subscribe to the genre and college of Cyberwave indulge in gadgetry and music in equal measure, constructing elaborate instruments from spare technology to brave new frontiers in music. Their consummate instrument, the wave synth, is half blaster, half synthesizer, capable of playing tunes on the waves of blaster bolts. While also providing a spectacular light show, the wave synth is unmatched when performing haunting and pulse-pounding orchestrations.

Etheradio Stations.

Beginning when you choose this college at 3rd level, you learn to tap into ever-present etheradio stations, long distance communication networks that echo with faint S.O.S. signals, pirate radio stations, and cryptic numerical messages. Furthermore, you can transmit short signals on this wavelength, to play wherever you choose.

As an action, you can send a short message of twenty-five words or less to a character with which you are familiar, if that character is carrying a comms set. The character hears the message through the static on their comms set and can answer in a like manner immediately. You can send the message across any distance, but not to other planes of existence.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Wave Synth.

Also at 3rd level, you finish constructing your very own wave synth, a music instrument built on the framework of a blaster (colloquially called a "moog" by bards of this college). You can simultaneously use this device as an instrument and a blaster with which you have proficiency. When used as a weapon, the wave synth is a blaster with a range of 60/240 feet and the Two-Handed property. On a hit, it deals thunder damage equal to two rolls of your Bardic Inspiration die.

Once per turn when you hit a creature with your wave synth, you can expend one use of your Bardic Inspiration to deal extra damage to the target. The damage equals the number you roll on the Bardic Inspiration die. If you roll a 1 or 2 on the Bardic Inspiration die, you don't expend a use of your Bardic Inspiration.

Modulation.

Beginning at 6th level, you can modify your wave synth with modules scavenged from other blasters and electronic instruments. You can choose to use one of the following modules when you start your turn:

Cone Resonator. You can use your action to make a ranged attack against any number of creatures you can see within a 15-foot-cone. You must make a separate attack roll for each target.

Direct Amplifier. Whenever you hit a creature with your wave synth, you deal an extra die of damage to the target.

Harmonic Reverb. Whenever you hit a creature with your wave synth, the next attack roll made against this target before the end of your next turn has advantage.

Polyphonic Echo.

By 14th level, you have optimized your synth with the latest in blaster tech. Once on each of your turns when you miss with an attack using your wave synth, you can make another weapon attack as part of the same action.

Additionally, when you roll the highest number on a damage die for your wave synth, you can roll an additional die and add its damage to the total, rolling again if this die is also the highest number, and so on. You can roll a total of eight damage dice for this damage roll, or sixteen on a critical hit.

Way of the Warped

Monk Subclass

Those who are exposed to the hideous lights of the Void essentially unravel. It is a gruesome sight to behold. However, trained monks exert a specific resilience to this fate, as their control over ki and the energy that flows through limbs allows them to restrict and even harness the “warp” of the voidlights. No living thing can completely resist the influence of the Void, however, and warped monks exhibit a characteristic, almost cartoonish pliability that allows them to stretch their arms and bodies with rubbery ease.

Flexile Fists.

Beginning when you choose this tradition at 3rd level, your limbs are pliant, extensible things that you can manipulate through your ki. Your unarmed strikes have a reach of 10 feet. Additionally, you gain the following abilities:

Big Fists. When you take the Attack action, you can spend 1 ki point to increase your Martial Arts die by one step (1d4 → 1d6 → 1d8 → 1d10 → 1d12) until the end of your turn.

Rebound Strike. Once on each of your turns when you miss with an unarmed strike, you can spend 1 ki point to reroll the attack against the same target.

Deflect Blows.

By 6th level, your rubbery body allows you to deflect strikes as well as missiles.

As a reaction when you are hit by a melee weapon attack, you can reduce the bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage you take from the attack by 1d10 + your Dexterity modifier + your monk level.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest, unless you expend 2 ki points to use it again.

Spring Knees.

At 11th level, your springy form lets you weave through the battlefield with agility. You gain the following benefits:

- Opportunity attacks made against you have disadvantage.
- You can use your bonus action to escape a grapple. You automatically succeed on ability checks you make to escape being grappled or slip bindings.



- You suffer no penalty for squeezing through a space that is only large enough for a creature that is one size smaller than you.

Gatling Strikes.

By 17th level, you can use your action and expend 3 ki points to unleash a barrage of unarmed strikes in a 30-foot cone. You can make two attacks against each creature within that area, with separate attacks against each target.

Oath of the Gamma Knight

Paladin Subclass

Gamma Knights dedicate themselves to the ideals of freedom and exploration as they scour the universe for fragments of the legendary *gamma pendant*, source of all hardlight. This legendary pendant was one shattered and cast to the far ends of the 'Verse, where its individual shards of hardlight still gleam, waiting for a knight to collect them.

Tenets of the Gamma Knight.

Gamma Knights swear their oaths on shards of the *gamma pendant*, pledging to abide by the following tenets:

Eternal Light. The *gamma shards* never dim, and so the cause of freedom shall never diminish.

Across the 'Verse. Once set to searching, a Gamma Knight's task is never complete until the pendant is whole. The knight seeks to right wrongs and break chains wherever they travel.

Gamma Knight Spells.

You gain oath spells at the paladin levels listed.

Paladin Level Spells

3rd	<i>divine favor, hardlight blaster</i>
5th	<i>hardlight nails, hold person</i>
9th	<i>hardlight construction, protection from energy</i>
13th	<i>freedom of movement, guardian of faith</i>
17th	<i>hold monster, wall of force</i>

Gamma Blade.

Starting at 3rd level, as an action, you can expend one use of your Channel Divinity to create a magical bond between yourself and one weapon, which becomes your Gamma Blade. The bond lasts until you use this feature to bond to another weapon or you choose to end the bond (no action required).

Your Gamma Blade gains the following benefits:

- Whenever you attack with your Gamma Blade, you can use your Charisma modifier for the attack and damage rolls instead of using Strength or Dexterity; and you can cause the weapon to deal force, necrotic, or radiant damage or its normal damage type.
- You can use your Gamma Blade to make ranged attacks with a range of 30/120 feet, as a blast of energy extends from the blade.
- You can use your Divine Smite feature whenever you hit a creature with a Ranged attack using your Gamma Blade.
- Once on each of your turns when you take the Attack action, you can expend one use of your Channel Divinity to make an additional attack using your Gamma Blade.

Aura of Attunement.

Beginning at 7th level, you can attune up to four magic items at once.

As a bonus action, you can transfer one of your attuned magic items to an ally within 10 feet of you. The item teleports to the ally and the ally temporarily becomes attuned to the item, which doesn't count against the number of magic items it can attune to.

This transference lasts for 1 minute. It ends early if you are incapacitated, you dismiss the effect (no action required), or if you use this feature to transfer another item. When the transference ends, the magic item teleports back to you, its temporary attunement ends, and you attune to it again.

At 18th level, the range of this aura increases to 30 feet.

Intercepting Strike.

Starting at 15th level, whenever an enemy that you can see hits you or one of your allies within 10 feet of you with a ranged attack, you can use your reaction to intercept the projectile. Make a ranged attack using your Gamma Blade. The projectile's Armor Class equals the enemy's attack roll. If you hit the projectile, the enemy's attack misses.

Galactic Knight.

Beginning at 20th level, as an action, you can shroud yourself in brilliant hardlight armor, gaining the following benefits for 1 minute:

- You can make an additional attack using your Gamma Blade without expending a use of your Channel Divinity.

- You have a flying speed equal to your walking speed and can hover.
- Once on each of your turns when you take the Attack action, you can replace one of your attacks with the activation of a magic item that requires an action.
- If you activate this feature while in open space, outside the confines of an atmosphere or gravitational field, you grow to Mega size by projecting a field of cosmic energy. Your body, along with any equipment you are wearing or carrying, grows to 100 times your normal size. Your attacks, paladin spells, movement speed, and class features extend to 100 times their normal ranges and deal mega damage. Mega damage dealt to you is divided by 100, dealing normal damage instead.

Once you use this bonus action, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest, unless you expend a 5th-level spell slot to use it again.



School of Hardlight

Wizard Subclass

Equal parts magic and material, hardlight is perhaps the penultimate arcane discovery. With a flick of the fingers, you can compose any geometry, any device you can conceive of in scintillating light. It is perhaps this expressive freedom that drew you to becoming a pupil of its use as a luxomancer. Through experimentation and cunning, you have learned how to invest hardlight into your armor, weapons, blasters, and spells. Its utility is limited by your own magical reserves, an impediment that shrinks with each passing day.

Photonic Savant.

Beginning when you choose this tradition at 2nd level, you learn the *hardlight blade* cantrip. If you already know this cantrip, you learn a different wizard cantrip of your choice. The cantrip doesn't count against your number of cantrips known.



Additionally, when you reach certain levels in this class, you learn additional spells which are added to your spellbook instantly at no cost, as shown on the Hardlight Spells table. New spells are marked with an asterisk and included in Chapter 6 with the (futuristic) tag. You always have these spells prepared and they don't count against the number of spells you have prepared.

Hardlight Reservoir.

Also at 2nd level, you have a reserve of energy which you can use to empower your spells with hardlight. This reserve is represented by a pool of hardlight points equal to your wizard level. You regain all expended hardlight points when you use your Arcane Recovery feature or finish a long rest.

Emerald Armor. You can use your action to invest hardlight energy into a protective field around you. For 10 minutes, whenever you begin your turn, you gain temporary hit points equal to the number of hardlight points you have remaining, which last for 10 minutes. If you expend hardlight points, you lose an equal number of temporary hit points.

Hardlight Casting. When you cast a spell from the Hardlight Spells table, you can expend the number of hardlight points noted in the Hardlight Points column for that spell instead of expending a spell slot.

Radiant Edge. You can use a bonus action and expend 2 or more hardlight points to coat a weapon you are holding with radiant hardlight. Until you finish a long rest, whenever you attack with that weapon, you can use your Intelligence modifier, instead of Strength or Dexterity, for the attack and damage rolls. This weapon deals force damage on a hit.

Additionally, the weapon gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls, unless it is a magic weapon that already has a bonus to those rolls. When you reach 9th level in this class, you can expend 4 or more hardlight points to increase this bonus to +2. When you reach 13th level, you can expend 6 or more points to increase this bonus to +3.

HARDLIGHT SPELLS.

Wizard Level	Hardlight Points	Spells
2nd	2	<i>hardlight blaster</i> ,* <i>mage armor</i>
3rd	3	<i>branding smite</i> , <i>hardlight spikes</i> *
5th	5	<i>hardlight construction</i> ,* <i>hardlight gauntlet</i> *
7th	6	<i>freedom of movement</i> , <i>resilient sphere</i>
9th	7	<i>hardlight frame</i> ,* <i>wall of force</i>

Scintillating Spell. When you cast a spell that deals damage to a creature, you can expend 1 or more hardlight points as a bonus action, up to a maximum of your proficiency bonus, to deal an additional 1d6 force damage for each hardlight point expended to one target of the spell.

Radiant Strike.

Starting at 6th level, you can use your bonus action to make a melee weapon attack. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Intelligence modifier (a minimum of once), unless you expend a hardlight point to use it again. You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Hardlight Juggernaut.

Beginning at 10th level, your *hardlight frame* spell doesn't end early if you run out of temporary hit points, as long as you have hardlight points remaining.

Low Orbit Hardlight Cannon.

At 14th level, you can use your action to conjure a hardlight cannon high up in the atmosphere to raze an area on the ground. The cannon creates a 15-foot radius, 1-mile high cylinder centered on a point you can see within 120 feet, which lasts until the start of your next turn.

When a creature enters the area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, it is scorched by the beam's energy, and it must make a Dexterity saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, a creature takes 10d10 radiant damage, or half as much damage on a successful one. The beam ignites flammable nonmagical objects in the area that aren't being worn or carried.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest, unless you expend 13 hardlight points to use it again.



Hardlight Spells.

The following spells are available to the Gamma Knight and School of Hardlight subclasses.

Hardlight Blaster

1st-level conjuration (futuristic)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 10 feet

Components: V, S, M (an emerald ring worth 30 gp)

Duration: Instantaneous

You wave your hand and conjure a sophisticated arcane weapon, constructed of brilliant compressed light, which hovers in the air in an unoccupied space within 10 feet of you. The weapon fires a crackling beam of energy at a target you choose within 60 feet of it, making a ranged spell attack using your spell attack bonus. The weapon is the point of origin for this attack; therefore, the attack can target a creature that isn't within your line of sight, as long as it is within the weapon's line of sight. On a hit, the target takes 3d6 force damage. After this attack, this weapon dissipates.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you deal an additional 1d6 force damage for each slot level above 1st.

Hardlight Blade

Evocation cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (5-foot radius)

Components: S, M (a melee weapon and an emerald ring worth 30 gp)

Duration: 1 round

As part of the action used to cast this spell, you must make a melee attack with a weapon against one creature within the spell's range, otherwise the spell fails. On a hit, the attack does damage as normal, except that the attack deals force damage instead of its normal damage type. Additionally, a hardlight duplicate of your weapon hovers around you, ready to strike. If the target deals damage to you before the start of your next turn, you can use your reaction to deal 1d8 force damage to the target, ending the spell.

At 5th level, the melee attack and secondary damage each deal an additional 1d8 force damage. Both damage rolls increase by 1d8 at 11th level (2d8 and 3d8) and 17th level (3d8 and 4d8).

Hardlight Construction

3rd-level conjuration (futuristic)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (an emerald ring worth 30 gp)

Duration: 10 minutes



You compress waves of light into a solid, shimmering structure composed of hardlight within range. You can create a Huge or smaller object (contained within a 15-foot cube, or 27 connected 5-foot cubes) which persists for the duration. For example, you can build a bridge crossing a chasm, a tower to see over a treeline, or a patch for the hull of a starship. This object can't have moving parts or directly harm anyone. No matter what object you build, it has AC 10 and HP equal to 30 + your spellcasting modifier. The object collapses into nothingness and the spell ends if it drops to 0 hit points.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, its HP increases by 10 per slot level above 3rd. If you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, you can use your action to change the object created into any other object you choose which fits the criteria. Doing so doesn't restore the object's HP.

Hardlight Frame

5th-level conjuration (futuristic)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (an emerald ring worth 30 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

Plates of shimmering compressed light swarm your body, landing in the precise positions to form an intricate suit of power armor. For the duration, you gain the following benefits:

Size. Your size becomes Large, if it was smaller.

Hardlight Armor. The frame provides you a base AC of 17 (your Dexterity modifier doesn't affect this number). If you are using a shield, you can apply the shield's bonus as normal.

Temporary Hit Points. At the start of each of your turns, you gain 10 temporary hit points. These hit points last until the spell ends.

Mighty. You have advantage on Strength checks and saving throws.

Integrated Battlefists. The armor has two integrated battlefists. You have proficiency with these weapons. When you attack with them, you make a melee spell attack against a target within 10 feet of you. On a hit, the battlefists deal force damage equal to 2d8 + your spellcasting ability modifier.

Extra Attack. You can attack twice, instead of once, when you take the Attack action on your turn.

Hardlight Gauntlet

3rd-level evocation (futuristic)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (an emerald ring worth 30 gp)

Duration: Instantaneous

You conjure a scintillating gauntlet composed of compressed energy and unleash a barrage of strikes. Make three melee spell attacks against a single target. On the first hit, the target takes 1d12 force damage, on the second hit, it takes 2d12 force damage, and on the third hit, it takes 3d12 force damage.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, you can make 1 additional attack; the fourth hit deals 4d12 force damage. If you cast this spell using a spell slot of 7th level or higher, you make 2 additional attacks; the 5th hit deals 5d12 force damage.

Hardlight Spikes

2nd-level conjuration (futuristic)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (an emerald ring worth 30 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

Foot-long spikes of compressed light jut out from a surface you choose within range. The spikes cover a 20-foot square area on the surface, wrapping around the surface's contours. This area becomes difficult terrain for the duration. If a creature falls prone on the spikes, lands on them, or is forcibly moved into them, the creature takes 3d8 force damage.

If the surface is moved more than 10 feet, the spell ends.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d8 for each slot level above 2nd.

Hardlight Needle

Conjuration cantrip (futuristic)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (an emerald ring worth 30 gp)

Duration: Instantaneous

You condense light into a razor-sharp pinpoint that you can effortlessly guide. A target you can see within range takes 3 piercing damage.

This spell's damage increases by 3 when you reach 5th level (6), 11th level (9), and 17th level (12).

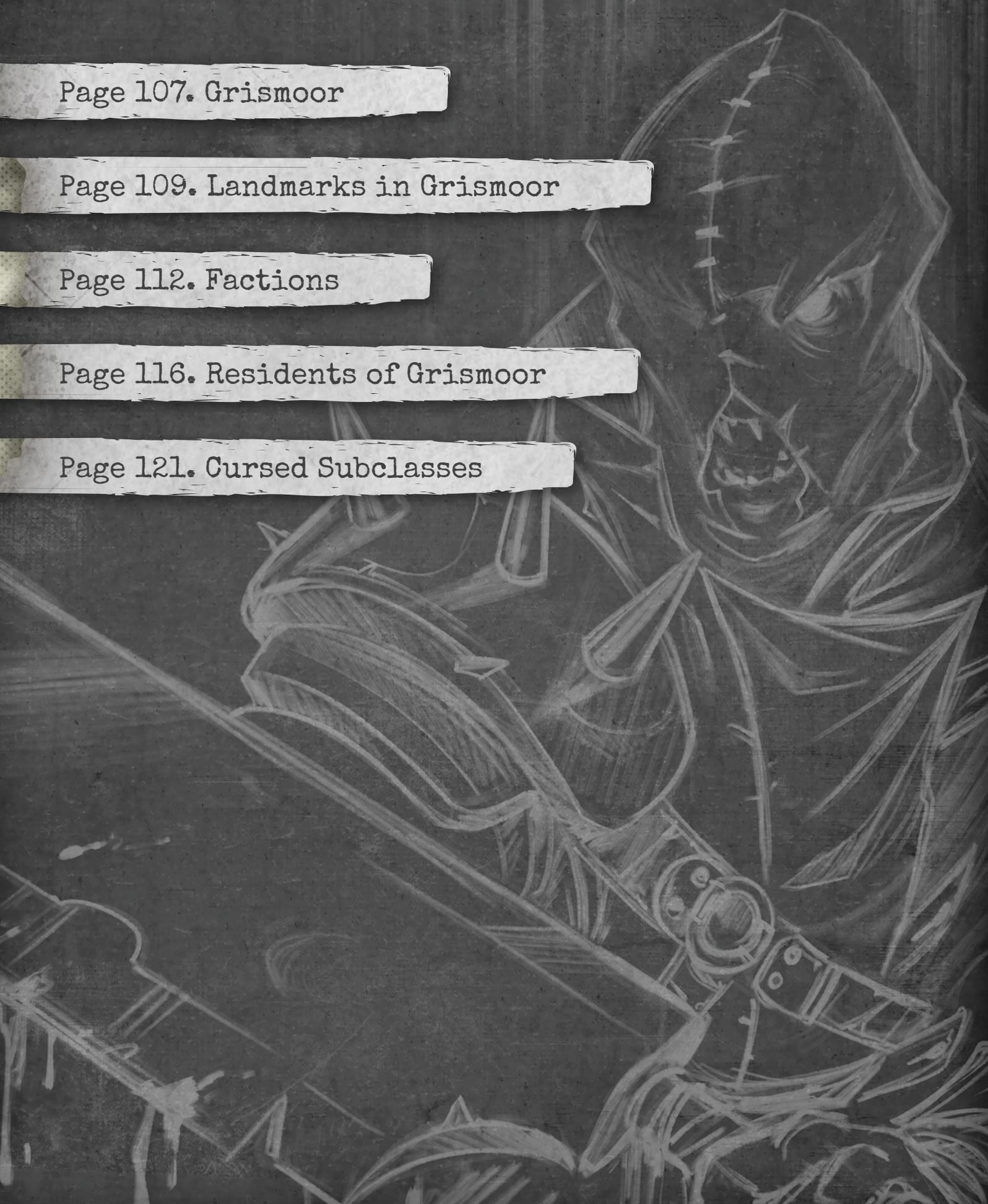
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CHAPTER 4: GRISMOOR

GRISMOOR

Near the southern tip of Illinois lies the ruined city of Cahokia—at its peak, more populated than contemporaneous Paris or London. It lies buried in colossal mounds, a civilization's collective grave. History is rife with such shining cities, places held aloft by human ambition and ingenuity, but all of which faced the same fate. When the vital arteries of food, water, people, and wealth falter, a civilization shudders and dies, leaving abandoned streets and ruined monuments; or perhaps, a series of colossal mounds.

The medieval riverside city of Grismoor hangs on just such a precipice. After years of disasters, known far and wide as the Seven Curses, the city is perhaps one final catastrophe from outright collapse. A grim fog of uncertainty plagues the citizenry, who have already begun to depart in search of opportunity elsewhere. Perhaps a panicked evacuation will leave the town abandoned, or perhaps a final curse will burn the city once and for all.

Rise of the Cape City.

Grismoor rests on a cape in the Riverrook, a plateau of rich farmland neatly positioned as a trade hub for river traffic and a crossroads for caravans heading westward. Its location alone has afforded the city decades of prosperity. Silver mines and black soil produced coinage and cornucopias for the city—both are emblazoned on its crest.

At Grismoor's pinnacle, it rivaled the kingdom's capital for grandeur, but fell slightly short of its population. The city's mercantile class grew wealthy and founded an array of guilds, each of which sponsored its own private militia. Together, these forces, known as the Patchwork Knights, secured the isolated city from without and purged criminality from within.

None benefited from the city's rising prominence more than House Douvaine, the noble family entrusted with its administration. Its seat of power, Castle Douvaine, is a magnificent gothic structure festooned with gargoyles and battlements, towering over the Riverrook and the city surrounding it. Perhaps tellingly, the first of the so-called Curses of Grismoor was the sudden death of Lord Douvaine, the steady hand at the city's helm. Before long, more curses would follow.

The Seven Curses.

Over a decade of misfortune and disaster has blighted the city of Grismoor and brought it to the brink. The trade city has deteriorated into a shadow of its former self, its magnificent promenades and proud spires crumbling into ruin with each passing year. Perhaps half of its residents remain, out of stubbornness, obligation, or a misplaced sense of hope.

Though seven curses have befallen Grismoor, only five are detailed below, so that you can refine the city's history to suit your campaign and your tastes.

The Malformed Prince.

Old Lord Douvaine's reign came to a tragic and sudden end. Though the official declaration cited the cause of death as a heart attack overnight, whispers from inside the castle told of a bloody scene and inexplicable magic. No public funeral was held, and after a week of mourning, the lord was interred in the castle catacombs.

Unbeknownst to all but a few caretakers, the heir to House Douvaine was a secret prince, hidden away within the castle walls until adulthood. The young heir—and current lord of Grismoor—is a monstrously deformed creature, hideous to look upon and vile of temperament. Some say he is prone to fits of delusion and ferocious outbursts. Others say he is faintly timid, like a wild animal. All this is hearsay, however, as none of the public have seen their new lord. Whispers of the Malformed Prince circulate unabated, while Castle Douvaine remains deafeningly silent.

HIGH AND LOW FANTASY

Grismoor is designed to fit seamlessly into any corner of your fantasy world, whether magic is omnipresent or extraordinarily rare. If you focus a campaign on Grismoor, the GM decides whether the setting as a whole is high-fantasy or low-fantasy, and adjusts the available player options accordingly.



The Barren Mine.

The mines around Ashridge have always afforded Grismoor a bulwark of wealth and work to stave off hard times. When foreign wars or domestic upsets interrupted trade, the silver and coal mines pumped enough wealth through the city to sustain its industries. Recently, however, silver yield began to slow, culminating in an abrupt halt within a span of weeks. Miners worked tirelessly to find a new vein in the labyrinthine tunnels beneath Ashridge, to no avail. When the mine closed, Grismoor's most critical lifeline was severed and its signature coins immediately became scarce.

The Drowning.

Great levees rise on three sides between Grismoor and the wide, capricious Riverrook. Every Spring, great rains flood the river, with some years bursting its banks and spilling out into swathes of farmland and even nearby settlements like Kaldstowe village. The earthenworks forestalled the river's advance for generations, until a terrible storm raged over the city for over a week. As frantic workers filled flour bags with gravel to reinforce the lowermost levees, the water burst through and consumed entire neighborhoods in a single terrible wave. Higher ground and the city's inner wall spared the rest of Grismoor the same devastation, but uncountable lives were lost in the flood. The water never fully receded in the "Drowned Quarter," as the Riverrook's course now sweeps through it like a canal.

The Moss Blight.

When a farmer first noticed crimson moss speckling his fields, he didn't think much of it. Heavy rains routinely flood the Riverrook and bring sediment to low-lying farms, improving the soil and dredging some river-bottom scum to the surface. It would be gone with the next rain. However, his crops soon withered on the vine and turned gray in the field. Then it spread.

Like a ravenous giant, the Moss Blight consumed entire counties of produce over the course of a season. By the harvest season, Grismoor was spared mass starvation only via regular shipments from the 1212 barge, which makes monthly runs down the Riverrook, filled with wheat and vegetables.

Each year since has been a die roll for farmers. If the crimson moss appears on their fields, the season is already lost. Perhaps some fields will be spared, but the Blight is unforgiving, and looms large in the minds and stomachs of Grismoor.

The Godfist.

Salvation came in the middle of the night with a booming crash. Not ten miles outside of Grismoor, an enormous stone from the heavens impacted the countryside, leaving a wide crater and a hill-sized boulder. Beneath a skin of ash, the entire stone shone a brilliant silver. Priests declared it a miracle, a Godfist sent to save the ailing silver industry, and an army of disaffected miners got to work cracking the dense ore and melting it down.

It took only hours for them to fall hideously ill. The blackened, blistered skin, violent illness, and confusion gave way to inevitable death mere days later. Anyone who touched the Godfist suffered the same fate: a terrible affliction that no magic could remedy or detect. Even their clothing and bodies caused the illness, albeit more slowly, so a great pyre was erected overlooking the crater, and all that touched the stone was incinerated.

Even after the curse was apparent, a pair of foolhardy silversmiths worked to forge in excess of a hundred *cursed coins* from the metal. They perished for their efforts, as did their children who inherited the coins, but a few coins eventually entered circulation—silent assassins that kill indiscriminately, the final curse of the Godfist.

Landmarks in Grismoor.

Though characters can spend months exploring the winding cobblestone streets of Grismoor itself, the noteworthy landmarks extend far beyond the city's walls and into the villages and hills that once allowed Grismoor to thrive.

Ashridge Mines.

In the weeks before the Ashridge Mines were sealed, the frantic search for silver veins tunneled into a vast chamber. Ancient cobblestones laid underfoot and cyclopean rooms were carved from the chamber walls, with corridors and shafts plummeting deep into the earth. The sprawling maze of tunnels and rooms continued for miles. At a loss with their discovery, the miners called the forgotten necropolis Hagrazat, or the Catacombs of Hagrazat, in reference to an allegorical kingdom consumed by fire and forgotten by all.

Exploration of the ruins was cut short when the mines were unceremoniously closed and its entrance sealed. However, rumors of the catacombs spread like wildfire, embellished with piles of gold and magical trinkets, and adventurers were soon to follow. Within months, new entrances to the mines had been tunneled in secret, and expeditions into the depths began.

Few have returned from these descents. The chaotic network of mineshafts already possessed a host of hazards, but became positively deadly once the mine was closed and subterranean monstrosities

took up residence. Those that reached the depths of Hagrazat spoke of an extravagant metropolis, once perhaps belonging to chthonic giants, and the rare piece of antiquity worth a fortune above. However, they also told of an unseen entity enveloping the halls and infecting their thoughts, as if the darkness itself had gone stale and malevolent.

Asphodel Club.

Only an exclusive clientele pass through the doors of the Asphodel Club: guildmasters, wealthy merchants, foreign nobles of renown, and socialites that enjoy the favor of any of the former. The exterior gives off an air of comfortable debauchery, much like a gentlemen's club, but the Asphodel Club aspires to grander and more occult hedonism. The club's members wear ornate masks of their choosing at all times within the walls of Asphodel; only the staff remains maskless. Anonymity runs rampant, though the club's regulars can read voices and actions well enough to deduce their company. Through this facelessness, the heads of Grismoor's factions do business, their arrangements and agreements lubricated by strong drinks and a comprehensive host of vices.

Purportedly, the masked and nameless club owner is a warlock of some repute, capable of bringing to bear sinister rituals in the club's back rooms. Some of his spells work to enrich the club's clientele, others to manipulate them. Others still advance cryptic schemes with far-reaching and profound implications.



The Barracks.

Nestled within the narrow, winding streets of Grismoor stands a bastion of respite for travelers known as the Barley Barracks, or simply “The Barracks.” This imposing establishment was once home to the city guard, but now acts as a base for the Patchwork Knights, as well as a tavern and inn. The interior is still dominated by military rigidity and adorned with the shields and sigils of the city guard’s various regiments, but now features a small bar and dozens of tables in neat rows. Above, the rooms are as spartan as ever, but are by far the cheapest in town. Without fail, when a new face comes into town on the 1212, they find a room at the Barracks for a few silver pieces.

Bechet’s Shop.

The dusty two-story premises of Mr. Bechet’s bookshop are lined wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling with old books, none of them categorized. Ancient histories reside next to cookbooks. Scroll cases containing forgotten spells are massed alongside anonymous missives and discarded pages from other tomes. Perhaps the shop’s owner once had a method to organize the chaos of knowledge, but it has since disintegrated, along with many of the owner’s memories.

If a visitor takes the time to separate the gold from the dross, rare and sometimes dangerous books can be found among the common texts. Grimoires and spellbooks, often in foreign or forgotten languages, trade for the same price as biographies.

Similarly, occasional visitors will drop by the shop with books to sell, and the owner will indulge them in exchange for a story of the book’s provenance. Scribbled on the inside of the front cover, each book within Bechet’s Shop contains a brief of its own history, clues to its twisting journey that terminated in the dusty two-story shop.

Blackened Bell Tower.

The blackened bell tower of St. Lyon stands at the heart of Grismoor, a mournful spire looming over the cityscape. Though it once rang on the hour, the bell has been silent ever since a grand fire swept through it. The flames scorched the wooden stairs, charred the stone in upward streaks, and warped the bell until a great crack emerged in its side. St. Lyon has never been repaired.

However, the bell tower still issues an ominous, discordant knell on full moon nights, a haunting tune without a ringer. Perhaps, the spirit of the old bell ringer still haunts the tower, or else someone else treks up the flimsy, burned stairs to ring the bell to mark some solemn occasion. Regardless, the denizens of Grismoor have learned to ignore the tower and its hunting bell and its moonlit dirges. With so many abandoned buildings in Grismoor, it matters not who dwells in St. Lyon’s tower.

Castle Douvaine.

Were it not for a few loyal bannermen standing watch on the battlements, Castle Douvaine would appear utterly deserted. The drawbridge remains raised and its portcullis closed, as if a siege were imminent, while the city around the castle proceeds unabated. Rot and disrepair on the structure has already begun: the castle’s banners flutter in tatters and ivy has laid siege to its walls, embracing them in an emerald cloak.

Within, the Malformed Prince must enjoy an austere lifestyle, as only a few rations are delivered up the wall via ropes and pulleys each day. A similar system delivers guardsmen up and down the wall, though more staff leave the castle with each passing year. Perhaps a secret passage allows the prince’s most valued agents to travel unseen, or perhaps they cross the moat assisted by magic.

Rumors of the castle’s state and the prince’s sickening “experiments” are an evergreen topic of conversation in Grismoor taverns, though the grisly details of any given story dampen the mood somewhat.

The Drowned Quarter.

Once part of the city’s most vibrant quarter, the Merais and Riverside neighborhoods now lie partially submerged in the murky depths of the Riverrook. Buildings in the so-called Drowned Quarter still stand in the persistent flood like skeletal remains, eroded and marked with dingy waterlines, even as their foundations turn to silt.

Grismoor’s inner wall and newly-erected gates cut the Drowned Quarter off from the rest of the city, but enterprising citizens have yet taken to offering gondola services through the flooded thoroughfares as a swift replacement to carriages. The jaunt is a haunting one, however, as shadows in the water and creaking within the abandoned homes suggest that something dwells in the still, dark waters. Whether spirits of the drowned or horrors of the deep linger in the Drowned Quarter, few dare to see for themselves.

Godfist.

By night, a constellation of dull red embers speckle the dirt of a crater nearly a mile wide. At its exact center stands a silvery mound over a hundred feet tall bearing the pockmarks and scratches of pickaxes: the titular Godfist, sent by the heavens as a bane to Grismoor. Even standing in the Godfist's presence or visiting its hallowed crater invites a mysterious illness that no magic can remedy. Shrines dedicated to various deities dot the crater's perimeter, but they go wholly unobserved, as any pilgrimage to the Godfist means certain death. Only the grass has begun approaching the crater's edge, being mangled more into a thorny weed with each foot it gains on the crater.

Instead of the Godfist itself, Grismoorians travel to the nearby Pyre Hill to pay their respects. Hundreds of cairns litter the hill, each a makeshift gravestone for those claimed by the Godfist's curse. A sense of confounding melancholy presides over the place, as the mute stones offer no solace or answers, only questions, to those still living.

Kaldstow Village.

The riverside village of Kaldstow is ridden with Mossblight. Great crimson piles of infected crops have been heaped in empty fields and left to rot, permeating the entire village with the humid stench of fungal compost. Worse, the moss itself leaves a stain on anything it touches, so the entire village is tinged with red streaks upon the wood and soil. It is an ever-present reminder of the existential plague that consumes their town, body and soul.

A mirror of their village, the Kaldstow townsfolk have developed a sickly aspect: gaunt faces, bulbous growths, and yellowed pupils. Perhaps their food contains traces of the Mossblight, or perhaps something else has infected the remote village.

Beyond the village are fields of low-lying swampland alongside the Riverrook, and the occasional hermitage rising on stilts above the shifting water level. A trio of hags infamously dwell at the confluence of the Riverrook and the Riverraza, a day's ride south of Kaldstow, and offer twisted wishes to those who visit.

Siegeball Arena.

Once a week, the outskirts of Grismoor are dominated by a dull roar: crowds of fanatics ushering the Grismoor Griffons to victory in siegeball. This competition sport revels in the same conflict and violence as bloodsport, but with fewer abject casualties. Regardless, the ionic columns and stark limestone facade of the towering structure seeks to emulate the glory and ubiquity of coliseums at their peak.

Even with the full-throated support of the Grismoor citizenry, the Griffons rarely win and the stands are rarely full. The arena's owner, a miserly man ruled by his pocketbook, has endeavored to sell the building for years. Alas, no takers.

The Unseen Market.

Stepping on the right cobblestones and ducking through the right archways might lead you to the Unseen Market, a line of vendors just outside the mortal realm in which beings that look like ordinary peddlers—but are certainly not—will buy or sell anything, including your soul. The desperate might sell years off their life or their favorite memories, or take jobs collecting specific items from those in the city beyond. Forming a relationship with one of the peddlers in this manner is a devil's bargain, guaranteed to line one's pockets, but at the cost of accepting whatever task is assigned, be it abhorrent, esoteric, or seemingly mundane.

Villisca Estate.

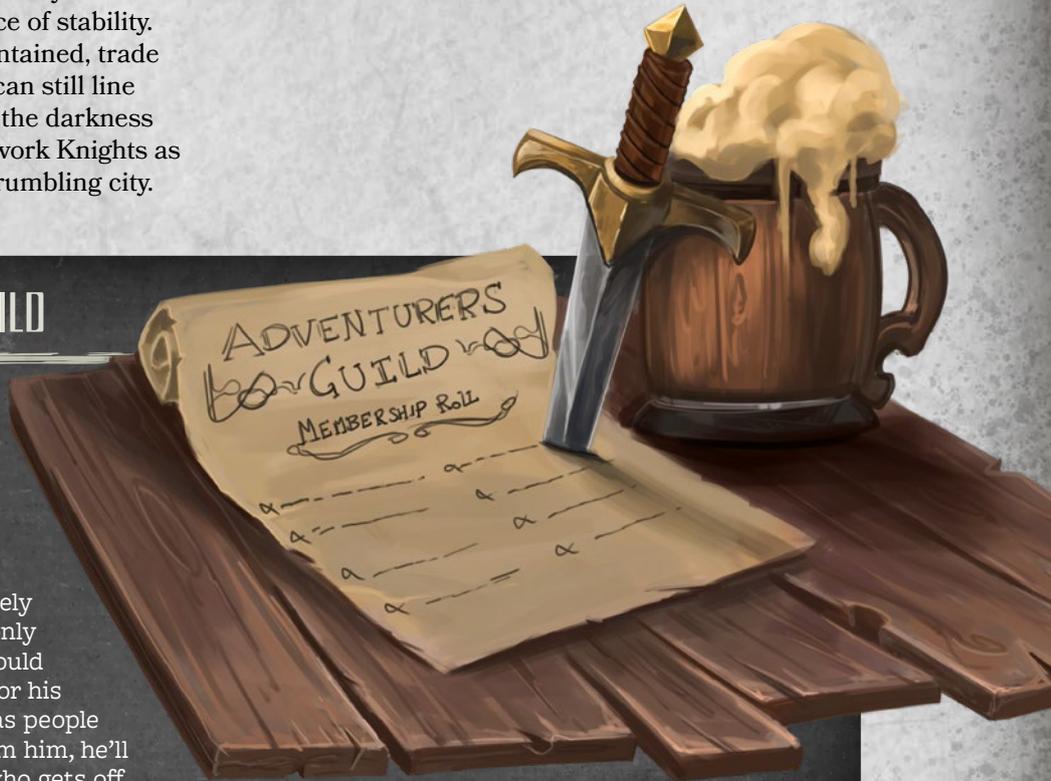
This villa's crumbling architecture and rusting name on the wrought iron exterior gate betrays its once-esteemed and affluent past. At one time, this building would have been the tallest structure for miles, a great mansion overlooking barley and wheat fields. Yet as Grismoor expanded around it, the building remained, steadily becoming a relic out of time. The grim façade is boarded up and rotting, with vines and weeds choking the estate's condemned structure and surrounding courtyard. What little paint remains has withered into great chips and begun to flake away, allowing exposed boards to rot into chasms within the walls. Perhaps the only thing that has survived the ravages of time is the marble gargoyle—just as menacing as when it was carved—at the center of a fountain overlooking the mansion's entrance. Its avian eyes seem to follow with disdain anyone who draws near.

Factions.

Even as the rule of House Douvaine has waned into nonexistence, the guilds that hold sway over Grismoor seek to maintain a semblance of stability. As long as the bare essentials are maintained, trade via caravans and down the Riverrook can still line their pockets. However, knives glint in the darkness behind the merchants and their Patchwork Knights as other powers vie for influence in the crumbling city.

THE ADVENTURER'S GUILD

Jethro Medlitt wants to start a guild of adventurers and has precisely zero members. If asked, the gregarious halfling will acknowledge that organizing adventurers, who usually form small independent companies, is a challenge, but lays the blame squarely on their reluctance to pay dues. If only adventurers could organize, they could multiply the profits for everyone! For his part, Jethro isn't daunted. As long as people will keep accepting free drinks from him, he'll keep pitching his guild to anyone who gets off the 1212.



CULT OF THE RAT

The nameless acolytes of the Rat Queen emerge from the sewers each night to steal dreams from those who sleep. The silent, hooded figures scale walls or creep beside windows to cast their esoteric ritual, pulling a faint, glowing thread from a sleeper through windows and walls, into a spool. When the spool is full and the sleeper tosses and turns in restless nightmares, the acolyte retreats to the undercity to make an offering to their shrouded queen.

Lines of supplicants stand in reverent silence to pay their respects to the Rat Queen. Those who present a new dream are granted an intangible boon: whatever vision they hold in their mind at that moment is stolen away by the Rat Queen and imposed in subtle ways on the city above. The supplicant forgets their desire at the same moment it is made real.

It is impossible to fathom the motives held by the Cult of the Rat, or, indeed, their methods. But when one is desperate enough, it might be possible to wander the sewers and find the shrouded queen, to offer a dream and a vision, though visions are rarely as sweet when made real as they are when held in thought.



GRAFTED ONES

In his sequestered castle, the Malformed Prince has delved into xenoalchemy—or graftworking—the distasteful art of stitching together and animating parts of monsters. Many of those remaining in Castle Douvaine serve as specimens for his wild experiments, which demand ever fresher and more exotic components. His horrific agents, who conceal the extent of their disfigurement under fine silk cloaks, have arranged an underground network to acquire freshly harvested organs and limbs from monsters of every description, and will pay handsomely for new specimens. Adventurers can find lucrative business with the Grafted Ones' contracts, but they should be wary in case they themselves become unwilling subjects.

THE GUILDS

When the locals of Grismoor refer to the “Powers That Be” or the “Almighty Above,” they’re not paying tribute to a pantheon of gods, but to the coalition of guildmasters that steer the city’s operations.

During the heyday of the city’s prominence, various guilds colluded with House Douvaine as invisible accomplices, a set of furtive hands lining the pockets of nobility while given free reign of the city beyond. Secrecy is still favored among the guildmasters, who wear bronze masks to denote their station and conceal their identities. Meanwhile, their influence over the city has never been more prominent, from the patrols of Patchwork Knights to the opulent guildhalls that dot Grismoor. Rumor has it that each month the guildmasters gather in secret—some say in a yacht on a Riverrook—to orchestrate schemes for wealth and power. Vast conspiracies swirl around these clandestine meetings and their anonymous participants, but one thing is true: the meetings of perhaps a dozen people steer the fate of the entire city beyond.





THE OBSERVATORY

The Elders of Grismoor, an eclectic group of arcanists, alchemists, and astrologers, convene weekly in the Observatory at the city's southernmost edge. A cylinder proudly topped with a bowler hat, the observatory stands just outside Grismoor's bounds, tethered to the city beyond only by a high walkway from the wall.

Inside, the grand architecture of the Observatory's design is dwarfed by a hoard of scientific trinkets and gadgets lining every wall, even stacked atop one another, such that only a few winding passageways can be found amongst the experiments. The old Douvaine regime preferred the uncouth and often unsafe experiments of the so-called "Elders" be quarantined within the Observatory's walls, and the greatest mass of scientific trinkets and esoteric books still reside there.

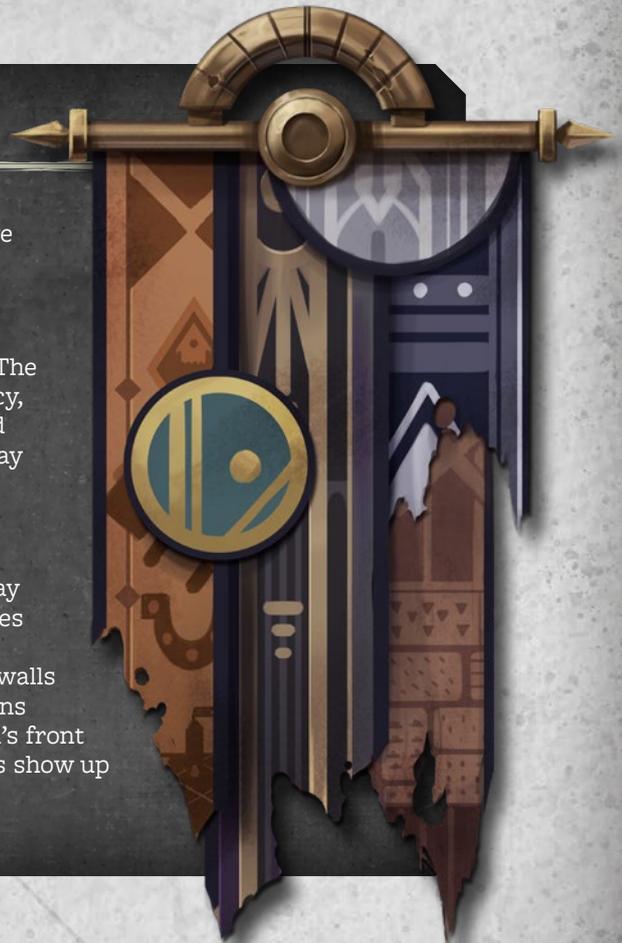
As the Elders of the Observatory probe deeper into the firmament above and the aether below, they discover ever more disquieting truths. Perhaps, these grand paradoxes gesture at a new perspective on all of creation, or perhaps they hint that only terror and chaos dwell at the universe's core, and that when one examines it too deeply, it peers back.

PATCHWORK KNIGHTS

Under the absent rule of the Malformed Prince, Grismoor's regiment of city guards found themselves without wages or command. This gave rise to a unique, if unexpected, vanguard: The Patchwork Knights.

Initially a coalition of mercenaries used as enforcers and bodyguards by the city's guilds, the knights have been thrust into a position of authority as the de-facto force of law and order within the city walls. The city's guildmasters, driven by a desperate need for order and normalcy, invested in swelling the ranks of their knights with veterans of the old guard and swept in to fill the vacuum. Though the guilds still hold sway over their oldest companies, the duties of the Patchwork Knights now extend to the daily service of town guards, earning a small fortune in taxes for their trouble.

The Patchwork Knight's namesake comes from their mismatched array of uniforms and insignias, hailing from dozens of mercenary companies across the kingdom and hinting at their split allegiances. Though the streets once again ring with the echo of patrolling boots and the city walls are manned with sentries, the Patchwork Knights don't hold all citizens and city blocks in equal regard. When a murder takes place on a guild's front steps, it sees full investigations, arrests, and executions. When bodies show up in the Drowned Quarter, they're lucky to get a single investigator.

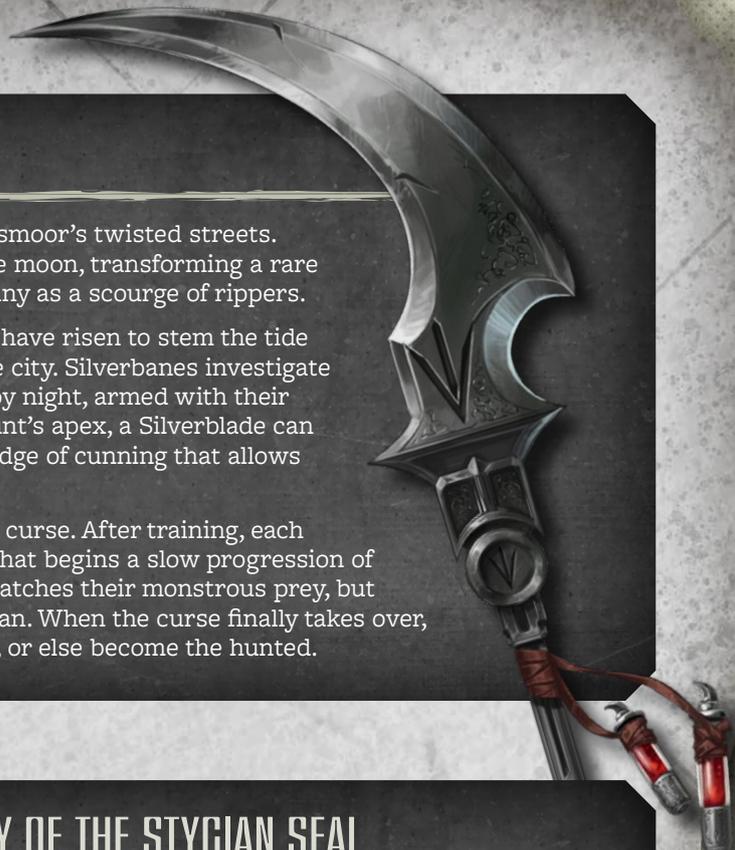


THE SILVERBANES

Under the cloak of night, a bestial horror plagues Grismoor's twisted streets. Were-creatures spread with each passing cycle of the moon, transforming a rare few into bloodthirsty beasts while brutalizing the many as a scourge of rippers.

In their shadow, the clandestine order of Silverbanes have risen to stem the tide of beasts and drive the curse of lycanthropy from the city. Silverbanes investigate grisly murders by day and perform secretive hunts by night, armed with their namesake silver blades and crossbow bolts. At the hunt's apex, a Silverblade can match their quarry for speed and brutality, with an edge of cunning that allows them to prevail more often than not.

This inhuman agility is the Silverblades' blessing and curse. After training, each Silverblade initiate is administered a blood infusion that begins a slow progression of lycanthropy. The curse grants them a ferocity that matches their monstrous prey, but gradually transforms them into a mix of beast and man. When the curse finally takes over, the hunter is expected to burn themselves on a pyre, or else become the hunted.



SOCIETY OF THE STYCIAN SEAL

The Society is many things, principally a sinister cult masquerading as merchants masquerading as miracle healers. The Society's vibrant caravan and equally garish costumes roll into Grismoor once a month, offering to sell all manner of miracle cures in the form of tinctures, blams, and talismans—few of which do anything at all. However, their ruses have thorny layers, designed to ensnare the desperate.

For a few coins more, a customer can join the Society itself and sell their miracle cures throughout the month, restocking whenever the caravan returns. Naturally, this confers discounts and exclusive benefits galore.

Once within the Society, its true nature is unfurled over many years, for the society has many tiers of secret knowledge, quickly forgoing the commercial in favor of the esoteric. The Society secretly venerates the Stygian Seal, a mark for the vestige Erebus, a being of blackness and unmaking known only to heretical scholars. The convoluted legend of Erebus pertains to the creation of the world, the first and most profound sin, and the need to unmake all things, either to start anew, or to let the multiverse wallow in true oblivion as profound penance. In secret, the Society's most zealous agents work in secret to consolidate ancient lore and ritual components, in preparation for the day that Erebus returns.



Residents of Grismoor.

Though Grismoor is the grandest city for hundreds of miles, both it and its citizenry have seen better days. Fortunes turn for the worse more often than not in the Cursed City, so those who remain brandish a thick skin and black humor usually demonstrated by gravediggers, surgeons, and the like.

You can introduce the following nonplayer characters (NPCs) into your investigations as suspects, allies, antagonists, and innocents to be protected. Like everything else in *Insomnia*, you can omit some or all of this list, supplement these NPCs with those of your own creation, and modify them as needed in the service of your story.

Caelias, Escaped Cultist.

Some twenty years ago, Caelias (*he/him*) entered the sewers beneath Grismoor and became an acolyte in the Cult of the Rat. About a week ago he stumbled out, a wild-haired, sallow-eyed shadow of his former self. Whatever he experienced in the Rat Queen's service has left him a paranoid, agoraphobic amnesiac, cowering in caves and ruined homes as he sorts through his shattered memories for clues to his own identity. So far he has assembled his first name and the unsubstantiated notion that he is a scion of the Villisca family, whose estate lies in ruins at the center of Grismoor.

The only exception to Caelias' memory loss is spatial awareness. The tattered elf can perfectly follow any path he has ever walked, but he doesn't know what else lurks along the path. Only a threat to his life will drive him into open spaces, but there is no finer guide to the labyrinth of sewers underneath Grismoor.

Duchess and Mr. Bechet.

Bechet Thistledown (*he/him*) is a doddering gnome bookseller unaware that his shop is actually run by his hyper-intelligent, psionic cat Duchess (*she/her*). This salient fact is quite a blessing, as Bechet quite prefers buying books to selling them, and has stacked his shop to the rafters with all manner of pages and scrolls collected over the years. Whenever someone idles into Betchet's Shop with a tome to sell, the gnome loves nothing more than to sit down with a cup of tea to discuss the book's provenance. The resulting notes, a recollection of the book's history as far back as the owner can discern, decorate the inside front cover of each book in the shop. Because Betchet can barely remember last week, to say nothing of his inventory, rare and esoteric books might be found within the vast collection, if one has the patience to search them out.

The other fixture of Betchet's shop is Duchess, a calico cat with a purple ribbon tied around her neck who prowls the bookshelves and reclines in





the windowsill's sunlight. Secretly, Duchess is much more than an ordinary cat. When the feline takes a liking to someone, her voice—a serene, feminine tone—echoes telepathically through their mind. The feline is perceptive and of genius intellect, having spent many years reading over Betchet's shoulder and trawling through the tomes of the shop. She prefers to communicate with an array of purrs and nudges, resorting to telepathic communication only when she fancies someone or despises them. Whenever possible, she guides Betchet and the shop's customers by “accidentally” knocking the right book off a shelf or yowling to attract someone to items of interest.

Betchet has literally no idea Duchess is anything more than a normal cat, and any attempt to reveal her true nature garners little more than good-natured disbelief.

Envie the Urchin.

Envie (*she/her*), “Queenie,” and “Kneecapper” are the names and aliases assumed by a twelve year old urchin that aspires to carve out a life on the streets of Grismoor. Envie is possessed of boundless energy and a sense of invulnerability, despite a wiry frame and uneven gait. Envie is affable, even talkative, when she's curious about someone, but always mixes a tangle of thieves' cant into her words to throw off anyone who might be listening. In particular, Envie is fascinated with adventurers, though she understands only that their work promises travel and treasure.

A host of other orphans, the “Broadstreet Rogues” look to Envie for leadership, and she rarely disappoints. Though they might not look like much, the rogues are a cutthroat bunch, making ends meet through pickpocketing and petty theft. They have grand ambitions of one day graduating to heists, blackmail, and seizing territory from the Guilds—anything to get them off the streets for good. The way Envie and the rogues see it, Grismoor is circling the drain, and it'll all be theirs for the taking.

Finley West.

Finley West (*he/him*) is a lute-playing human bard with a beautiful voice and his hat in his hand. A newcomer to Grismoor, fresh off the 1212 barge, plays at the Barracks each evening and takes just about any odd job he can find during the day. Most everyone has the impression that they've met Finley before; he must have “one of those faces.” His shows at the Barracks feature shanties and old standards that most patrons know by heart, as well as a smattering of originals whose poetry and performance move even the roughest fisherman to misty-eyed reflection. However, reading between the lyrics proves Finley is more familiar with magic and the malevolence around Grismoor than he lets on.

Finley claims he's just passing through, but he never seems to give a straight answer about where he's coming from, and he seems pretty nervous around the Patchwork Knights.

Hedge Witch Aralia.

Aralia Moonpot (*they/them*) is an itinerant halfling herbalist with a penchant for psychedelics. Although most folks displaced by the Drowning left the city entirely, a few stubborn locals seem intent on rebuilding their lives among the flooded streets of the Drowned Quarter. Aralia is one such flotsam.

Aralia spent half a lifetime realizing her dream of a cozy storefront with a little upstairs apartment. There, the scents of sage and saffron welcomed customers into an atmosphere of well-being. Potions and herbs lined the walls, a little garden outpost in Grismoor's sprawling brickwork.

It took mere hours for the shop to wash away in The Drowning, and Aralia never fully recovered from the loss. These days, they can be found rowing a gondola festooned with watercress and ferns. Aralia can reliably produce remedies for minor ailments from aquatic plants found in the drowned streets and has thereby avoided total destitution—but only just. In the evening hours, Aralia burns herbs into a hallucinogenic haze, and a myriad of past and future events flow before the halfling's bloodshot eyes. On rare occasions, this blur of imagery coalesces into a genuine prophecy.

Nimrod Arch.

Nimrod Arch (*he/them*) is an elderly elven monster hunter searching for someone to kill them. Walking with a hunch and a heavy cane, Nimrod is ancient even by elven standards, perhaps nearing a millennia old. Age hasn't impacted their acuity, however, as one glance past their half-moon glasses will reveal.

Though Nimrod's dottering posture isn't exactly a ploy, it falls away completely when a monster is afoot. At the moment of a chase or a life-or-death struggle, an inhuman vitality surges through the elf, and their cane unfolds to reveal the silver blade of a scythe. This is the lycanthropic blessing of the Silverbanes. However, in the elf's waning years, it threatens to become a curse.

All Silverbanes succumb to their lycanthropic infusion after years of monster hunting and transform into a mindless beast; somehow, Nimrod has staved off the final transformation for decades. The elf seeks a new recruit, a monster hunter capable of killing them once the transformation finally takes hold. Perhaps he will initiate new blood into his dying order, or perhaps he will become just another monster stalking the streets.



Patchwork Knight Kevin.

Kevin Lang (*he/him*) is a melancholy mercenary who would rather be anywhere else. Like most of the Patchwork Knights of Grismoor, Kevin is unreliable at best. In Kevin's case, this results from a peculiarly slouchy brand of nihilism, rather than corruption, greed, or negligence.

With the absolute least possible effort, Kevin learned to handle a sword, patrol a few alleyways, and keep beneath the attention of his superiors. Kevin is unmatched at deliberately ignoring a problem. With the malevolent forces both magical and mundane swirling through Grismoor, this is something of a survival skill. Kevin is determined to be the last one standing when everyone finally fights it out, chiefly by standing somewhere else. He can be a valuable source of information, if he can be convinced that there's any point in sharing what he's seen.

Phaedra, Blighted Dryad.

Phaedra (*she/her*) is a bitter dryad disfigured by the Moss Blight. In her humanoid form, she appears as an elderly woman with greenish skin and hair like willow branches. Puckered scars like old burns blotch her left side, and her left eye is milky and still. In actuality, Phaedra is the fey spirit of a lowland glade that survived the touch of the Moss Blight. That now-ashen field is as much a part of Phaedra as her physical form, causing chronic pain and an outlook of utter contempt. As a spirit of the land, she should have a perfect connection with her glade, but now she is all but blind to it and too weak to affect anything but the smallest, hardiest saplings. She has become quietly obsessed with the Moss Blight's origin, forging a list of would-be originators and guilty parties. If she had even one willing accomplice, she would scratch the names off her list one by one.

Slugmug the Fishmonger.

Slugmug (*he/him*) is an eccentric goblin fishmonger searching for a cryptic river god. By night, Slugmug casts his net into the murky waters of the Riverrook, and by day, he sells his catch from a slapdash shack named the Shellycoat's Delight. Along with an array of silvery fish, he also peddles a host of muddy trinkets dredged from the riverbed. Most are junk, a few are unrecognized treasures, and a rare handful bear magic that should have been left at the bottom of the river.

Slugmug pays well for any of the blasphemously mutated fish found downstream of the Godfist, either in coin, information, or items from his shop. Though reticent to state it in as many words,





Slugmug has become fixated on an entity that he believes dwells in the murky depths of the Riverrook. The currents and trinkets tell cryptic parts of a grand narrative playing out in the goblin's head, connecting the Curses of Grismoor and a lifetime of hardship to the whims of a being slithering through the silt.

Thirty-Seven.

Thirty-Seven (*they/them*) is perhaps the most recognizable of all the Grafted Ones, for unlike their brethren, Thirty-Seven keeps their silken hood lowered. The only visible marks of the Malformed Prince's blasphemous experiments are fine, silvery scars criss-crossing Thirty-Seven's face and a number of lumpy, anonymous protrusions that interrupt the outline of their cloak. Whatever identity Thirty-Seven possessed before entering Castle Douvaine is lost to them, supplanted by the number branded in neat, square letters on the back of their neck.

Although their motives are frequently inscrutable, Thirty-Seven is predictable in a few respects. They pay handsomely for organs and limbs—the fresher and more monstrous the better. For the right price, they can arrange xenoalchemy procedures for willing participants. And they are ardently loyal to the Malformed Prince.

Young Elder Zenk.

Zenk Pallor (*he/him*) is a fresh faced arcanist-in-training with much to learn. Pimpled and squeaky-voiced, Zenk is the youngest Elder ever admitted to the Observatory, where the scholars of Grismoor convene to watch the cosmic motions and perform experiments too unseemly for the city at large. He passed his entrance exam with flying colors, but his theoretical knowledge is dwarfed by his practical ineptitude. Zenk has never cast a complex ritual, never brewed a potion unsupervised, never crafted his own wand, and never peered into a scrying glass. The Observatory confronts the unprepared with horrors incomprehensible to the layman—glimpses beyond the ken of our reality and into the howling dark beyond. Perhaps predictably, Zenk has no idea what his esteemed position entails.

When he isn't recording data or attending to the experiments of the other Elders, young Zenk hangs out at the Barracks trying (and usually failing) to meet people his own age. Lanky limbs, an awkward demeanor, and a set of ostentatious and missized robes place him at a distinct disadvantage among the common folk. However, that's where Zenk feels most comfortable, seeing himself more akin to the adventuring wizards that come in on the 1212 as opposed to the stuffy Elders that he can't quite measure up to.



CURSED SUBCLASSES

Class	Subclass	Description
Druid	Circle of Disaster	Draws vast, chaotic elemental power from natural disasters
Fighter	Pseudomorph	Afflicted by psudonatural corruption, mutates in horrific ways
Ranger	Beastborne	A type of lycanthrope, gradually transforms into a ferocious beast
Sorcerer	Jinx	Cursed with existential bad luck and can manipulate others' fortune

The Seven Curses of Grismoor infect the land and the people in equal measure, leaving lingering, immutable scars on those who remain in the city and delve into its abandoned districts. The following cursed subclass options are available for campaigns in Grismoor, or any setting enhanced by horror options.

Circle of Disaster

Druid Subclass

Druids that align with the Circle of Disaster draw their power from catastrophic shifts of nature, such as earthquakes, thunderstorms, wildfires, and tidal waves. Wherever these druids go, disasters follow in their wake, both because they can predict such catastrophes and because they can manipulate the elements to spark them. Such druids believe that natural disasters are a vital step for renewal; things must first be destroyed before they can be reborn.

Disaster Spells.

Beginning when you choose this circle at 2nd level, you gain access to some spells when you reach certain levels in this class, as shown on the following table.

Once you gain access to one of these spells, you always have it prepared, and it doesn't count against the number of spells you can prepare each day. If you gain access to a spell that doesn't appear on the druid spell list, the spell is nonetheless a druid spell for you.

Druid Level Circle Spells

2nd	<i>fog cloud, thunderwave</i>
3rd	<i>flaming sphere, gust of wind</i>
5th	<i>call lightning, sleet storm</i>
7th	<i>blight, control water</i>
9th	<i>cone of cold, insect plague</i>

Aspect of Calamity.

Also at 2nd level, you can expend a use of your Wild Shape feature as a bonus action to empower your magic with the elemental force of natural disasters. For the next hour, whenever you cast a spell of 1st level or higher, you can choose one of the following effects to improve the spell:

Blizzard. Once per turn, when a creature fails a saving throw against a spell that you cast of 1st level or higher, you can choose to coat that creature in ice. This creature's movement speed is reduced to 0 for up to 1 minute, or until it or another creature within reach of it uses an action to break away the ice.

Earthquake. Whenever a creature fails a saving throw against a spell that you cast of 1st level or higher, you can choose to knock that creature prone.

Thunderstorm. When you cast a spell of 1st level or higher, each creature of your choice within 10 feet of you can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.

Tidal Wave. When you cast a spell of 1st level or higher that affects an area, you can magically push up to three creatures of Large size or smaller up to 10 feet in order to move them into the spell's area of effect. You can't use this ability to push a creature that is more than 10 feet away from the spell's affected area.

Wildfire. When you cast a spell of 1st level or higher that deals damage to a creature, you can choose one creature that takes damage from the spell to take an extra 1d6 fire damage for each level of the spell slot expended.

Stormsight.

By 6th level, your eyes have adapted to the smoke and rain of cataclysmic events. Your vision is unobstructed in lightly obscured and heavily obscured conditions caused by fog, heavy rain, smoke, falling snow, and other natural phenomena.

Elemental Aegis.

Starting at 10th level, your attunement to natural disasters has afforded you a measure of elemental resistance. You can cast the spell *protection from energy* without expending a spell slot or using your concentration. The spell lasts until you cast it again using this feature.

Additionally, you have advantage on saving throws against nonmagical natural hazards, such as earthquakes, strong winds, and wildfires.

Doombringer.

Beginning at 14th level, you gain the power to channel true cataclysms through your magic. You can cast one of the following spells without expending a spell slot or material components: *control weather*, *earthquake*, or *incendiary cloud*.

At 15th level, you always have these spells prepared, and they don't count against the number of spells you prepare. Additionally, these spells count as druid spells for you.

Once you cast one of these spells using this feature, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest, though you can still cast it normally using any spell slots you have of the appropriate level.

Pseudomorph

Fighter Subclass

When an otherworldly entity seeps into our world, its darkness corrupts everything it touches, warping familiar things into foreign monstrosities. This corruption is so malignant that it can never fade, only reconstitute into different forms. Somehow, you were touched by such an alien influence, whether you were exposed to another reality, survived an encounter with pseudonatural horrors, or glimpsed an eldritch god.

Now, your body resists its natural form, warping into terrible silhouettes and growing monstrous limbs at a mere thought. If you can control these transformations, you might be able to cling to your former self, but corruption is inevitable, and your transformations will surely worsen with time.

Indiscernible Anatomy.

Beginning at 3rd level, the placement and composition of your internal organs defies comprehension. Any critical hit against you becomes a normal hit.

Morphic Limbs.

Also at 3rd level, your aberrant physiology becomes fluid, allowing you to alter your limbs to almost any arrangement. Choose one of the following transformations when you finish a short or long rest. You gain that transformation until you choose a different one with this feature.

Hyperelastic. Your flesh takes on a rubbery quality, allowing you to bend and stretch with ease. Melee weapons you use are considered to have the Reach property, if they didn't have it already. Additionally, you have advantage on ability checks you make to escape grapple or slip binds.

Polybrachia. You grow a pair of additional arms. These arms are fully functional and can be used to hold weapons and shields (allowing you to hold 2 two-handed weapons, or 4 one-handed weapons), perform somatic components of spells, and perform other actions, though the arms themselves don't grant you any additional actions.

Pseudopods. You grow pseudopods that you can use to make unarmed strikes. You can use Dexterity instead of Strength for the attack rolls of your unarmed strikes made using your pseudopods. If you hit with them, you deal bludgeoning damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength or Dexterity modifier, instead of the bludgeoning damage normal for an unarmed strike.

Additionally, you can make an opportunity attack using the pseudopods without using a reaction. You can't do so on your turn and you can't make more than one opportunity attack per turn. Once you make an opportunity attack using the pseudopods, you regain the ability to do so at the start of your turn.

Pariah.

At 7th level, you gain proficiency in the Intimidation skill, if you don't have it already. You can use your Constitution modifier, instead of Charisma, for Charisma (Intimidation) checks.

Additionally, you have advantage on the first Charisma (Intimidation) check you make directed at a creature you have first encountered in the last minute.

Morphic Flesh.

Beginning at 10th level, you can use your Second Wind feature twice between rests. Additionally, when you use your Second Wind feature, you can gain one of the following benefits of your choice:

Aberrate. You cast the spell *aberrate*.

Constitution is your spellcasting ability for this spell.

Calcify. You gain a +4 bonus to your Armor Class, which lasts until the end of your next turn.

Skitter. You immediately move up to your movement speed without provoking opportunity attacks. Additionally, you gain a climbing speed equal to your walking speed until the end of your next turn.

Corpse Gorging.

By 15th level, your unnatural gullet hungers for flesh. You can use your action to consume the entire corpse of a Medium creature or part of the corpse of a Large or larger creature. If the creature has died within the last hour and has a challenge rating of 10 or higher, you regain all of your expended Hit Dice and you regain an expended use of your Action Surge, Indomitable, and Second Wind features.

Once you use this feature, you can't do so again until you finish a short or long rest.

Molt.

Beginning at 18th level, you can slough off your skin and transform as an action to fully embrace your pseudonatural corruption. Alternatively, when you are reduced to 0 hit points and are not killed outright, you can choose to drop to 1 hit point instead and automatically transform if you have a use of this feature available. Your transformation lasts for 1 minute, or until you choose to revert to your normal form on your turn (no action required). While transformed, you gain the following benefits:

- If you are smaller than Large, you become Large. If you lack the room to become Large, your size doesn't change.
- Whenever you hit a creature with a melee weapon attack, you can deal an extra 1d6 damage to it.
- You gain all three transformations of your Morphic Limb feature. Additionally, your pseudopods deal 1d10 damage on a hit.
- You grow a grotesque pair of wings, gaining a flight speed equal to your walking speed.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.



ABERRATE

2nd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action **Components:** V, S
Range: Self **Duration:** 1 minute

For the spell's duration, you don't take extra damage from critical hits.

Additionally, your body adapts to threats as it warps. Immediately after you take damage while this spell is active, you can use your reaction to gain resistance to that damage type until this spell ends or until you use this ability again to gain resistance to a different damage type. This resistance doesn't apply to the triggering damage.

Beastborne

Ranger Subclass

Whether by infected bite or insidious curse, your blood was marked by the indelible stain of beasthood, a curse of lycanthropy. A new form, a primal, bestial self, lies just beneath your skin, awaiting the allure of blood and the thrill of a hunt to emerge in a terrible spectacle. Perhaps, if you can avoid the violence of combat or the siren call of moonlight, you can resist the lycanthropic urge. Or perhaps you see the infection as a blessing, a fearsome weapon, with claws that rend and teeth that bite.

Shapechanger.

Beginning when you choose this archetype at 3rd level, your body is stained by a lycanthropic curse which struggles to escape from you at all times. You gain the shapechanger subtype; your true form is a ghastly hybrid of beast and man. Additionally, you gain the following abilities:

Darkvision. You gain darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. If you already have darkvision from your race, its range increases by 30 feet.

Keen Smell. You have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Bestial Aspect

At 3rd level, as blood is shed, you gradually lose control and slip into a beastlike form, ravenous and hungry for carnage. Whenever you take damage or deal damage to a hostile creature with an attack, add the total number together; this is your damage pool. You gain a bonus to your damage rolls, as well as additional beastlike abilities, according to your total damage pool, as shown on the Bestial Aspect table. After 1 minute of taking and dealing no damage, reset your damage pool to 0.

Wolfbane Fury.

Starting at 7th level, you can whip yourself into a lycanthropic fury. As a bonus action, you can roll 4d6 and add the total to your damage pool.

Once you use this ability, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Howling Carnage.

Beginning at 11th level, whenever your damage pool exceeds 50, you attack three times with your claws, instead of twice, whenever you take the Attack action on your turn.

Relentless Bloodlust.

By 15th level, not even death can hold back your transformation. When you are reduced to 0 hit points and aren't killed outright, you can choose to drop to 1 hit point instead. Add the total damage you would have taken to your damage pool.

Once you use this ability, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

BESTIAL ASPECT.

Damage Pool	Damage Bonus	Ability
0	—	—
10	+2	You sprout a set of vicious claws, which are natural weapons you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with them, you deal slashing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the bludgeoning damage normal for an unarmed strike. Your claws count as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistance and immunity to nonmagical attacks and damage.
20	+2	You gain resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered.
30	+2	Your walking speed increases by 10 feet.
40	+3	You gain blindsight with a range of 10 feet.
50	+3	You gain a climbing speed equal to your walking speed.
70	+3	Your walking speed increases by an additional 10 feet (20 feet total).
100	+3	Your claws deal an extra 1d6 slashing damage on a hit.

Jinx

Sorcerer Subclass

Some people are cursed with bad luck from the day they were born. Known as “jinxes,” they are shunned everywhere they go, for fear that their misfortune will plague anyone who gets too close. In fact, this fear is well-founded, for a jinx really can inflict their curse on other people and, with training, can even harness it into a potent source of magic.

Misfortune Magic.

You learn additional spells when you reach certain levels in this class, as shown on the Misfortune Spells table. Each of these spells counts as a sorcerer spell for you but doesn't count against the number of sorcerer spells you know.

Whenever you gain a sorcerer level, you can replace one spell you gained from this feature with another spell of the same level. The new spell must be a divination or a necromancy spell from the sorcerer, warlock, or wizard spell list.

Misfortune Spells.

New spells are marked with an asterisk.

Sorcerer Level	Spells
1st	<i>bane, unseen servant</i>
3rd	<i>augury, ray of enfeeblement</i>
5th	<i>bestow curse, remove curse</i>
7th	<i>confusion, divination</i>
9th	<i>dream, telekinesis</i>

Fumble.

Starting at 1st level, you radiate an aura of bad luck. Whenever a creature within 30 feet of you rolls a 1 on the d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, you can choose to amplify its bad luck. Choose one of the following effects:

- The creature falls prone.
- The creature drops everything it is holding.
- The creature can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.
- The creature takes 1d6 damage. The damage is bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage, as appropriate to the accident that occurs. This damage increases by 1d6 at 5th level (2d6), 11th level (3d6), and 17th level (4d6).

The creature suffers a harmless, but extremely embarrassing accident of the GM's choice.

Unlucky Numbers. When you reach 2nd level in this class, you enhance your aura of bad luck by spending 2 sorcery points as an action. Roll a d20 and record the number rolled; this is an unlucky number. Whenever a creature within 30 feet of you rolls an unlucky number on an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, you can turn the roll into a 1.

Unlucky numbers last until you finish a long rest. You can have a total number of unlucky numbers equal to your proficiency bonus at one time.

Abate Disaster.

Beginning at 6th level, you can delay the tides of misfortune. When a willing creature you can see within 60 feet is hit by an attack or fails a saving throw, you can use your reaction to cause the attack to miss or saving throw to succeed. If the attack or saving throw would have caused the creature to take damage, roll damage as normal and record the amount.

Disaster can't be avoided, however, only delayed. After three rounds, at the start of the willing creature's turn, a string of improbable events conspires to create an unavoidable accident, dealing the same amount of damage as recorded to the creature. The GM decides the nature of the accident and the damage type it deals.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Bad Omen.

At 14th level, your magic is infused with portents of doom. Whenever a creature fails a saving throw against a spell of 1st level or higher that you cast, it has disadvantage on attack rolls it makes against you until the start of your next turn.

Black Spot.

When you reach 18th level, you learn to channel the tides of misfortune into an infamous curse: the black spot. As an action, you can choose a creature you can see within 60 feet of you and expend a spell slot. The creature gains the black spot, a permanent mark that appears somewhere upon its body. You can use your reaction at any time to evoke the mark. Compare the creature's current hit points to 10 times the level of the spell slot expended. If the creature has fewer hit points, it dies. Otherwise, it takes 1d12 necrotic damage for each level of the spell slot expended. The mark then fades.

If you place a black mark upon another creature, any existing marks fade. You can also cause the black mark to harmlessly fade (no action required).

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CHAPTER 5: MONSTERS

MONSTERS

Insomnia presents each of its adventures as conflicts with a single monster that the characters must survive, investigate, and hunt, lest they be hunted themselves. In stark contrast to the power fantasy of other roleplaying games, the players aren't brave heroes carving a swathe through foes on their way to a dramatic confrontation with a dragon. Instead, they're trapped in a monster movie, hoping to survive for a few hours longer.

NEW MONSTERS, NEW FEAR

If the players know exactly what to expect from a monster, it's probably not a good fit for a horror campaign, especially if a monster has an easily-exploitable weakness. Players will probably expect zombies to be shambling minions, easily dispatchable with a blow to the head—nothing to be worried about. However, with some small changes, you can subvert player expectations and put them on the back foot. Sprinting zombies with no clear weaknesses, ambiguously dead zombies that rise back up at any moment, or zombies made from real, living people, who might be rescued from their fate, are all substantial remixes to the formula, and force players to improvise.

Each monster in *Insomnia* follows this spirit of rethinking tropes. The Vampire, clad in armor, is nothing like any vampire you've seen before. Our Imp is a fearsome devil and a savvy manipulator, not a tiny minion. With any luck, the characters will interact with these monsters authentically, unsure what to expect and constantly fearing reprisal.

Hunt or Be Hunted.

When a monster is on the loose, one of two things will happen: either it'll pick off the characters one-by-one, or the characters will investigate it, uncover its weaknesses, corner it, and bring it down. None of these are small feats; each is fraught with peril, thrusting them into encounters with the monster or its minions. In the course of investigation, the characters might need to procure special weapons or resources, pull on threads of inquiry to meet people familiar with the monster, or simply spend a lot of time at the library. Every action brings them closer to an inevitable final confrontation with the monster, whether or not they're ready for it.

Critical Weakness.

Many things can be learned as the characters delve into investigation, from the monster's origin, to how it kills, to the location of its lair, but the most important is undoubtedly the monster's weakness. As invincible as any monster might seem, nearly every creature has an Achilles' heel, some critical vulnerability that slows them down, undermines their powers, banishes them from time and space, or allows them to be slain. With the proper research, and a little bit of luck, the characters might be able to find some detail which gives them a fighting chance.

Insidious Lair.

Whenever the monster has finished consuming or abducting a victim, or if a powerful foe forces it to flee, it retreats to its lair, a shadowy bastion in which it heals and grows more powerful. Within its lair, the monster wields a suite of supernatural lair actions and the advantage of familiar territory—it is never more formidable. Tracking it back to its lair, however, offers the potential to corner it for a final confrontation. If the characters want the greatest edge possible, it might be prudent to lure the monster away from its lair to deprive it of lair actions and ensnare it in a trap.

Hook, Mystery, Revelation.

Each monster in this chapter is presented with the outline of a three-part adventure—beginning, middle, and end—arranged as a set of adventure hooks, an overarching mystery, and a number of revelations to uncover as the investigation unfolds. *Chapter 1: Insomnia* provides additional guidance on how to run an adventure using this format.

Furthermore, each monster can mix-and-match with any setting you wish. This means that certain details—like “the town” or “the authorities”—are painted with a broad enough brush to grant the necessary flexibility. Feel free to massage smaller details to suit your selection of setting, NPCs, and factions to maximize your horror experience. Also, try out unconventional pairings of incursions and settings. Perhaps a string of daemonic creatures visits the sci-fi Blackpost colony, or a court of fey creatures sets its sight on Nowhere, USA.

Hooks. For the monster’s slow, insidious reveal, each comes armed with at least three adventure hooks, which inform different aspects of the mystery that follows. Don’t simply pick one—use all three! When all of the plot’s elements center on the monster in different ways, the players will organically point their investigation in the correct direction as well.

Mystery. The overarching mystery centers on how the monster hunts, the clues it leaves behind, and the investigation’s unexpected detours. Sometimes, the mystery has all the hallmarks of a detective story or a monster movie; other times, it involves deciphering esoteric patterns appearing in the world or reckoning with intangible forces from beyond space and time.

Because the mystery is almost entirely player-directed, this section of the monster should be taken as a loose guideline, molded to the whims of your players and the demands of your story.

Revelations. It wouldn’t be a mystery without secrets to uncover. As the characters investigate, they’ll pinpoint the monster’s lair, realize previously unseen aspects of its nature, unravel its motivation, and ultimately determine how it can be killed. Each revelation is a modest achievement, a step toward understanding and ultimately slaying the monster at hand.

Tiers of Threat.

Every monster in this book can pose a threat to characters of up to 17th level, utilizing a novel format of stat blocks that varies statistics to the party’s tier of play.

Tiers. The monster’s HP, AC, saving throw DCs, attack bonus, and damage inflicted on a hit aren’t present in their relevant traits and actions; rather, they’re presented at the bottom of the statblock with each tier. The **SHADOW** tier applies to parties of 1st to 4th level, the **TERROR** tier applies to parties of 5th to 10th level, and the **NIGHTMARE** tier applies to parties of 11th to 16th level. Parties of 17th level and higher tend to mesh poorly with the structure of a horror roleplaying game.

Some abilities (such as Legendary Resistance and Multiattack) scale with higher tiers of play, as noted in the stat block, but ability scores do not. If you wish to scale the monster’s skill bonuses and saving throw proficiencies with higher tiers, add +1 to all relevant proficiencies for Terror tier, and +3 for Nightmare.

Weakness. Each monster is presented with a weakness that disables its most powerful features. Note that the challenge rating assumes that the party employs the weakness in combat; otherwise, they don’t stand a chance.

Dread Actions. Monsters are also equipped with a terrifying and streamlined version of legendary actions called dread actions. Very simply: the monster acts between every turn, no matter how many players are present. Actions don’t have variable costs or need to be taken in a specific order—the monster takes an action between every turn. Even with the monster’s weakness, players must be judicious and canny to overcome their foe.

Adjusting Difficulty.

Because the tiers of monster statistics leap between level milestones, they provide very little granularity for parties in the middle of those levels. A 1st-level or 2nd-level party stands practically no chance against a Shadow-tier monster, for example, so you may need to adjust the difficulty of such encounters to render the final confrontation palatable.

Use the suggestions on the Difficulty Adjustments table to adjust monster difficulty to your party. If you need to lower it a bit more, feel free to decrease the monster’s damage or HP on the fly, or use any of the mid-battle moments to deal additional damage to the monster or force it to skip a turn.

Noble Sacrifice. Just before the monster deals a killing blow to one of the characters, they seize their chance and go out swinging, critically injuring the monster before they're torn to shreds.

Environmental Fortune. Boards break beneath the monster's feet, causing it to scratch wildly at the air. Or a gas tank begins to leak, catching a spark and exploding when the monster ventures near. This stroke of luck gives the party the upper hand.

Unexpected Ally. An ally, geared up and ready to fight, barges in and deals a decisive blow to the monster. Their interruption doesn't last long, as the monster zeroes in on the interloper, but the attack temporarily brought the monster to its knees.

Momentary Distraction. An innocent bystander inadvertently pulls the monster's attention, granting the party a moment to strike, rally, or flee.

Built-In Trap. The base of a towering column has crumbled, allowing the characters to push it over when the monster is in position. Or a piece of heavy machinery is poised to crush the monster beneath its treads. This blow fails to slay the monster outright, but it certainly evens the playing field.

Otherworldly Intervention. A mysterious force, either a supernatural ally or the influence of a yet-greater foe, strikes the monster and temporarily paralyzes it. Perhaps the characters can secure a killing blow, but the momentary aid provides more questions than answers.

DIFFICULTY ADJUSTMENTS.

Level	Tier	Adjustments
1st	Shadow	Reduce the monster's HP by 40. Replace two dread actions each round with Roar.
2nd	Shadow	Reduce the monster's HP by 30. Replace two dread actions each round with Roar.
3rd	Shadow	Reduce the monster's HP by 20.
4th	Shadow	—
5th	Terror	Reduce the monster's HP by 60. Replace two dread actions each round with Roar.
6th	Terror	Reduce the monster's HP by 50. Replace one dread action each round with Roar.
7th	Terror	Reduce the monster's HP by 40. Replace one dread action each round with Roar.
8th	Terror	Reduce the monster's HP by 30.
9th	Terror	Reduce the monster's HP by 20.
10th	Terror	—
11th	Nightmare	Reduce the monster's HP by 80. Replace one dread action each round with Roar.
12th	Nightmare	Reduce the monster's HP by 70. Replace one dread action each round with Roar.
13th	Nightmare	Reduce the monster's HP by 60. Replace one dread action each round with Roar.
14th	Nightmare	Reduce the monster's HP by 40.
15th	Nightmare	Reduce the monster's HP by 20.
16th	Nightmare	—

Dread Action: Roar. The monster bellows a guttural roar.
It gains a +1 bonus to its Armor Class until it takes damage.

INCURSIONS

When a foul creature drags itself out of the bowels of the earth, it rarely does so of its own accord. It might have been summoned by mad cultists, led to our world through an open portal, or forced to flee its dark home by something even more terrible. Whatever the reason, new and more horrific monsters will surely follow it.

A campaign in *Insomnia* consists of a string of monstrous invasions called an incursion. Once an incursion is begun, the very world is on a ticking clock—*forfeit* if the incursion is not halted. An incursion of undead threatens to overrun the world with ghouls, vampires, and wraiths; an eldritch incursion threatens to drive the world into a dark age under the foot of strange, elder gods; a daemonic incursion threatens to rain literal hellfire and damnation. No matter its shape, combating the incursion is the final and greatest hurdle of any campaign.

A single adventure might be crafted around banishing or slaying a single monster, but a campaign should center on halting an incursion that grows more powerful with each passing hour.

Running an Incursion.

A one-off monster investigation and a full-fledged incursion start off the same way: with a single, menacing creature creeping through the shadows. It's only with the arrival of new and more powerful threats that the mounting peril reveals itself. Thankfully, it doesn't take much preparation to transform a string of unrelated monster attacks into a sprawling mystery.

Because the first investigation of a larger campaign is preoccupied with introducing the setting, the faces around town, the characters, and the unique format of a monster investigation, it's best to start laying the groundwork for the larger incursion after the first monster lies dead. This gives the players time to acclimate to the style of play and decide if it's right for them, while you decide which threads of mystery resonate the most with everyone around the table.

Once the first investigation draws to a close, it's time to dangle some loose threads and knock some dominos over.

Loose Threads.

As the characters investigate individual monsters, they'll also pick up hints about the larger mystery: why monsters are showing up in the first place. These clues might seem inscrutable at first, appearing as red herrings or lingering questions about the monster investigation at hand, but over the course of multiple investigations, the larger truth comes into focus: a full-scale incursion looms on the horizon.

This sets off a chain of questions to be unraveled as the characters combat their next monster: How are monsters arriving in our world and what sort of monster is coming next? Why are they coming to our world, and is anyone assisting them? How grave is the threat, and how long until it becomes unmanageable? Together, the answers to these questions form a ticking clock that frames the entire campaign. Even if the characters escape the monster with their lives, they can be certain their days are numbered.

Dominos Falling.

When the characters first arrive, the adventure's setting is in a steady-state of normalcy: there's a day-to-day routine, an illusion of justice and safety, and someone in charge. Even if things are in a state of decline or a few individuals are aware of the monstrous threats on the horizon, the situation hasn't gotten dire.

Each monster's appearance shakes the foundations of society a little more, ripping back the curtains to reveal their longtime shortcomings and their unreadiness for the horrors at their door. First, the authorities can't keep people safe. Then, the experts can't rationalize the unexplainable. Finally, leadership can't lead.

Over the course of the incursion, it becomes clear that the characters, and their successful investigations are all that stand between civilization and collapse. The characters aren't obligated to accept the status quo—that's what brought things to a precipice—but they need to halt the worsening incursion before it's too late.

Final Confrontation.

When the characters finally discover the source of evil, they need only put a stop to it. In this confrontation, the characters close a portal allowing evil to seep into the world, destroy a cursed item that attracts monsters from other dimensions, kill a cultist hellbent on ending the world, or one of any number of other climactic scenes. Sometimes, this necessitates only a conversation or a single decisive motion; other times, it entails monster hunt in its own right. It is always, however, a finale.

Hand-and-fast rules are imprecise for final battles, but a good rule of thumb is to resolve a character's arc before it ends. Allow a character searching for redemption to perform a noble sacrifice. Let a character struggling to choose their path make a profound choice about who they should be. Give a loser an unmitigated triumph. Whether the final confrontation happens against an epic backdrop or in a parking lot, the characters are what make it profoundly memorable.

Source of Evil.

The biggest questions regarding the larger incursion are how and why. Below, several potential answers to these questions are explored. Feel free to pluck from this list for your own incursion campaign or use them as a guideline to devise your own.

Seeping Horrors.

Monsters dwell just beyond the edges of our perception, just beyond the borders of our world, a paper thin step to the left across the myriad dimensions. And occasionally, that divide grows thinner still. The plane that gives rise to these horrors is entirely alien, obeying rules that are anathema to those of our reality. Perhaps, the season of monsters will pass like the tides as that other realm draws close and recedes away. Or perhaps something—or someone—is forcing the planes together, shaving away the walls, and allowing those abominable things to seep through.

It Awakens.

Hundreds or perhaps thousands of years ago, a band of heroes triumphed against an ancient evil and banished it into the earth. But that malign intelligence merely slumbered there, groaning under its slab. With passing centuries, cracks have opened in its prison walls, allowing its malevolence to seep through and manifest as horrific beasts, made all the more corrupt through long exile. However strong, the walls shall soon fall completely and that evil shall awaken, hateful and ravenous in the light of the morning, ready to blight the world above.

From the Cosmos.

A flash and a low rumble interrupt the placid night sky, and a smoldering hunk of exotic metals becomes one with a lonely hillside. Something slithers out over the crater's edge, drawn by the sounds of a distant town below.

However many lights twinkle in the night sky, the stars above are but a sprinkling of dust in an incomprehensible abyss. The horrors that drift in that void—the blasphemous constructions of alien gods—make a mockery of our understanding of science and magic. They are altogether horrible, monsters in every respect. Did a solitary rock bring their ilk to our world, or have they constructed vessels or portals to leap across the vast emptiness? Why have they come, and what designs do they have for our world?

Abomination Labs.

In the bright, sterile lights of a subterranean laboratory, a team of brilliant researchers work around the clock to twist nature into stomach-churning forms. Their tinkering has long since abandoned ethics or rationality, driven by an insatiable curiosity and the thrill of breaking new ground. The only question unanswered in this scientific endeavor is why. Nobody bothered to ask that.

Floor-to-ceiling glass tubes within the laboratory nurture the fruits of their labors: an entire catalog of horrors, unnamed and inconceivable, ready to escape and eviscerate their creators at a moment's notice. Perhaps the laboratory has long since been destroyed by its creations, now blanketed in a thick layer of dust and dried viscera. Or perhaps the researchers are only now taking their first fledgling steps into the realm of mad science, and only a few of their creations have escaped into the town beyond. Or perhaps the monsters have taken over entirely, influencing their creators with subtle and strange enchantments to create more of their kin.

Apex Monster.

Your first tentative investigation into the parade of invading monsters provides plenty of questions, but only one concrete answer: they have traveled a bewildering distance—across the cosmos, through the misty walls of dimensions, or from some other remote corner of reality—without any real objective. Their odyssey has left them hungry, but they were already afraid. One potential hypothesis sends chills down your spine: these horrors aren't invading so much as they're fleeing. A monstrous apex predator is coming, hot on the heels of its prey and ravenous enough to consume the entire world.

The Profane Circle.

In the dead of night, a circle of hooded figures lit candles and carved a forgotten, ancient rune into the stone. They chanted. And somewhere, in the vast oblivion beyond our realm, a monstrous thing heard them.

The cultists didn't contact something so quaint as a devil, but awakened something that slumbered for untold centuries beyond our reality. Its lesser appendages, creatures of vast and terrible forms, have clawed their way out of the cultist's circle and widened it for the true being to follow.

Perhaps the entire cabal of chanting cultists were slain in their disastrous first contact with that alien intelligence. Or perhaps, emboldened, their numbers have grown and their chanting continues, even as more terrible creatures spill from their circle. One thing is certain: if their profane circle remains unbroken, the world as we know it is doomed.

Third Eye Opened.

Invisible horrors lurk around every corner and in every hallway, their breath hot on your neck when you at last think you're alone. They've always been there, creatures of gnashing teeth and whipping tendrils that most people, in their blissful ignorance, can't perceive. You were once just as oblivious. But now you're awake—and you can never close your eyes again.

Only a select few can perceive these unspeakable horrors and fight back. To everyone else, however, the monstrous incursion has perfectly plausible if macabre explanations, and your compatriots seem like the real threat. If you can walk the line between creeping dread and mania, perhaps you can find the pit out of which these creatures crawl and push them back. Or perhaps, you'll be consumed by even more mysterious creatures that are yet invisible to you.

Undead Incursions.

The Slasher, the Vampire, the Geist, and the Gravelord

Every fear derives its sting from death, the inexorable fate of all things. The chilling image of a skeletal figure bearing a scythe needs no explanation; death is evident to all. Though glimpsing the stillness of a corpse confers a pit in the stomach or waves of grief, seeing a shambling corpse or a spirit from beyond the veil is downright horrific. Undeath is the fear of death made manifest.

Corporeal and Incorporeal.

All undeath is a corruption of death, an error of the body and soul passing into the afterlife. As such, there are two general types of undead: corporeal undead: shambling bodies devoid of immortal souls; and incorporeal undead: restless souls divorced from their material forms. The majority of undead, from revenants and zombies, to specters and poltergeists, fit within this dichotomy.

Rare exceptions—undead that are neither corporeal or incorporeal—require a third element to facilitate the disconnection of body and soul. A lich, for example, results when a soul is divorced from the body, but not allowed to pass on to the afterlife. Instead, the soul is trapped in an object, a phylactery, allowing the lich to retain its intelligence, even as it slips beyond the bonds of death. Similarly, vampires are afflicted with a curse which corrupts their soul and rots it to nothingness, leaving them with only a withered facsimile of life.



Eldritch Incursions.

The Nightmare, the Shoggoth, the Pain Elemental, the Starlight, and the Herald

Terrible, nameless things lie just beyond the corners of your vision. Abominations which defy description originate outside of our reality and creep into our world on strange and unpredictable tides. Their motives are as utterly alien as their appearances, and with them spreads a corruption that erodes your sanity and turns familiar things foreign.

Pseudonatural Corruption.

The eldritch dimensions which lie beyond reality are governed by esoteric laws of nature and incomprehensible building blocks. When even a pinpoint breach connects our reality to the eldritch dimensions beyond, a stream corruption seeps forth mutating living things and distorting reality itself.

The intermingling of matter and energy with the surreal fabric of an eldritch plane gives rise to **PSEUDOELEMENTS**, unnatural particles composed of concepts and emotions. When living things draw near, pseudoelements congeal and knot together, corrupting first the creature's mind with a tormenting mania, and then warping its tissues in horrific, unrecognizable ways. The pseudonatural corruption equally extends into the eldritch dimensions beyond, agitating whatever mockeries of life dwell there and drawing them into the breach.

As the corruption seeps into the mortal world, its corruption gives rise to mutated abominations as well as pseudoelements—creatures such as pain despair elementals and fear elementals, composed entirely of pseudoelements. The breach can be closed and the corruption halted, but the pseudonatural effects linger on, an irrevocable cancer that weakens our reality against further breaches.



Daemonic Incursions.

The Imp, the Seraph, the Cult, and the Lamb

The heavens burn with the stuff of nightmares: hellish radiance and ominous prophecies. Armageddon awaits, and the world itself shall be judged against the whims of an unknowable god. Unnatural angelic servants—abominations of fire and beasts—utter proclamations and mete out judgment upon the living, in preparation for the final cleansing.

Gnashing and writhing in the dark abyss, a legion of malevolence gathers in open rebellion of the hideous lights above. Their war shall be one of corruption and desecration in the mortal realm, strengthened by our secrets and our darkest desires.

Dead Gods and Vestiges.

Divinity, itself, is eternal. Like living things, gods grow old, sire children, wage war, perish, and become forgotten. Divinity doesn't bestow immortality or omnipotence, but it does condemn gods to eternity. For even if they die, they remain.

Beyond the veil of reality—beyond every plane and dimension—lies the infinite nothingness of the Void, into which the final remnants of gods are discarded like so much chaff. Even in the Void, dead gods remain in sensationless agony, powerless yet alive for all eternity. Nameless horrors from the dawn of time, cast off shells of once-supreme deities, titanic monsters of legend, and all manner of forgotten demigods wallow in the Void, conspiring for the moment they might slip their bonds and intrude on the divine plane again.

SLASHER

Undead.

A remorseless killer on a protracted rampage, the slasher's rough-hewn hood conceals the terrible face of undeath beneath.

Hooks.

The slasher's hideous visage can be introduced in a number of ways. Use these hooks to introduce players to this monster.

Urban Legend. Teenagers are fond of telling the story of the slasher by firelight, wooing and making scary noises as accompaniment. The details of the urban legend always differ, shifting to match the times as it has passed through the decades, but the curious nursery rhyme which accompanies it hasn't. All one has to do is go into a pitch-black room with a candle and recite the following lines before extinguishing the flame and waiting in silence for five minutes:

Dark of night, dark of night,
what do you see?
Not a thing, not a thing,
nothing's here with me!

Candle light, candle light,
fire in the mirror!
Don't be scared, don't be scared,
nothing left to fear!

Douse the flame, douse the flame,
think about your friends!
In the dark, in the dark,
coming to their ends!

Can you hear, can you hear,
heartbeats in your head?
Listen close, listen close,
here comes Mister Red!



Historical Record. Amateur local historians are soon celebrating an unorthodox anniversary: every twenty-three years, like clockwork, there's a killing spree. Sometimes, the killings are condensed into a single tragic night, other times they take place over a span of days or weeks, but they always claim dozens of victims (usually children and young adults). Someone is almost always sentenced under the barest of evidence, and memorials are usually erected in memory of the victims. It might be a coincidence or a case of cherry-picked news reports, but the sheer consistency makes it a tantalizing subject for speculation.

Murder! Someone close to you has been butchered in their home. Within hours, the authorities are grilling you about when you last saw them and showing you grisly depictions of the crime scene: you didn't even know a person could be carved up into so many unrecognizable parts.

Another 24 hours later, someone else is killed in the same manner. Despite the authorities' best efforts to keep people calm, folks around town grow frantic as they conclude that someone or something is hunting them for sport. For you, however, it's personal—and you have revenge on the mind.

Mystery.

Once the slasher awakens, it butchers one person each night, or a pair if it happens upon a lone couple. Before striking, the slasher lingers in the shadowy periphery, stalking its prey until nightfall. This provides a rare chance to glimpse the slasher at a distance: its profile is disturbingly human, wearing a long trench coat, workman's gloves, and a rough-hewn burlap mask with one eyehole. The oversized knife slung over its back is the tool of choice, brandished only when the killing begins.

Each crime scene it leaves behind is a bloodbath, recounting a desperate chase, a chaotic struggle, a decisive strike, and a deliberate hacking to bits, starting with the head. Nobody escapes. The slasher always pilfers a trophy from the corpse, usually its head or some other defining feature, which it mounts on its belt for all future murders. The trail of blood leading away from the killing points somewhere distant, a location which can be derived with a map and a few data points.

The slasher methodically executes its killings to be as unique as they are gruesome, using whatever tools that prove to be most lethal. It isn't possessed of high thoughts or grand ambitions: it kills because it is compelled to, and because it enjoys its victims' suffering.

While lacking heads makes it harder to identify the bodies, a pattern of victims gradually emerges. They are a circle of friends, classmates, or coworkers familiar with the slasher's urban legend, and they invariably realize they are being hunted before the authorities do. They stoke their own fears and suspicions, playing a game of whodunit with the web of acquaintances they have left, trying to place someone they know beneath the slasher's mask. Soon, fight or flight sets in: the remaining survivors rush to fortified or remote places, clutching any weapons they can find. This rarely impedes the slasher for long.

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the slasher:

Undead Killer. Encountering the slasher quickly reveals that, despite its lumbering, it possesses inhuman strength and durability. Nothing truly injures the slasher, though a few things might slow it down. Its pallid flesh and revolting stench provide additional clues that the slasher is not a masked killer exacting revenge, but is actually an undead creature.

Summoned. Not everyone involved in the string of killings is strictly innocent. Someone known to the victims chanted the slasher's rhyme with serious intent (whether or not they believed it would work), and beckoned the undead monster into existence. It was this individual's thoughts which guided the slasher to its targets. Should all these targets be butchered, the slasher will depart and resume its slumber for another twenty-three years.

Murderous Ritual. Research suggests that the slasher has performed its killings for hundreds of years, stemming from an ancient curse invoked as revenge for some wrongdoing forgotten to history. No magic can break this curse, for there are no remaining practitioners of this variety of necromancy.

However, there is one other way to end the killer's spree early: if the slasher can be tricked into killing its summoner, its connection to the mortal realm will be broken forever. Knowing this, the slasher will never willingly attack its summoner, nor even interact with them after appearing out of the blackness to begin its murder spree.

Weakness: Holy Water, Iron Spike. With enough research, or by interrogating the oldest people who remember the rhyme, the characters can discover that the slasher's rhyme has two additional lines:



Now he's done, now he's done,
All your friends are dead!
Holy water, iron spike,
goes right through the head!

These reveal the slasher's weakness, by which it can be "slain," ending its killing spree early (though the slasher will still awaken when called in another twenty-three years.) Holy water is only mitigation for the slasher's invulnerability, and an iron spike through the heart or head is the only way to kill the slasher for good.

Lair: Killer's Basement.

The slasher always sets up shop in someplace below ground, usually an abandoned basement filled with rusted tools and broken antiques. There, it shackles kidnapped victims whom it is not yet ready to kill, displays its trophies, and sharpens its knives. The slasher resides in its basement in daytime, pensively waiting until nightfall. Once the sun goes down, it is possible to infiltrate the basement, but doing so is perilous, as the slasher could return at any moment.

While fighting in its lair, the slasher can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the slasher can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Magical darkness spreads from a point the slasher chooses within 60 feet of it, filling a 15-foot-radius sphere until the slasher dismisses it as an action, uses this lair action again, or dies. The darkness spreads around corners. A creature with darkvision can't see through this darkness, and nonmagical light can't illuminate it. If any of the effect's area overlaps with an area of light created by a spell of 2nd level or lower, the spell that created the light is dispelled.
- Rusted implements and broken glass fly around of their own accord, forming a 5-foot radius whirling cloud at a point the slasher chooses within 60 feet of it. The cloud spreads around corners and remains until the slasher dismisses it as an action, uses this lair action again, or dies. The cloud is lightly obscured. Any creature in the cloud when it appears must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) slashing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature that ends its turn in the cloud takes 10 (3d6) slashing damage.
- Chains animate like snakes and coil around the ankles of anyone in the room. Any creature on the ground within the lair must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be restrained. A restrained creature can use its action on its turn to reattempt the saving throw, ending it on itself on a success.

THE SLASHER

STR 20 (+5)	DEX 10 (+0)	CON 18 (+4)	INT 14 (+2)	WIS 16 (+3)	CHA 12 (+1)
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Brutal Killer. The slasher scores critical hits on a roll of 19 or 20.

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the slasher fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Regeneration. The slasher regains 25 hit points at the start of its turn.

Weakness. If the slasher takes damage from holy water or is impaled with an iron spike, its Regeneration and Damage Immunities don't function for 24 hours.

Weakness. If the slasher kills its summoner, it dies and its Regeneration trait doesn't function.

ACTIONS

Butcher's Knife. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft. or range 20/60, one target. *Hit:* slashing damage.

DREAD ACTIONS

The slasher takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Stab. The slasher makes one Butcher's Knife attack.

Move. The slasher moves up to its movement speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Medium Undead, Chaotic Evil

Speed
30 ft.

Saving Throws
Str +8, Con +7, Wis +5, Cha +4

Skills
Athletics +11, Intimidation +11, Perception +6, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances
fire, radiant, necrotic, psychic

Damage Immunities
bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities
charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned

Senses
darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages
Common

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP 110	AC 14	DC 16
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Atk +8 to hit	Dmg 7 (1d4 + 5)
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TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)
Multiattack. Two melee attacks

HP 153	AC 17	DC 17
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Atk +9 to hit	Dmg 16 (2d10 + 5)
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NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)
Multiattack. Three melee attacks

HP 204	AC 20	DC 19
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Atk +11 to hit	Dmg 18 (3d8 + 5)
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VAMPIRE

Undead.

A blood-drinking undead abomination hailing from antiquity, the vampire's curse hangs over the populace as it stalks the night and drinks its fill.

Hooks.

The vampire's haunting presence can reveal itself in a number of subtle ways. Use these hooks to introduce players to this monster.

Low Moon. The full moon looms low and large in the sky, seeming to grow wider each night. At first, it might be an optical illusion, the bright lunar phase causing the moon to appear more prominently than it might otherwise, but soon it is unmistakable: the moon is colossal, hanging so close that you can see each and every crater on its pockmarked face. It's even visible throughout the day, casting a shadow that delays the morning and lengthens the night.

Hemophilia. A minor health crisis has tightened its grip on the area: dozens of people have reported bleeding for hours from minor wounds, a textbook symptom of hemophilia. This minor medical annoyance becomes life-threatening whenever someone sustains a serious bodily injury and starts bleeding uncontrollably. What makes this crisis utterly bizarre is that hemophilia is genetic, not contagious, and that the issue seems to be affecting more and more people each day.

Living Shadows. You spot movement in the corner of your vision, but turn around and there's nothing there. Movement again; nothing again. When you think you're at last losing your mind, you see it: shadows moving of their own accord—shifting around when they think nobody's watching. You try to close your mind to it, but the very idea makes your skin crawl. The shadows are alive, and it seems they want something from you.

Mystery.

The vampire's arrival is signified by ominous signs and omens: a low, orange moon, the sense that the shadows are suddenly alive, and a sudden abundance of nocturnal creatures—bats, most of all. Shortly after, the killings begin: usually one person a night, desiccated into a blackened husk, like a mummy. Should anyone chance upon the vampire as it feeds, they are cut down with prejudice, usually hacked to pieces.

Apart from the bodies left behind after its meals, the vampire leaves few clues in its wake. Bloody footprints vanish after a few steps, and nothing can capture the monster's image. The scant few witnesses and survivors, however, report an uncanny spectacle: a silent figure in medieval armor bearing a greatsword, floating near the horizon at dusk.

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the vampire:

Noble of Antiquity. Research indicates that this vampire is the last of its order, perhaps the last of its kind. It traces a once-proud heritage to historical kingdoms, when it once reigned as a lord with legions of peasants under its command. Despite how far it has fallen in the centuries hence, it still considers itself a personage of noble blood. All others, save royalty, are merely cattle upon which to feast. Therefore, it spares anyone of royal blood.

The vampire sleeps and eats sporadically, slumbering for decades, then feasting voraciously for weeks.

Sanguine Magic. When the vampire awakens, it commands an eerie blood magic to cover its tracks and loosen the blood of its victims. This magic predates other arcane disciplines, perhaps tracing its origin to prehistory.

Moreover, the vampire's immortality doesn't equate to eternal youth. The passing centuries have withered it into a terrible husk, such that it can no longer create more of its kind.

Vampiric Beast. Though the vampire appears humanoid in most respects, the facade crumbles if it is starved of blood for too long, revealing its true form: that of a monstrous bat creature. Once transformed, it will engage in a killing spree ended only by its death or the consumption of an ocean of blood.

Weakness: Silver. Through research, experimentation, and observation, the characters can learn that the vampire isn't susceptible to classic vampiric weaknesses. It outright ignores garlic, crucifixes, and running water, and, while it is nocturnal, sunlight doesn't harm it. A stake (or any other object) through the heart is painful and inconvenient, but not outright lethal.



Silver, however, proves fruitful, as it is possible to poison the vampire with silver-laden blood. Such poisoning is similar to heavy metal poisoning in humans, but curiously only works with dissolved silver, causing the vampire's organs to falter, interrupting its regeneration.

Perhaps this is why the vampire's image doesn't appear in mirrors, as ancient mirrors were often composed of polished silver.

Lair: The Dark Spire.

Guided by predatory instinct, the vampire makes its lair as high as possible: the peak of an abandoned tower or spire will usually suffice. From such a vantage point, it can select its nightly meal (or meals, should its appetite compel it), and it can look down upon the mortals it sees as loathsome peasants.

While fighting in its lair, the vampire can take lair actions even if it is transformed into its bat form. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the vampire can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- The vampire targets up to three creatures it can see within 60 feet of it. Each creature must succeed a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or its shadow detaches from it and becomes a **LIVING SHADOW** minion under the vampire's control.
- A cloud of bats fills a 10-foot radius sphere centered on a point that the vampire can see. This area is difficult terrain and heavily obscured. Any ranged attack that passes through the area has disadvantage. The bats disperse on initiative count 20.
- The vampire targets a creature it can see within 60 feet of it that doesn't have all of its hit points. The creature must succeed a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be restrained by threads of blood from its wounds until initiative count 20.

Minion: Living Shadow.

When the vampire perceives a threat to its midnight hunts, it directs living shadows to strike at its foes. These foul shades are the remnants of those consumed—body and soul—by the vampire in ages past. As commanded, they seek out and strangle those who might discover the vampire's weakness, and defend the vampire's lair while it hunts.

Minion.

A living shadow is a minion, which is a monster with the following special rules:

Hits. Instead of hit points, a minion has a number of hits (usually 1). It dies if it takes the specified number of hits. A minion takes a hit if it is hit by an attack or fails a saving throw against a spell or effect that deals damage.

Saving Throws. If a spell deals damage on a successful save, it deals 1 hit to a minion on a success and 2 hits on a failure. If a spell calls for more than one minion to make a saving throw, all minions roll one save and use the result.

Initiative. Roll initiative once for all minions, which act on the same turn of initiative.

Massive Damage. Critical hits deal 2 hits to a minion. The GM can decide that other attacks that deal high damage, such as a rogue's Sneak Attack, also deal 2 hits.

Shadow. A 1st–4th level party encounters 4 (1d4 + 2) living shadows.

Terror. A 5th–10th level party encounters 6 (1d4 + 4) living shadows.

Nightmare. A 11th–16th level party encounters 7 (1d4 + 5) living shadows.



Living Shadow

Medium Undead,
Typically Lawful Evil

STR

6 (-2)

DEX

14 (+2)

CON

13 (+1)

INT

6 (-2)

WIS

10 (+0)

CHA

15 (+2)

Speed

40 ft.

Senses

darkvision 60 ft.,
passive Perception 10

Languages

understands Common
but can't speak

Amorphous. The shadow can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the shadow has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

ACTIONS

Necrotic Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* necrotic damage.

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Hits

1

AC

12

DC

12

Atk

+4 to hit

Dmg

4

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Hits

2

AC

13

DC

13

Atk

+5 to hit

Dmg

6

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Hits

3

AC

15

DC

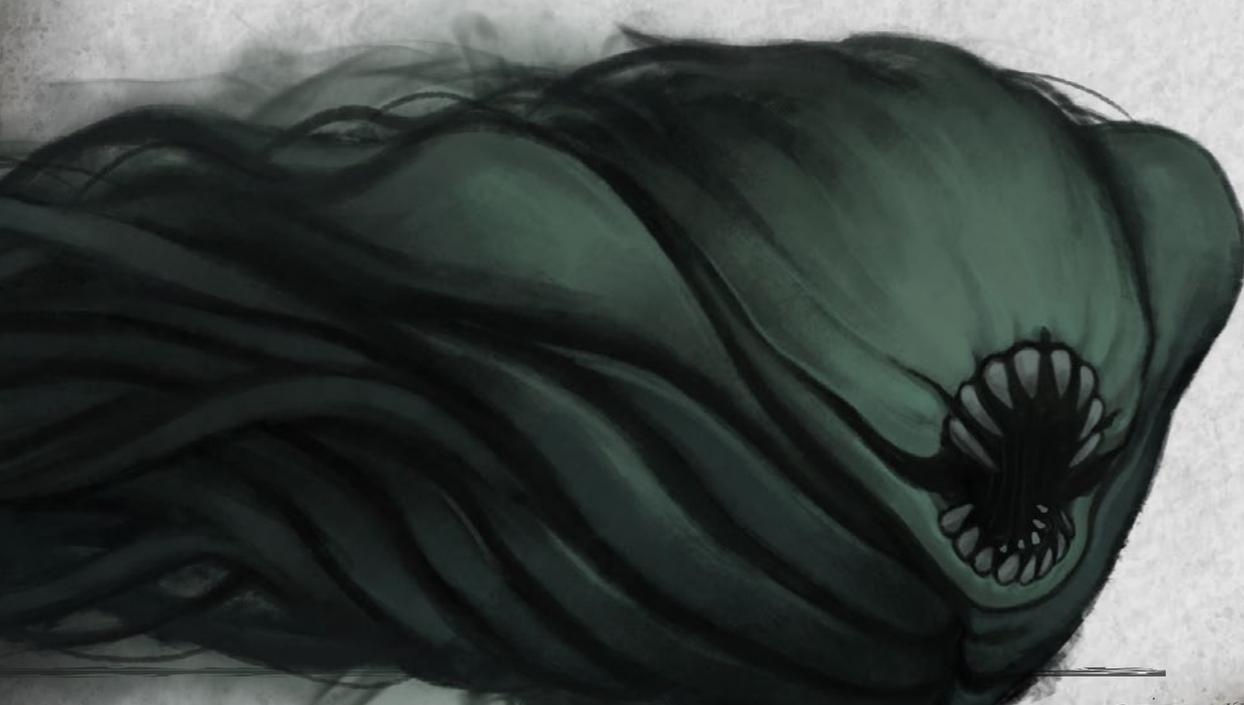
15

Atk

+7 to hit

Dmg

8



THE VAMPIRE

Medium Undead, Neutral Evil

Speed

30 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

Skills

History +5, Perception +6,
Stealth +7

Damage Resistances

necrotic

Condition Immunities

charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses

darkvision 120 ft.,
passive Perception 16

Languages

Any one ancient language

STR

15 (+2)

DEX

18 (+4)

CON

16 (+3)

INT

14 (+2)

WIS

17 (+3)

CHA

9 (-1)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the vampire fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Transformation. When the vampire drops to 0 hit points, it transforms and uses the statistics of **The Bat**. The bat has half its hit point maximum until it finishes a long rest.

ACTIONS

Ancestral Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* slashing damage, and the target suffers a bleeding wound. A creature loses 1d6 hit points at the start of each of its turns for each of its bleeding wounds, unless it uses an action to staunch the bleeding of all of its wounds. While a target is bleeding, it can't regain hit points.

DREAD ACTIONS

The vampire takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Blade. The vampire makes an Ancestral Blade attack.

Bleed. The vampire causes a creature with a bleeding wound to immediately lose 1d8 hit points.

Move. The vampire moves up to its movement speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP

37

AC

18

DC

12

Atk

+5 to hit

Dmg

6 (1d8 + 2)

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

Multiattack. Two melee attacks

HP

127

AC

18

DC

13

Atk

+6 to hit

Dmg

9 (2d6 + 2)

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties

Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

Multiattack. Three melee attacks

HP

180

AC

18

DC

15

Atk

+8 to hit

Dmg

13 (2d10 + 2)

THE BAT

Large Undead, Chaotic Evil

STR 19 (+4)	DEX 14 (+2)	CON 18 (+3)	INT 9 (-1)	WIS 17 (+3)	CHA 7 (-2)
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Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the bat fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Weakness: Silver. If the bat takes damage from a silvered weapon or ingests silver, it can't regain hit points and its damage immunities don't function for 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* slashing damage, and the bat regains hit points equal to the damage dealt.

Screech (Recharge 5-6). The bat emits an earsplitting screech in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes thunder damage equal to the amount dealt by a Bite attack, or half as much damage on a successful save.

DREAD ACTIONS

The bat takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Bite. The bat makes a Bite attack.

Move. The bat moves up to its movement speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Recharge. The bat rolls a d6, and regains the use of its Screech on a roll of 5 or 6.

Speed

40 ft., fly 40 ft.

Saving Throws

Str +7, Con +7, Wis +6

Damage Resistances

necrotic

Damage Immunities

bludgeoning, piercing, slashing from weapons that aren't silvered

Condition Immunities

charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses

darkvision 120 ft.,
passive Perception 13

Languages

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SHADOW

1st-4th Level Parties
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP 110	AC 14	DC 15
Atk +7 to hit	Dmg 6 (1d4 + 4)	

TERROR

5th-10th Level Parties
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

HP 178	AC 15	DC 16
Atk +8 to hit	Dmg 17 (2d12 + 4)	

NIGHTMARE

11th-16th Level Parties
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

HP 256	AC 16	DC 15
Atk +10 to hit	Dmg 23 (3d12 + 4)	

The geist is a conduit to the afterlife, a channel through which restless spirits can return to the world. As it grows in power, the barrier between life and death withers, threatening to tear the mortal world asunder.

Hooks.

The geist's presence can be felt long before any of its effects are seen: a chill down the spine, a sense of unease, or a glimpse of a terrible negative plane. Use the following hooks to introduce the geist:

Lost Souls. Yesterday, a dozen people saw a transparent specter howling down a busy street in broad daylight. Last night, two more apparitions materialized in a corner shop at closing time. Ghost stories are usually intangible things, the product of grieving widows or tourist traps, but these are sudden, chaotic events with abundant witnesses and consistent descriptions. Moreover, the spirits seem panicked as they dart about the air. Are they fleeing from something? The authorities seem to think this is either a prank or some type of mass hysteria; something best ignored, in any case.

The Negative. Whenever a light floods a pitch black room with illumination, the world seen for an instant is not our own, but a twisted, decaying reflection of it—a negative plane. In this forsaken world, weeds choke out all other life, buildings decay and fester with the apparent passage of ages, and desolate piles of bones lay where people stand. Then, after that terrible flash of another place, it is gone. Most worryingly, once someone has noticed this negative image hidden in the first flash of light, they always see it hidden there, and grow to fear the first light of morning.

The Sleepwalkers. Someone awakens in a field far from their home, soaked in sweat with no recollection of the last several hours. Others, however, remember that person's behavior that night perfectly well: they spoke in a gruff cadence and failed to answer to their own name. In an erratic fit, they retrieved a length of cord, tried to strangle someone to death, and fled into the night.

The following evening, someone else slips into an identical fugue state: bizarre behavior, attempted murder, and escaping into the darkness. This isn't a case of sleepwalking, but perhaps something more sinister.

Mystery.

Investigation into the geist begins with shrieking spirits in broad daylight, an omen foretelling a rising ethereal threat. These specters resemble the recently deceased and make spectacular appearances near wherever they lived or died. After one or two sightings in a particular location, the sightings cease. With more spectral appearances, the geist becomes steadily more visible at the sites of hauntings, a lingering spectral reaper in the background. It never becomes tangible, however.

The geist also appears at the deathbeds of those soon to die and the sites of near-fatal accidents. With a decisive sweep of its scythe, the geist hurries the dying along to the underworld, even if they might have been saved.

Simultaneously, a string of possessions take place by night, as an entity wrests one individual at a time from their body and roves about town. Whatever possesses these so-called sleepwalkers has little self-preservation for its hosts and refuses to identify itself by name, but seems obsessed with killing someone before the night is out. However erratic it might seem, it clearly has a grander scheme in mind. Harming or even killing the sleepwalker fails to abate it, as it returns with a new host the following night.

The sleepwalker and the geist are never seen together, but seem to narrowly avoid one another. Shortly after someone dies, the geist appears to reap the spirit of the deceased, but the sleepwalker is always long gone.

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the geist:

Evil Returned. Though there are no connections between the sleepwalkers, their methods bear a striking resemblance to a serial killer that lived nearly a hundred years ago. The manner in which the killer selected his victims, stalked and strangled them, and stole a trophy—usually a ring finger—from the corpse, was as spine-chilling as it was unique. The odd vernacular and gruff tenor they share reinforces the connection: the strangler is back, a fugitive from the afterlife.



Warden of the Underworld. The geist is a grim manifestation of death, an implacable entity charged with transitioning souls into the afterlife and ensuring they remain. However, it has failed in its duty: a soul has escaped the afterlife and slipped into the bodies of slumbering people. Usually, the geist could pinpoint an escaped soul quickly, but the sleepwalker performs daring murders each night, releasing additional souls to distract the geist.

Mortal Impatience. The sleepwalker's scheme to escape death can only last so long. The geist is bound by inscrutable laws, and begins to siphon the souls of the living, beginning with the oldest and most infirmed, in an attempt to find its quarry. Those whose souls are wrenched away by the geist's scythe fall into a wakeless coma and eventually perish. Each soul captured empowers the geist and hastens its hunt. Before long, it will harvest every soul in the area, and capture its target in turn.

Weaknesses: Tribute or Refuge. Whenever the geist seeks its quarry, it remains utterly intangible, little more than a faded image superimposed on the mortal world. This intangibility does little to dull the geist's soul-stealing scythe, but its appearances remain brief, implying that the geist can only hunt in brief jaunts before recuperating elsewhere.

The characters can placate the geist by capturing the sleepwalker and offering it as tribute—either by luring the geist via a death, or by venturing to its lair. Doing so is a timed affair, as the sleepwalker escapes back into the ether upon the sunrise, and also entails the death of the sleepwalker's host as well. However, once placated, the geist returns to the afterlife peacefully.

Alternatively, extensive research might discern that the geist is an otherworldly being, and must therefore replenish its energies between hunts in its lair. While recuperating, the geist should be at least semi-tangible and vulnerable to attack.

Even if the geist is slain in its lair, the sleepwalker remains. Though it no longer must jump between bodies or kill nightly, the sleepwalker is still a serial killer on the loose who must be captured and magically banished for good.

Lair: Forsaken Cemetery.

When the geist isn't scouring the mortal world for its quarry, it dwells in a place saturated by death: a forgotten cemetery of anonymous headstones and weathered mausoleums, crumbling under the implacable march of time. The geist lurks invisibly among the unremembered dead, where the walls between the mortal realm and the afterlife are thinnest, rejuvenating it between successive hunts. The geist treats mortal intrusion into this place as a trespass, and marks such interlopers for death.

While fighting in its lair, the geist can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the geist can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- An ear-piercing screech echoes from the geist in a 30-foot-radius sphere, centered on itself. Each creature within the area that is dying automatically fails 1 death saving throw. Every other creature in the area other than the geist must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be unable to regain hit points until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- Thick mists cloak the cemetery in a 60-foot-radius sphere, centered on a point on the ground the geist can see within 120 feet of it. This area is heavily obscured until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- A creature that the geist can see within 60 feet of it experiences a vivid glimpse of the moment of its death. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be incapacitated until the end of its next turn.



THE SLEEPWALKER

Medium Humanoid,
Chaotic Evil

STR 16 (+3)	DEX 16 (+3)	CON 10 (+0)	INT 10 (+0)	WIS 10 (+0)	CHA 10 (+0)
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Speed
30 ft.

Skills
Athletics +5, Perception +2,
Stealth +7

Senses
passive Perception 12

Languages
an archaic dialect of Common

Ambusher. The sleepwalker has advantage on initiative rolls.

ACTIONS

Garrote. *Melee Spell Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* slashing damage and the target is grappled and restrained and begins suffocating (escape DC listed below). The sleepwalker can have only one creature grappled at a time.

A suffocating creature can survive for a number of rounds equal to its Constitution modifier (minimum of 1 round). At the start of its next turn, it drops to 0 hit points and is dying, and it can't regain hit points or be stabilized until it can breathe again.

If the sleepwalker hits a creature it is grappling with another Garrote attack, the number of rounds that the creature can survive while suffocating decreases by 1.

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

HP 36	AC 13	DC 15
Atk +5 to hit	Dmg 5 (1d4 + 3)	

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)
Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP 99	AC 13	DC 17
Atk +6 to hit	Dmg 8 (2d4 + 3)	

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)
Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

HP 180	AC 13	DC 19
Atk +7 to hit	Dmg 13 (4d4 + 3)	

CAPTURING THE SLEEPWALKER

Once the party understands the relationship between the lurking geist and rampaging sleepwalker, they might attempt to capture the sleepwalker to arrive at a swift and (mostly) bloodless conclusion. Doing so is no mean feat, however. The sleepwalker's possessions are entirely random, and it won't hesitate to end its host's life to evade capture.

Capturing the sleepwalker is a microcosm of an investigation and monster hunt within a larger adventure. As such, the characters should investigate the sleepwalker, learning how to lure it into a trap, safely immobilize it, and potentially to draw the possessing entity out of the host. Doing so provides a way to dispatch the geist without confronting it directly.

THE GEIST

STR

7 (-2)

DEX

18 (+4)

CON

12 (+1)

INT

10 (+0)

WIS

14 (+2)

CHA

16 (+3)

Detect Life. The geist can magically sense the presence of the sleepwalker up to 5 miles away. It knows the general direction of the sleepwalker but not its exact location.

Incorporeal Movement. The geist can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Turn Immunity. The geist is immune to features that turn undead.

Weakness. If the geist is encountered in its lair, it loses its damage immunities.

ACTIONS

Grim Scythe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: necrotic damage. If the geist scores a critical hit, the target must succeed on a Charisma saving throw (DC listed below) or be reduced to 0 hit points.

DREAD ACTIONS

The geist takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Fade. The geist vanishes and teleports to an unoccupied space it can see within 30 feet of it.

Reap. The geist makes a Grim Scythe attack.

Terror. One creature the geist can see within 60 feet must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Medium Undead, Lawful Evil

Speed

0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

Skills

*Intimidation +6,
Perception +5, Stealth +7*

Damage Immunities

all

Condition Immunities

*charmed, exhaustion, frightened,
grappled, paralyzed, petrified,
poisoned, prone, restrained*

Senses

*truesight 120 ft.,
passive Perception 15*

Languages

*the languages it knew in life
but can't speak*

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP

110

AC

14

DC

14

Atk

+7 to hit

Dmg

7 (1d6 + 4)

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

Multiattack. Two melee attacks

HP

176

AC

15

DC

15

Atk

+8 to hit

Dmg

11 (2d6 + 4)

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

Multiattack. Three melee attacks

HP

225

AC

17

DC

17

Atk

+10 to hit

Dmg

13 (2d8 + 4)

GRAVELORD

Undead.

The gravelord is an enormous amalgamation of death: corpses, grave dirt, and headstones given shape by untold necromancy. Moreover, it is incomplete, seeking to harvest more bodies to add to its titanic mass.

Hooks.

The gravelord's terrible presence can be first detected in a few ways. Use these hooks to introduce players to this monster.

Graverobbers! Graveyards have been upturned in the dead of night. Entire graveyards—gravestones, caskets, mausoleums—to say nothing of hundreds of corpses, have been stolen. Noone has seen the perpetrators come or go, but the authorities figure that at least a dozen people with pickaxes, shovels, and vehicles must be responsible. But who would desecrate so many graves, steal away so many bodies? And who has the manpower to do all this without being seen?

Royal Pox. People have been coming down with a terrible sickness: a wet cough, stiffness in the joints, and sores that ooze an awful-smelling, dark purple ichor. Doctors are utterly perplexed as sufferers begin to spiral toward a gruesome death. Fearful people have nicknamed the yet-unnamed illness “royal pox” for the purple stains it leaves on garments, but nothing is known on how to fix it.

The discerning will also notice a purple haze appearing at twilight, a miasma which grows thicker and more pungent as the weeks progress. Surely, there must be more to this ominous miasma.

The Dead Walk. Something is affecting the recently deceased, causing them to rise. A few hours after death, a rhythmic pulse takes hold in the brainstem, bringing with it waves of full-body convulsions. Even as the body putrifies, the waves increase in intensity, leading to thrashing limbs and wide open eyes. Within the hour, the body rises of its own accord, its erratic movements guided by a steady nerve pulse.

Everyone, no matter the cause of death, animates in the same manner, becoming a danger to the living. Thankfully, random deaths being rare, only a few corpses have risen, but if the problem is not contained, it could snowball into a plague of the undead outnumbering the living.

Mystery.

Sinkholes open up in the ground, swallowing people, vehicles, and even entire structures. At first, these might seem random or even harmless, as some time passes before they result in a fatality, but a clear pattern soon emerges: graveyards, mortuaries, and funeral homes are the principal targets. They're being utterly destroyed and raided of their bodies in the dead of night, and the monster responsible probably emerges from these holes.

The characters will likely first encounter the gravelord while snooping around cemeteries, or after setting up a grisly trap involving a few cadavers. They are met by a titanic humanlike arm composed of headstones, grave dirt, and rotting corpses, which rises out of the earth; the stench alone is enough to turn one's stomach. This terrible limb subsumes entire graves and mausoleums before plunging back into the ground. It will take a well-prepared ambush to confront, lest the characters be crushed and added to its mass.

It becomes apparent that the characters are in a race against time. The gravelord's targets are predictable while un-pillaged graveyards still remain, but when the supply of the corpses runs out, the royal pox and the gravelord itself will start preying upon the living.

ROYAL POX

At the onset of this adventure, choose a character or determine one at random to gain the incurable royal pox. An afflicted character must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw for every 24 hours that elapse. On a failure, their hit point maximum is reduced by 5 and they gain the poisoned condition for 24 hours. The poisoned condition can be ended, but the disease can't be cured until the gravelord is killed. If this disease reduces a character's hit point maximum to 0, they die.



Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the gravelord:

Rotting Stench. The gravelord is drawn to the stench of death. When it turns to slaying the living, it first targets those of a similar odor: the elderly, the chronically ill, and those suffering from the royal pox.

Manifested Putrefaction. The gravelord is an ancient embodiment of putrefaction, a monument to death. At first, its aims are at first simple: collect more corpses to complete its body. Its natural miasma performs some of the work, while it sets about absorbing entire graveyards into its mass.

With more corpses comes greater intellect: it soon realizes that the dead won't be enough to sate its hunger. Its schemes grow in complexity, and soon it terrorizes the town with its nearly-complete arm and a burgeoning army of zombies.

Incomplete Lord. The arm encountered by the characters is but a fragment of the true gravelord, a terrible embodiment of death that is constructing itself with pilfered corpses. Each time they encounter the gravelord's arm, it grows in size with more corpses and graves, before retreating back into the earth. Even if they somehow defeat the arm, the royal pox and animated dead don't cease; the true gravelord has not yet been defeated.

The true gravelord rests in a subterranean cavern called the Necropolis. Venturing to the Necropolis is the only means by which the characters can hope to stop the miasma and contain the gravelord.

Weakness: Resurrection Magic. With research or some clever guesses, characters might realize that, as the gravelord is constituted of death, magic which returns the dead to life is antithetical to it. Those who entombed the gravelord in the Necropolis were keenly aware of this, and inscribed arcane diagrams of spells like *revivify* and *raise dead* on colossal stone slabs around the perimeter. These carvings might have contained the gravelord here at one point, but a single slab is cracked, its inscription broken.

Lair: The Necropolis.

If the characters follow an escaping zombie, or acquire digging equipment to follow the gravelord's arm into the earth, they will find an opening to a cave complex that plunges down to the gravelord's Necropolis.

It strains the mind to consider that such a cavern could exist: more than a mile long, with a ceiling of stalactites over a hundred yards high, this space is a deathly silent and utterly black expanse.

NECROPOLIS SLABS

The Necropolis is littered with colossal stone slabs inscribed with diagrams for resurrection spells, intended to contain the Gravelord. A spellcaster in the Necropolis can cast *revivify* using a 3rd level spell slot, even if the spell isn't on their class's spell list, by succeeding on a DC 15 spellcasting ability check. On a failed check, the spell fizzles and the spell slot is wasted.

Reaching it is a trek through narrow passageways and sheer vertical shafts, a challenging climb marked by primitive handholds and ancient graffiti.

The cavern itself was once filled with graves and monuments of a forgotten civilization—this place, so deep in the earth, is an ideal place to bury the dead. But now, it contains only ruins. The rest has been subsumed into the gravelord's titanic mass. The gravelord, incomplete as it is, looms over this enormous subterranean expanse.

While fighting in its lair, the gravelord can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the gravelord can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Stalactites fall to a point on the ground that the gravelord can see within 120 feet of it. Each creature within 10 feet of that point must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 4d6 bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.
- A piercing howl echoes through the necropolis. Any creature that is dying automatically fails 2 death saving throws.
- Fissures spew volcanic gasses in a 60-foot radius around the gravelord. Each creature other than the gravelord in that area must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be unable to breathe while in the area.



Minion: Undead.

Foul mockeries of life, undead corpses shamble at the gravelord's behest to consume the flesh of the living and acquire yet more corpses for their lord. Even once dispatched, an undead minion still represents valuable mass for the gravelord's body, so more waves of undead arrive until all the corpses can be collected. Burning a corpse, by contrast, deprives the gravelord of a body, ending the undead siege.

Minion.

An undead is a minion, which is a monster with the following special rules:

Hits. Instead of hit points, a minion has a number of hits (usually 1). It dies if it takes the specified number of hits. A minion takes a hit if it is hit by an attack or fails a saving throw against a spell or effect that deals damage.

Saving Throws. If a spell deals damage on a successful save, it deals 1 hit to a minion on a success and 2 hits on a failure. If a spell calls for more than one minion to make a saving throw, all minions roll one save and use the result.

Initiative. Roll initiative once for all minions, which act on the same turn of initiative.

Massive Damage. Critical hits deal 2 hits to a minion. The GM can decide that other attacks that deal high damage, such as a rogue's Sneak Attack, also deal 2 hits.

Shadow. A 1st–4th level party encounters 4 (1d4 + 2) undead.

Terror. A 5th–10th level party encounters 10 (1d4 + 8) undead.

Nightmare. A 11th–16th level party encounters 12 (1d6 + 9) undead.

UNDEAD

Medium Undead, Neutral Evil

Speed
20 ft.

Damage Immunities
poison

Condition Immunities
poisoned

Senses
darkvision 60 ft.,
passive Perception 8

Languages
understands Common
but can't speak

STR

13 (+2)

DEX

6 (-2)

CON

16 (+3)

INT

3 (-4)

WIS

6 (-2)

CHA

5 (-3)

Unliving. When the undead is killed, roll a d20. On a 5 or lower, the undead survives. Part of its body, such as its arm, leg, or head, is harmlessly removed instead.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* piercing damage.

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Hits

1

AC

8

DC

12

Atk

+3 to hit

Dmg

4

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Hits

1

AC

8

DC

13

Atk

+4 to hit

Dmg

7

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Hits

1

AC

8

DC

15

Atk

+6 to hit

Dmg

8

THE ARM

Large Undead, Neutral Evil

STR 18 (+4)	DEX 6 (-2)	CON 19 (+4)	INT 5 (-3)	WIS 11 (+0)	CHA 4 (-3)
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Speed
25 ft.

Condition Immunities
blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses
blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages
—

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of the arm must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the arm's Stench for 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Grab. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC listed below). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained, and the arm can't grab another target.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

DREAD ACTIONS

The arm takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Grab. The arm makes a Grab attack.

Throw. The arm throws a creature it is grappling, ending the grapple. The arm makes a Rock attack with disadvantage, dealing damage as normal on a hit. *Hit or Miss:* The thrown creature takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage per 10 feet it travels through the air (maximum 9d6).

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

HP 123	AC 12	DC 14
Atk +6 to hit	Dmg 8 (1d8 + 4)	

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)
Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP 180	AC 14	DC 16
Atk +8 to hit	Dmg 15 (2d10 + 4)	

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)
Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

HP 228	AC 16	DC 17
Atk +9 to hit	Dmg 23 (3d12 + 4)	

THE GRAVELORD

Gargantuan Undead, Neutral Evil

Speed
35 ft.

Saving Throws
Str +8, Con +8, Int +4, Wis +4

Damage Resistances
all

Condition Immunities
blind, charmed, deafened,
exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses
blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this
radius), passive Perception 11

Languages
—

STR

20 (+5)

DEX

5 (-3)

CON

21 (+5)

INT

13 (+1)

WIS

12 (+1)

CHA

4 (-3)

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of the gravelord must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the gravelord's Stench for 24 hours.

Weakness: Resurrection. When the gravelord is targeted by the spell *gentle repose*, *reincarnation*, *resurrection*, *revivify*, or *true resurrection*, it loses 10 hit points for each level of the spell slot expended, and it loses its damage resistances for 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: bludgeoning damage and the target is knocked prone.

Grave Fist (Recharge 5-6). The gravelord hammers its fist upon a 20-foot cube, making a separate Slam attack against each creature in that area.

DREAD ACTIONS

The gravelord takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Miasma. One creature the gravelord chooses within 120 feet of it must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes poison damage equal to half of the amount dealt by a Slam attack and is poisoned until the end of its next turn.

Recharge. The gravelord rolls a d6, and regains the use of Grave Fist on a roll of 5 or 6.

SHADOW

1st-4th Level Parties

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP

124

AC

12

DC

16

Atk

+8 to hit

Dmg

11 (1d12 + 5)

TERROR

5th-10th Level Parties

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

HP

170

AC

14

DC

17

Atk

+9 to hit

Dmg

24 (3d12 + 5)

NIGHTMARE

11th-16th Level Parties

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

HP

232

AC

16

DC

19

Atk

+11 to hit

Dmg

37 (5d12 + 5)

NIGHTMARE

Eldritch.

A shape-changing being from outside our reality, the nightmare assumes whatever form people find the most horrific. Curiously often, it resembles a lanky clown with cold, dead eyes.

Hooks.

The nightmare's myriad forms can be introduced several ways. Use these hooks to introduce players to this monster:

Missing Posters. Posters all over town feature the face of an awkwardly smiling child, emblazoned with "Missing" and a slew of contact information. The parents and the child's entire extended group of friends, are frantic, searching the length and breadth of the town, so far to no avail. Naturally, the authorities are out in full force, arresting persons of interest and interrogating family members, but have turned up precisely zero leads. With the disappearance entering its second week, however, they have confidentiality switched their priorities to finding a body. The lead investigator seems keen to find answers, but everyone else that might help seems preoccupied by that rash of pranks.

Baffling Pranks. Someone wakes up inside a wooden box, hastily built around their entire bed. Someone else enters their car to find it filled with tarantulas. Others find their homes defaced with oddly personal messages that shake them to the core. Each of these pranks exacerbates the target's specific phobias and fears, subjecting the claustrophobic to closed spaces and exposing the affairs of infidelitous partners. Some of these events are downright wretched and result in gruesome harm. To the victims, they feel less like pranks and more like white-knuckle moments of fear.

Perhaps a dozen of these events happen each day, without so much as a glimpse of the culprit. And before long, one of them happens to you, exposing and triggering your mostly closely-held phobia.

Rush of Panic. The terrible wave of a panic attack sweeps over you, seemingly without cause. You begin hyperventilating and fixating on some benign stressor that spirals until it dominates your thoughts, as a sick weight pulls at your stomach. You might be familiar with these sensations, or it might be the first of such attacks you've ever experienced. Regardless, you are certain that you will die.

Just as suddenly, it dissipates. Moreover, when you again shift your focus to your surroundings, you realize everyone around you experienced the same thing, as if you were all just visited by an invisible mass of terror in broad daylight.

Mystery.

Initial investigations into the nightmare begin either with posters of the missing child around town or with the rash of unexplainable pranks, though the two dovetail into one another before long. Though the missing child's parents provide crucial information, the child's extended group of friends—all around the same age—offer a promising lead: the adults can't see it, but a terrible creature is stalking the town.

The pranks plague specific individuals more than others, almost like a sickness that grows worse over time. When the anxiety grows too much to bear, the creature reveals itself, manifesting in a different form to each person, resembling the victim's most terrible fear. The children have been seeing the creature for almost a week—ever since their friend disappeared.

As the investigation progresses, the characters begin seeing their own fears made manifest in sporadic, elaborate pranks, and in the form of the nightmare that stalks them wherever they go. It seems to be closing in, waiting for its moment to strike.

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the nightmare:

No True Form. Whenever two people perceive the nightmare, they describe seeing entirely different things: a giant spider, a sinister clown, an abomination of tentacles, or nothing at all apart from an invisible surge of dread.

The nightmare derives its appearance from the fears of those who behold it. Most often, the fears of adults are abstract, resulting in a totally intangible, invisible being. By contrast, children often have concrete, obvious fears—such as clowns and spiders—and manifest the nightmare as something tangible.

Fear Siphon. The nightmare siphons fears from its victims; the more intense the fear, the more nourishing. Furthermore, it can sense the precise triggers for a person's deepest phobias and leverages these to its advantage. Its "pranks" are intended to shake its target at its core and sustain the nightmare for a while longer. It seems that the nightmare must feed every few hours, and that it does so more frequently with each passing day.

Examining the time table of attacks uncovers a strange pattern, however: the nightmare goes dormant for up to twelve hours at a time. Where does it retreat to, and how does it sustain itself while there?

Terrified of Clowns. The missing child kidnapped by the nightmare has been through a horrific ordeal over the last week. Though they remain (technically) safe, they have been stashed in the basement of an abandoned home on the outskirts of town. The nightmare returns there whenever it must rest, subjecting the child to a battery of scares to replenish its reserves of fear.

What is the child afraid of most? Clowns. The home's former resident collected hundreds upon thousands of clowns and jesters of all shapes and sizes and filled their home with the memorabilia. In such a lair, the nightmare becomes more tangible and consistent: an alien, abominable clown.

Fear Elemental. The nightmare is a being from outside our reality, a place devoid of physical constants, such as time, gravity, and matter. In our reality, it is composed of pseudoelements—surreal matter defined by concepts and emotions, the result of two separate realities intermingling. It hungers constantly to devour fear, for without a steady supply, the nightmare would evaporate away into gossamer threads of pseudostuff.

Weakness: Spite. As the nightmare is composed of emotional pseudoelements—matter composed of emotions—emotions can also shake its terrifying grasp. If the nightmare is confronted with overwhelming, spiteful rage from a group of people, the sense of panic caused by the nightmare's presence dissipates. Usually, the nightmare would flee from such a confrontation, but trapped in its lair, it would have no recourse other than to fight.

Lair: Clowns' Domain.

The nightmare steals away its captives to an abandoned home on the edge of town. There, it works to keep them in a constant state of terror, a feast for its alien appetites. By happenstance, the home's previous resident was obsessed with collecting clowns, jesters, and circus souvenirs, covering every inch of their house in painted clown faces. The nightmare settles into the shape of a clown—or close to that shape, for it still has tentacles and insectile features—in this place, and leverages its form to terrorize its captives.

While fighting in its lair, the nightmare can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the nightmare can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Each creature that the nightmare can see within 15 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be teleported across the house. Teleported creatures might find themselves on other floors, locked in closets, or otherwise separated from others.
- Tiny objects, such as cookware, books, and decor, fly around of their own accord in a 10-foot-radius cloud centered on the nightmare. The area of the cloud is difficult terrain, and creatures within the cloud have disadvantage on ranged weapon attacks.
- One creature that the nightmare can see within 15 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute, or until the nightmare uses this lair action again or dies. While frightened, the creature vividly remembers the most terrifying moment of their life. A frightened creature can repeat this saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success



THE NIGHTMARE

Medium Aberration, Chaotic Evil

STR

16 (+3)

DEX

18 (+4)

CON

15 (+2)

INT

11 (+0)

WIS

14 (+2)

CHA

17 (+3)

Aura of Fear. When a creature starts its turn within 30 feet of the nightmare, it must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or be frightened until the start of its next turn.

Terrifier. The nightmare has advantage on attacks against frightened creatures.

Weakness. A character that feels spite toward the nightmare is immune to its Aura of Fear for 24 hours. A character gains this effect if they use the Rage feature or use their action to focus on this emotion.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* piercing damage.

DREAD ACTIONS

The nightmare takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Fright Bite. The nightmare moves up to its speed and makes a Bite attack against a frightened creature

Skitter. The nightmare moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Terror. One creature the nightmare can see within 60 feet must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. While frightened, the creature vividly remembers the most terrifying moment of their life. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns or when someone uses an action to rouse them from the memory, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Speed

30 ft.

Saving Throws

Int +3, Wis +5, Cha +6

Damage Immunities

Psychic

Condition Immunities

Blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, petrified, prone

Senses

darkvision 120 ft.,
passive Perception 12

Languages

Common

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

HP

136

AC

14

DC

13

Atk

+7 to hit

Dmg

8 (1d8 + 4)

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP

201

AC

16

DC

14

Atk

+8 to hit

Dmg

17 (3d8 + 4)

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

HP

253

AC

18

DC

16

Atk

+10 to hit

Dmg

28 (5d8 + 4)

SHOGGOTH

Eldritch.

An undulating mass of bubbling sludge replete with eyes and teeth, the shoggoth slithers through the water supply and plots the doom of all above.

Hooks.

The seeping pollutant of the shoggoth can first present itself in a variety of ways. Use the following hooks to introduce players to this monster.

Contamination. Something is wrong with the water. Buckets of it bear a cloudy, brownish tint and the sulfurous odor of rotten eggs. Worse, its taste is brackish and bitter, enough to turn one's stomach, and it leaves a slimy film behind. Somehow, the slime even accumulates on the exterior of pipes and containers.

Investigations into the contamination are ongoing, even as officials announce that the water is safe to drink, despite signs to the contrary. The few clean stockpiles of water, unconnected to the town's supply, are distributed to the young and elderly as everyone tries to keep calm.

The Walls Have Eyes. For a fraction of a second, an eye opens up on the wall and blinks at you. It blinks again, and it's gone. No matter where you go, you could swear that real, physical eyes are mounted on everyday objects and staring at you, only to vanish a moment before you can stare back. You catch a glimpse of eyes in your food. You lose your appetite.

Prime Suspect. Over the past few days, missing posters for household pets have proliferated across every public surface available. Beloved cats and dogs have just vanished after only a few minutes alone. Soon, reports of missing livestock join them. In every case, vanished without a trace. Come to think of it, you haven't seen any wildlife—no birds, rats, or squirrels—in town for a while.

Soon, someone goes missing under the same circumstances, and authorities come bursting through your door with an arrest warrant. Articles of your clothing and your knife were found in the victim's home.

Mystery.

The shoggoth is a great throbbing mass of moss and sludge that bubbles within the town's sewer pipes, spreading itself so thinly as to appear as an oily sheen on the water. Every drop of slime is an extension of the shoggoth itself. Wherever its sludge is present, it can manifest eyes, mouths, and pseudopods, and so it keeps careful watch everywhere at once, striking only the most isolated and vulnerable.

Initially, the investigation revolves around the town's water supply and the identity of its contaminant. Extensive testing fails to pinpoint it, but eliminates dozens of possibilities, including heavy metals and toxic runoff. Precise reading proves to be a challenge, as samples of the sludge often vanish under inspection. Perhaps they simply deteriorate quickly, or perhaps they slither away when unobserved.

The vanishing of pets soon escalates to people. The shoggoth monitors its potential victims closely by manifesting eyes in thin layers of slime, biding its time until they are alone and vulnerable. Then, gathering its mass in one place, it floods out from the nearest water source—whether that be a faucet or a well—to drown and dissolve its victim, adding to its mass. Moments later, it reverses and flows back the way it came, leaving only a thin layer of slime behind on everything.

Demonstrating an eerie canny, the shoggoth also frames one of the characters for murder, leaving a victim drowned, rather than fundamentally dissolved, and littering obvious clues like articles of clothing all over the crime scene. With each strategic move, the shoggoth works to isolate the party and embroil them in further crimes. With luck, the shoggoth defeats them without ever revealing its true purpose.

MURDER SUSPECTS

Though running afoul of the law is always a risk for the party, this adventure sets the authorities squarely in opposition to them. You can deal with the constant risk of law enforcement in a number of ways, ranging from a tense manhunt for the entire party, to a single character working in disguise for some time. Feel free to use the following elements throughout this adventure:

Skeptic in Uniform. The sloppy presentation of evidence left at the crime scene rubs one investigator the wrong way. Rather than looking to surprise the party with a raid and arrest the perpetrator, this individual reaches out to the party for an off-the-books meeting, hoping to uncover more information about the true killer.

Zealous Detective. The detective in charge of the murder case has bad blood with the accused, either due to conflict in prior investigations, or due to a complicated history between them. Unlike the rest of the authorities, this detective is ruthlessly effective and doesn't care much for evidence, just arrests.

Monstrous Jailbreak. If the character accused of murder is ever captured by authorities, the shoggoth attempts to flood the jail under cover of night to drown them. This might provide the characters a moment to stage a jailbreak, or to reveal the scale of the threat to at least one sympathetic investigator.



Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the shoggoth:

Unnatural Intelligence. Though severed, sludgy globs of the shoggoth possess intellect no greater than an animal, the totality of the shoggoth bears a devious superintelligence. As its biomass grows, the monster becomes not only more fearsome, but also more cunning.

The shoggoth exhibits its canny early by attempting to poison characters that demonstrate their investigative prowess. However, it soon shifts tact: framing them for murder, leaving clues implicating their guilt, and letting the chaotic aftermath distract from the investigation at hand.

Language of Shifting Tides. When the mysterious slime rests on still, clean water, it forms itself into organized shapes: faintly visible lines and curves rippling in iridescent colors. The symbols form an antediluvian language, eldritch symbols forgotten to all but the most ancient powers. What messages might be hidden in the shifting symbols, and can anyone decipher them?

Behemoth Below. From a fist-sized glob of sludge, the shoggoth has expanded into an ocean of bubbling protoplasmic ooze. Soon it could well itself into a geyser and split the town apart from below. Besides making even the grandest resistance seem miniscule, it becomes clear that destroying small portions of the shoggoth won't be sufficient: the monster must agglomerate into a single, colossal mass before it could truly be defeated.

Weakness: Salinity. Though the shoggoth infects water using bizarre, alien chemistry, it is vulnerable to a surprisingly commonplace additive: salt. Thoroughly saline water rejects the shoggoth entirely, leaving behind a foul-smelling earthen slop, reminiscent of sand mixed with excrement. The challenge, however, lies in confronting the shoggoth with salt in sufficient quantities, or performing a chemical reaction that produces a residual of salty brine.

Lair: The Sewers.

The shoggoth's blasphemous slime congregates in the sewers beneath the town, manifesting most fully in the largest chambers and outflow pipes. In this pitch black, fetid space, it wallows and grows, absorbing the filth and expanding its biomass to ever greater magnitude. Infiltrating the labyrinth of tunnels is possible from any storm drain or manhole cover, but the slime is ever-present and the shoggoth's mass can flood through at a moment's notice.

Because the shoggoth's slime covers every wall and tunnel of the sewers, it can perceive any creature within its lair.

While fighting in its lair, the shoggoth can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the shoggoth can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- A cloud of noxious gas fills a 20-foot radius sphere centered on a point the shoggoth can see within 120 feet of it. When a creature enters that area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of its next turn. This cloud lasts until the shoggoth dies or uses another lair action.
- A greasy black sludge pools on the ground in a 20-foot radius centered on a point that the shoggoth can see within 120 feet of it. This area becomes difficult terrain for 1 minute.
- The shoggoth's slime rushes like a wave to drown a single target that the shoggoth can see within 30 feet of it. The creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, until the end of the creature's next turn, it is incapacitated, its movement speed is reduced to 0, and it can't speak or breathe.



THE SHOGGOTH

Gargantuan Ooze, Neutral Evil

Speed

20 ft., climb 20 ft.

Damage Resistances

acid, poison

Condition Immunities

blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone

Senses

blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 11

Languages

understands Common but can't speak

STR

18 (+4)

DEX

6 (-2)

CON

20 (+5)

INT

22 (+7)

WIS

12 (+1)

CHA

7 (-2)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the shoggoth fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Amorphous. The shoggoth can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Siege Monster. The shoggoth deals double damage to objects and structures.

Weakness. If the shoggoth has been mixed with a sufficient quantity of salt, it has vulnerability to all damage, except for acid and poison.

ACTIONS

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* no damage, and the target is **grappled** (escape DC listed below).

DREAD ACTIONS

The shoggoth takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Pseudopod. The shoggoth makes one Pseudopod attack.

Submerge. The shoggoth envelops a creature it has grappled. The target takes acid damage equal to the damage dealt by an attack, and is restrained. A restrained creature can use its action to make a Strength check, freeing itself on a success.

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP

340

AC

8

DC

15

Atk

+7 to hit

Dmg

10 (3d6)

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

Multiattack. Two melee attacks

HP

526

AC

8

DC

16

Atk

+8 to hit

Dmg

21 (6d6)

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

Multiattack. Three melee attacks

HP

774

AC

8

DC

15

Atk

+10 to hit

Dmg

35 (10d6)

PAIN ELEMENTAL

Eldritch.

Composed of pseudoelements from beyond reality, the pain elemental is a product of agony, mania, and suffering, coalesced into an abominable mockery of life. It is anathema to our world, for its mere presence corrupts living things into twisted versions of themselves, which spread its corruption like a metaphysical plague.

Hooks.

The pain elemental reveals itself through a seeping, existential corruption that manifests in several ways. Use these hooks to introduce players to this monster:

Seeping Corruption. At first, very few people notice the proliferating mutations of plants and animals. It starts with a rat with two heads, then a dandelion bearing spikes among its flowers. Before long, however, the corruption produces abominable wolves with whipping tendrils and dozens of eyes, trees that ooze toxic sludge, and creatures too strange to name. The mutations grow wilder and more dangerous closer to the corruption's epicenter, from which it spreads outward, slowly but persistently infecting all natural life.

The Nightmare City. Recently, sleep has been bringing you a terrible nightmare. You wander an ancient city on some faraway coast, whose mazelike streets wind in on themselves in impossible ways, encircling an obelisk at the city's center. Perhaps it's not an obelisk, for it's far taller than that. Straining to see its apex, even in the dream, makes your head spin. You wander all night, and wake from fitful sleep as if you hardly slept. Each day, the dream takes you deeper into the city, drawing you closer to the enigmatic obelisk at its center.

By degrees, many sleep-deprived people recognize that they are all having the same cryptic dream of a cyclopean city. Perhaps everyone is dreaming of it? But then, not everyone remembers their dreams.

The Markers. There's a small, deliberate pile of flat stones stacked two feet high in the middle of a field. Over there, a stack of boards and bricks, just as deliberate, exactly the same height. They're everywhere, now that you're looking for them, each made of various materials which might be lying around. Moreover, if you inspect closely, you can find perfectly straight lines in the dirt connecting these inexplicable mile-markers over long distances. Who's making them and why?

Mystery.

Investigation into the pain elemental begins with several tangential mysteries and a lingering sense of paranoia. The enthralling dreams of the ancient city, strangely mutated animals, and inexplicable markers all begin at once and, though seemingly unrelated, strengthen in lockstep. Certain people seem at edge, like something is clawing at the edges of their minds, but only a few people go stark raving mad—at least at first.

When the pain elemental deigns to visit our reality, it manifests through a human host in great anguish. It places its markers, tortures those it finds nearby, and vanishes, leaving its host utterly broken.

The markers seem critical to its plan, and if destroyed, quietly reform themselves while nobody is looking. Some markers are harmless, but others cause headaches, nosebleeds, and confusion. If a character focuses near one of these more active markers, they find it possible to change the world in minor ways: darkening the sky, rumbling the ground, or levitating pieces of paper, depending on their emotional state. Focusing on it for too long, however, summons the pain elemental itself.

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the pain elemental:

Pseudoelements. The pain elemental is a creature from the periphery of our reality, where the physical constants of our world, such as time, gravity, and matter, intermingle with the more surreal forces at play in its eldritch dimension. In this intermediate space, the laws of both realities mix in unpredictable ways, creating pseudoelements, unnatural particles composed of concepts and emotions. The pain elemental is a living knot of pseudoelements, specifically those of suffering and anguish.

Irem, City Lost. Research into the dream city uncovers a rabbit hole of conspiracy theories about forgotten civilizations, ley lines, and eldritch dimensions. A name which constantly recurs is Irem, a lost city of pillars, whose descriptions are an uncanny match for the dream city.

Markers and Maps. Plotting the markers on a map and connecting them with dozens of lines reveals the chillingly familiar streets of the dream city superimposed on a map of the real world with little concern for its existing streets and landmarks. The center of this street plan must, therefore, be where that impossibly tall dream obelisk would reside.

Eldritch Breach. The corruption facing natural life is due to a breach into an eldritch dimension. From even a pinpoint hole, the surreal natural laws of that reality seep into our own, distorting governing physics, chemistry, and biology. Our reality also seeps into the eldritch dimension from such a breach, agitating whatever otherworldly sentience might reside there.

Traveling to the center of the breach, the site of the dream obelisk, first brings the characters into contact with transparent, pseudonatural filaments, which dance about when they are seen. These filaments, too, can be affected by the characters' emotional state, moving readily and knotting in various patterns.

Weakness: Painkillers. The pain elemental is composed of pseudoelements, matter from its eldritch dimension, tinged with the perceptions of our reality. As such, distorted perception (such as from intoxication or sleep deprivation) can insulate characters from harm and weaken the elemental's tethers to our reality. However, agony strengthens the elemental, so it grows more powerful as characters fall.

Lair: The Dream Obelisk.

At the epicenter of corruption, where the street map of the markers predict the base of the impossibly tall obelisk, pseudonatural filaments trace a rectangular outline. Near this place, in a cascade of blinding headaches and strange colors, characters find themselves in the center of the dream city, at the obelisk's base.

While fighting in its lair, the pain elemental can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the pain elemental can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- A piercing migraine subsumes the mind of each creature that the pain elemental can see within 10 feet of it, each of which must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the start of its next turn.
- The pain elemental chooses one creature it can see within 60 feet of it. That creature's worst fears and nightmares manifest out of

pseudoelements and gather close around the creature until the end of its next turn. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 4d10 psychic damage and be frightened until the end of its next turn. On a failed save, the creature takes half as much damage and is not frightened.

- Each creature that the pain elemental can see within 10 feet of it must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, a creature is teleported to a random location within 120 feet of the pain elemental, down different mazelike streets of the cyclopean city.

Minion: Pseudonatural Beast.

Near the pinpoint eldritch breach, an ineffable otherness—a pseudonatural corruption—seeps into our reality and twists nearby plants and animals into twisted monstrosities. These abominations have no place in our world, even though they originated here. Each pseudonatural beast is uniquely horrific, mutated to include many eyes, tendrils, and slimy membranes, while the creature's skin becomes white and translucent.

Minion.

A pseudonatural beast is a minion, which is a monster with the following special rules:

Hits. Instead of hit points, a minion has a number of hits (usually 1). It dies if it takes the specified number of hits. A minion takes a hit if it is hit by an attack or fails a saving throw against a spell or effect that deals damage.

Saving Throws. If a spell deals damage on a successful save, it deals 1 hit to a minion on a success and 2 hits on a failure. If a spell calls for more than one minion to make a saving throw, all minions roll one save and use the result.

Initiative. Roll initiative once for all minions, which act on the same turn of initiative.

Massive Damage. Critical hits deal 2 hits to a minion. The GM can decide that other attacks that deal high damage, such as a rogue's Sneak Attack, also deal 2 hits.

Shadow. A 1st–4th level party encounters 4 (1d4 + 2) pseudonatural beasts.

Terror. A 5th–10th level party encounters 6 (1d4 + 4) pseudonatural beasts.

Nightmare. A 11th–16th level party encounters 7 (1d4 + 5) pseudonatural beasts.

PSEUDONATURAL BEAST

Small Aberration, Unaligned

STR 12 (+1)	DEX 15 (+2)	CON 13 (+1)	INT 3 (-4)	WIS 14 (+2)	CHA 6 (-2)
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Keen Smell. The beast has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Mimicry. The beast can mimic simple sounds of speech it has heard, in any language. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Pack Tactics. The beast has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the beast's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Speed
35 ft., climb 20 ft.

Skills
Perception +4

Senses
darkvision 60 ft.,
passive Perception 14

Languages
—

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* piercing damage.

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Hits 1	AC 12	DC 12
Atk +4 to hit	Dmg 3	

TERROR

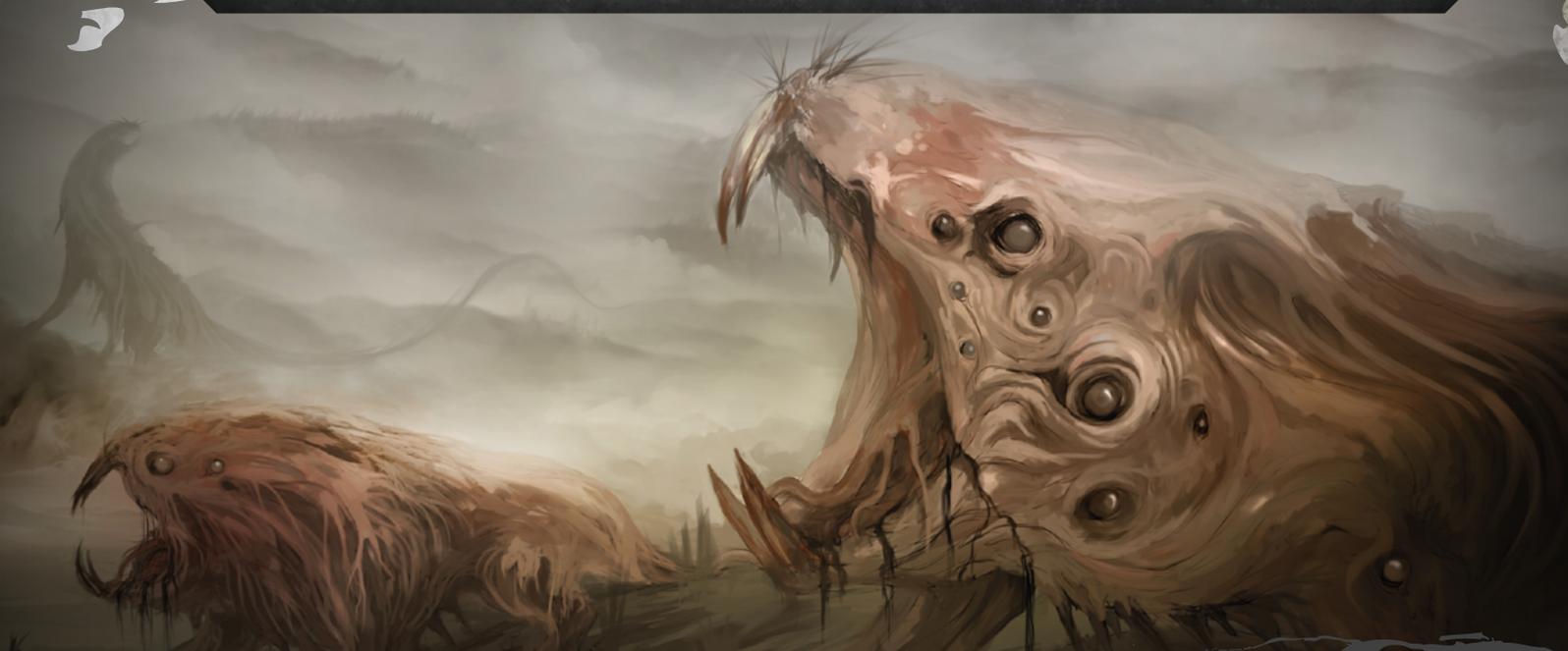
5th–10th Level Parties
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Hits 2	AC 13	DC 13
Atk +5 to hit	Dmg 6	

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Hits 3	AC 15	DC 15
Atk +7 to hit	Dmg 8	





THE PAIN ELEMENTAL

Large Aberration, Chaotic Evil

STR 18 (+4)	DEX 14 (+2)	CON 16 (+3)	INT 13 (+1)	WIS 15 (+2)	CHA 17 (+3)
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Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the elemental fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Aura of Suffering. Whenever a creature within 60 feet of the elemental makes an attack roll against the elemental or forces the elemental to make a saving throw, roll any die. On an odd roll, the attack automatically misses or the elemental automatically succeeds the saving throw.

Weakness. A creature whose perceptions are distorted, such as from intoxication or sleep deprivation, isn't affected by the elemental's Aura of Suffering.

ACTIONS

Agony (Recharge 5-6). The elemental emanates a wave of pain in a 60-foot-radius sphere, centered on itself. Each creature in the area must make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes psychic damage equal to the amount dealt by an attack, and has disadvantage on attacks until the end of the creature's next turn. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and doesn't have disadvantage.

DREAD ACTIONS

The elemental takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Recharge. The elemental rolls a d6, and regains the use of Agony on a roll of 5 or 6.

Agony Pulse. The elemental uses Agony, if available.

SHADOW

1st-4th Level Parties

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP 136	AC 12	DC 14
Atk +6 to hit	Dmg 10 (3d6)	

TERROR

5th-10th Level Parties

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

HP 195	AC 14	DC 15
Atk +7 to hit	Dmg 24 (7d6)	

NIGHTMARE

11th-16th Level Parties

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

HP 246	AC 16	DC 17
Atk +9 to hit	Dmg 35 (10d6)	

Speed
30 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

Damage Resistances
necrotic, poison

Damage Immunities
psychic

Condition Immunities
blinded, charmed, deafened,
exhaustion, frightened,
petrified, prone

Senses
darkvision 120 ft.,
passive Perception 12

Languages
Deep Speech, telepathy 1 mile

A shifting of hues, and a folding of space, the starlight is a presence whose very dimensions are hidden away, folded just behind the 4D curtain.

Hooks.

The starlight's influence over space and time precedes its terrible arrival, allowing you to introduce it in a number of ways. Use these hooks to introduce players to this monster.

Tangled Time. Some innocuous event—a snippet of conversation, a cat running across the street, or a dish clattering in the distance—plays out twice in a row in front of you. Nothing signifies that something unusual has happened; time has just skipped like a record. Only you seemed to notice it. From this moment on, an eerie, but irresistible sense of déjà vu pursues you.

If you keep your eyes and ears peeled, you might notice events slowing or playing out faster, sometimes skipping by a second or so or playing in reverse for a brief moment. The more you notice it, the more time goes awry. You see glimpses from decades and centuries ago, but most worryingly, you see yourself at moments in the recent past and moments in the near future. Are you going mad? Why is time twisting in front of you?

Invisible Things. For the last several nights, a thick fog has rolled out and stubbornly persisted until daybreak. Despite the utterly still wind, you can see vague perturbations in the fog, as if someone were moving about unseen within its clouds. Doubtless, it is the subtle shifting as layers of fog intermingle with cooler air. Except, of course, for footprints left behind in the morning dew. Every night, more strange footprints in the dew, and the strange feeling you're being watched from the fog banks at night.

The Dead You. When you think you are comfortably alone, you are suddenly gripped by the sensation of someone lingering silently nearby. The figure is your height, wearing clothing not dissimilar to an outfit of yours, albeit lighter. In fact, the figure's face is exactly like yours, but pale, gaunt, and blanketed in frost. This strange person remains

silent, no matter how much you accost them, and moves only falteringly. You grow to understand that this figure, this other you, is dead, or something very much like it.

Sporadically, when you are utterly alone, the other you appears and silently responds to your questions with simple gestures. It does a small part in furthering your investigation, but why? Is this other you a reflection of some alternate future, or a harbinger of things to come? Can you avoid this fate, or are you doomed to it?

Mystery.

Investigation into the starlight always converges on a date in the near future: the characters visit moments in this day through time jumps, and its date seems to come up unusually often in the investigation. It's not yet clear what, but something important will happen on that date—savvy characters will set up a countdown clock and schedule accordingly.

The starlight's arrival is always preceded by a thick fog, stalked by its invisible, abominable minions. As its name suggests, the starlight is similarly imperceptible, except for an uncanny light accompanied by a folding shift in the fog. People begin to go missing in the fog; sometimes, without a trace, but other times, seemingly butchered by animals. Some of these people later reappear in the fog, but dazed and walking aimlessly, oblivious of their demise. Such individuals always disappear into the fog by morning. At the heart of the temporal fog, a hazy starlight can be seen growing ever brighter.

Temporal distortions provide more clues, albeit cryptic ones. The characters might encounter versions of people they know, but drastically aged or made younger. Temporal glitches show them events moments before they happen, or rewind time at random. Perhaps a specific moment in the future is predestined, and reality is warping to accommodate it.

The clock is ticking on a race to confront the starlight. What clues can the characters glean from their glimpses into the future, and how can they confront something that sends ripples through time?

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the starlight:

Impossible Dimensions. The starlight is an entity from outside time itself. It doesn't intend to unravel our spacetime, but doing so is of little consequence to it: the starlight is moving orthogonally to our reality, and will pass through it at a predetermined time in the future. Beyond this seemingly trivial movement through spacetime, the starlight's motives are inscrutable.

Echoes in Time. When the starlight pushes through our universe, it bends spacetime back on itself, causing waves and eddies, like a great rock thrown in a pond. The temporal glitches, the dead and aged versions of people lost in the fog, and the inscrutable clues to the aforementioned date are the observable ripples, echoing from the climactic moment backward. In fact, it seems that the starlight has already passed through (in the future) and time has already repeated itself at least once. The only solution to this endless cycle is to meet the starlight when it draws near to our reality and push it back. But how many times have the characters faced the starlight? How many times have they failed?

Wayward One. The character that encounters a dead, frozen version of themselves was slain during the battle with the starlight—the battle which hasn't yet happened—and was cast through time. Now, this future version is disconnected, wandering aimlessly through spacetime, trying to direct their past self to the starlight's weakness.

It is unclear, however, if this fate is predestined, or merely one of multiple possible futures. The character should consider that their survival might cause a paradox (if this entire situation doesn't already represent a massive paradox in its own right).

Weakness: Extreme Cold. While the starlight and its minions are usually invisible, folded in higher dimensions of space, they are composed of exotic matter that produces a fog when exposed to cold air. The nightly fog hints toward this: the starlight's invisible minions create a fog in tandem with nightly temperature drops. So too does the visions of the dead, future version of one of the characters, as it is blanketed in frost. Extreme cold, therefore, pinpoints the starlight, weakens it, and allows it to be attacked.

GROUNDHOG DAY

Investigating the starlight is a prime opportunity to shift the format into a time loop adventure. If the party fails to discover the starlight's weakness, chooses not to confront the starlight in the fog when it emerges, or simply dies outright, the temporal ripple can send the characters back to the beginning of the adventure, with full knowledge of what happened in the previous "loop." In this way, you can build the elements of this investigation into several loops, allowing the players to solve the mystery by a process of reckless trial and error.

Lair: Depths of the Fog.

Venturing deep into a field cloaked with the starlight's temporal fog places one in a misty in-between space, equidistant to numerous points in time. From the fog's depths, moments from the recent past and near future echo around, and further off moments are mere strides away. However, every step in the fog is plagued by horrors that transcend our reality, native to this timeless dimension and hungry for the flesh of interlopers. The starlight, too, shall pass through this misty realm at a moment in the near future, sending ripples across time and twisting causality in its wake.

While fighting in its lair, the starlight can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the starlight can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- The starlight conjures an invisible horror in an unoccupied space the starlight can see within 30 feet of it.
- The starlight alters the flow of time in such a manner that every creature in the lair must reroll initiative. The starlight can choose not to reroll.
- One creature the starlight can see within 60 feet of it must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn, as its mind is thrust through time to the creature's happiest moment.

Minion: Invisible Horror.

Blasphemous horrors from beyond space and time lurk in the fog, utterly invisible except for the subtle perturbations in the clouds. Perhaps one will utter a guttural chitter before striking, but once blood has been spilled, the invisible horrors of the fog prefer a silent killing spree.

Even once slain, these abominations remain invisible, partially folded into higher dimensions of space, but their overall anatomy can be inferred: bipedal, bearing a prominent beak, vice-like pincers, and a hard carapace, riddled with small pits.

Minion.

An invisible horror is a minion, which is a monster with the following special rules:

Hits. Instead of hit points, a minion has a number of hits (usually 1). It dies if it takes the

specified number of hits. A minion takes a hit if it is hit by an attack or fails a saving throw against a spell or effect that deals damage.

Saving Throws. If a spell deals damage on a successful save, it deals 1 hit to a minion on a success and 2 hits on a failure. If a spell calls for more than one minion to make a saving throw, all minions roll one save and use the result.

Initiative. Roll initiative once for all minions, which act on the same turn of initiative.

Massive Damage. Critical hits deal 2 hits to a minion. The GM can decide that other attacks that deal high damage, such as a rogue's Sneak Attack, also deal 2 hits.

Shadow. A 1st–4th level party encounters 2 (1d4) invisible horrors.

Terror. A 5th–10th level party encounters 3 (1d4 + 1) invisible horrors.

Nightmare. A 11th–16th level party encounters 4 (1d4 + 2) invisible horrors.

INVISIBLE HORROR

STR

13 (+1)

DEX

13 (+1)

CON

11 (+0)

INT

6 (-2)

WIS

12 (+1)

CHA

8 (-1)

Dimensional Invisibility. The horror is invisible and can't be perceived by the *see invisibility* spell. The horror becomes visible if it takes cold damage.

ACTIONS

Pincer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* slashing damage.

*Medium Aberration,
Typically Chaotic Evil*

Speed

30 ft.

Damage Resistances

cold

Senses

blindsight 60 ft.,
passive Perception 11

Languages

—

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Hits

1

AC

12

DC

11

Atk

+3 to hit

Dmg

3

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Hits

1

AC

13

DC

12

Atk

+4 to hit

Dmg

8

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Hits

2

AC

14

DC

13

Atk

+5 to hit

Dmg

12



THE STARLIGHT

STR

16 (+3)

DEX

18 (+4)

CON

15 (+2)

INT

19 (+4)

WIS

17 (+3)

CHA

14 (+2)

Beyonder. Whenever the starlight takes damage, roll a d6. On a 3 or higher, the starlight instead takes no damage.

Dimensional Invisibility. The starlight is invisible and can't be perceived by the *see invisibility* spell.

Weakness. If the starlight takes cold damage, it becomes visible for 24 hours and its Beyonder ability only activates if the d6 rolls a 6.

ACTIONS

Astral Wave. *Ranged Spell Attack:* 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* force damage.

Temporal Tide (1/Day). The starlight forces each creature it can see within 60 feet of it to make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, a creature vanishes, being thrust forward to another point in time. At the end of its next turn, the target reappears where it was, or in the closest unoccupied space. If the creature rolled a 1 on the d20 for its saving throw against this effect, it instead reappears at the end of its turn on the following round.

DREAD ACTIONS

The starlight takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Shunt. One creature the starlight can see within 30 feet of it must succeed on a Charisma saving throw or be teleported to a location of the starlight's choice within 60 feet.

Temporal Blip. One creature the starlight can see within 30 feet of it must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is displaced a few seconds in time and has disadvantage on attack rolls until the end of its next turn.

Wave. The starlight makes an Astral Wave attack.

Large Aberration, Neutral

Speed

20 ft., fly 20 ft. (hover)

Saving Throws

Int +7 *Wis* +6, *Cha* +5

Damage Resistances

cold, fire, poison

Condition Immunities

charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone

Senses

blindsight 120 ft., *passive Perception* 13

Languages

—

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

HP

80

AC

15

DC

15

Atk

+7 to hit

Dmg

7 (2d6)

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP

168

AC

16

DC

16

Atk

+8 to hit

Dmg

14 (4d6)

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

HP

218

AC

18

DC

18

Atk

+10 to hit

Dmg

21 (6d6)

The dread Leviathan is coming, and its arrival shall be the end of all things. To usher in the eternal dark age, the Herald plays its alien flute and cultivates a garden of hideous flowers.

Hooks.

One of the characters in the party is chosen by an extradimensional Leviathan to be its Herald, a being presaging the coming of untold disaster through the melody of an alien flute. The Leviathan's approach, and the character's heralric status reveal themselves through the following hooks:

The Alien Flute. You open your door to a knock, but find nobody there apart from an unmarked package resembling a tube wrapped in paper. Scribbled roughly on the packaging is your name. Inside, you find a curious flute constructed of glass and ceramic. Its construction is entirely bizarre, but its function seems obvious: blow into one side and use its unusual valves and holes to play something resembling music.

Furthermore, you feel possessed with the urge to play it. Something about this strange instrument worms its way into your mind. The way the light plays across its surface, flickering across its silver valves and gold mouthpiece, entrances you. You always have it at your side. Did you bring it with you without thinking about it, or did it somehow teleport to your hand?

What is this alien flute, and more importantly, what is it doing to you?

Flower of Chaos. A close friend of the party goes missing, and all signs point to a violent abduction. At their home, scratchmarks rake their door and the lock has been shattered. Within, furniture has been wrenched apart in a struggle, leaving splatters of blood on the walls and ceiling. Uncanny, long-toed, clawed tracks cover the scene.

Most unnerving of all, at the center of the bloodshed, a flower has sprouted between the floorboards and grown to a height of six inches. It is like nothing anyone has seen, with spiraling petals that make your head spin and leaves that curl into shapes resembling twisted pipes. When the breeze catches the flower, these pipes echo eerie notes throughout the surrounding bloodshed. Stranger still, the flower's music sounds uncannily like that of the alien flute.

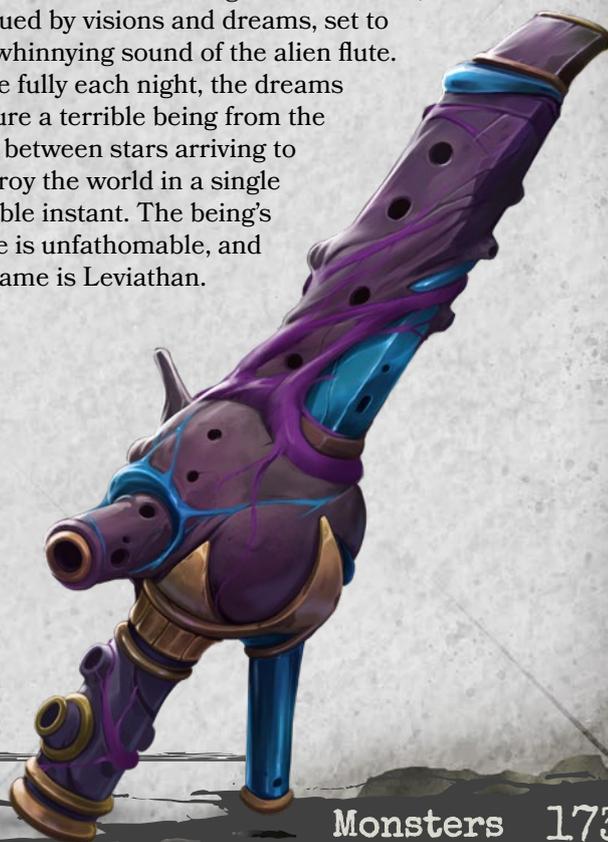
Vanishing Stars. The stars are perfectly clear at night, so it's strange that no one noticed them blinking out one-by-one. By the time you spotted the missing dots in constellations, the black void between the stars had grown into a cavernous hole in one part of the sky, and the rest of the cosmos had dimmed by half. Perhaps something is extinguishing the stars themselves, or perhaps something titanic is blotting them out. Do the missing lights spell out a pattern in the heavens? What could cause such a shift in the sky?

Mystery.

The twin threads of the investigation—the violent disappearances and accompanying strange flowers, and the delivery of an alien flute—soon dovetail into one another.

However the character bearing the flute tries to rid themselves of it, the instrument always finds its way back to them. Even smashing the flute into dozens of pieces fails to avail them of the instrument, as a new one inconspicuously shows up within arm's reach mere minutes later. Furthermore, playing the flute produces only a jumble of incomprehensible notes, impossible to decipher or enjoy, no matter which valves and buttons are used.

The character's nights are restless, plagued by visions and dreams, set to the whinnying sound of the alien flute. More fully each night, the dreams feature a terrible being from the void between stars arriving to destroy the world in a single terrible instant. The being's scale is unfathomable, and its name is Leviathan.



THE HERALD'S AGENCY

The player in possession of the alien flute will have only partial agency over their character throughout the investigation. While attempting to sleep at night, and occasionally when separated from the rest of the party in the daytime, the character transforms into the Herald and begins to slaughter. You may have to wrest control of the character away from the player to set up the Herald's appearances. Try to invent convenient excuses for the character to be separated from the others, but forcefully take control of the character, if needed. The Herald has profound work to be done, and its host's desires are immaterial to its goals.

You can choose to loop the player into the overall plot—that they have been chosen as Herald of the dread Leviathan—or you can leave them in the dark and manipulate their character to ensure the twist is as surprising to them as everyone else. Consider how your players feel about losing agency over their characters to inform this decision.

Lastly, once the twist is unveiled, you can give the character control over the monster, allowing them to battle the party on your behalf.

Meanwhile, it becomes clear that the abductions are nothing of the sort. The sheer amount of bloodshed could leave no survivor. And indeed, with each victim, a single uncanny, unearthly flower sprouts on the spot of their death. Like the flute, the flowers regrow if picked or destroyed, persistently multiplying like a weed when they do so.

The investigation leads to fleeting glimpses of the terrible killer, a creature that might once have been human, but is composed mostly of tentacles and pustules, with lankly, clawed limbs. Strangely, the character that bears the alien flute is never present at the time of these sightings, vanishing minutes or hours beforehand, perhaps to mindlessly play their flute. They remain consistently out of the loop through the investigation, even as it comes to center upon them.

More signs point toward the party—specifically the character bearing the alien flute—as the investigation proceeds. Do they have foreknowledge of the attacks, or is something more sinister at play?

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the Herald:

You Have Been Chosen. The alien flute has chosen one character in the party to become the Herald of the dread Leviathan. Through eldritch magic borrowed from the Leviathan itself, the flute metamorphoses the character into a terrible creature riddled with tentacles and claws, fully twice their height and possessed of uncanny swiftness. The monstrous fiend slays the first person it encounters, transforming the corpse on the spot into one of its flowers of chaos. Then, as swiftly as it transformed, the Herald returns into the form of the character, oblivious to their own metamorphosis and the subsequent murders.

Though the character experiences gaps in their memory, and perhaps finds a few unexplainable splatters of blood on their clothing, the flute's magic makes them incapable of addressing the idea that they are indeed the Herald until someone else first arrives at that conclusion. Once confronted with this conclusion, the character transforms irreversibly until the Herald is defeated.

Virulent Tune. The melody played on the alien flute and flowers of chaos begins to infect the thoughts of everyone in town. First, it manifests as a passing hum on the street, and then it sounds to be mixed into the notes of a windchime. Finally, it becomes ever-present, the only thing musicians can play on their instruments and whistled in every gust of wind. Some people seem completely unaware of the perpetual tune, whereas others feel as if they have gone insane.

Eldritch Chorus. Extensive research on the subject of mind-altering music and vanishing stars points to legends of an antediluvian Leviathan that dwells in the void between stars. Some legends gesture at Leviathan's inconceivable age, as it somehow predates the formless chaos before Creation. Others highlight its size, as a being that eclipses the sun and stars as it drifts through the void. One legend, however, speaks of its Herald, a being depicted bearing an odd flute, wreaking untold disaster wherever its music is heard.

It would seem that the alien flute and the flowers of chaos form a chorus of eerie music to attract the dread Leviathan from the cosmic void. With more flowers joining the chorus, the Leviathan draws ever closer.

Weakness: Silence. Magically or technologically dampening the sound of the Herald's accursed flute severs the power it draws from Leviathan, and furthermore, allows the characters to appeal to the Herald's host. If the characters don't have access to the *silence* spell, magical research yields a scroll or magic item that casts the spell as a ritual.

Lair: Garden of Chaos.

In the lengthy gaps between the Herald's killings, it tends to a garden of eldritch flowers, harvested from the corpses of animals and unsuspecting travelers. These wildflowers are akin to those left at the sites of its killings, but increasingly more bizarre. When a wildflower blossoms, its petals spiral fractally inward, in defiance of geometry, plummeting downwards into an infinite coil. Flowers that sprout nearby mutate wildly from this pattern, evolving into labyrinthine forms that send out helices and curves into the soil itself. Every petal and blade of grass in the Herald's garden creates an impossibly chaotic mosaic. And when the wind blows, they whistle in a maddening chorus of whines of whistles, calling out to the dread Leviathan.

While fighting in its lair, the Herald can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the Herald can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Vines sprout from the garden to ensnare a single creature within 60 feet of the Herald. This creature must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be restrained by the flowers until the end of its next turn.
- The Herald and the flowers play in an anti-harmonizing chorus that rips through the minds of creatures within 15 feet of the Herald. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 3d6 psychic damage, or half as much on a successful save.
- The flowers in the garden shriek in a thousand different notes. Each creature within 120 feet of the Herald must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be deafened for 1 minute. A deafened creature can repeat its saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.





THE HERALD

Medium Aberration, Chaotic Evil

STR 16 (+3)	DEX 19 (+4)	CON 14 (+2)	INT 12 (+1)	WIS 17 (+3)	CHA 22 (+6)
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Speed
30 ft.

Damage Immunities
thunder

Condition Immunities
blinded, charmed, frightened

Senses
blindsight 120 ft., passive
Perception 13

Languages
Common

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the Herald fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Call the Leviathan. The Herald has a Leviathan Counter in view of the players, representing how close the dread Leviathan is to arrival. This counter starts at 0. Whenever the Herald starts its turn, increase the Leviathan Counter by 1. Whenever the counter is equal or higher to the number detailed below, roll a d20. On a 1, the dread Leviathan arrives and destroys the world in a single terrible instant.

Weakness. Once the Herald is deafened, its control over its host weakens for 24 hours. For the duration, whenever the Herald takes an action or a dread action, it must roll a d6. On a 4, 5 or 6, it takes no actions.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* slashing damage.

Wailing Flute (Recharge 5–6). The Herald plays its alien flute. The Herald can't use this action if it is magically silenced. Each creature with 30 feet of it that can hear it must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes thunder damage equal to twice the amount dealt by an attack, or half as much damage on a successful save.

DREAD ACTIONS

The herald takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Rake. The Herald makes a Claws attack.

Skitter. The Herald moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)
Leviathan Counter 5

HP 92	AC 14	DC 17
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Atk +6 to hit	Dmg 14 (2d10 + 3)
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TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)
Leviathan Counter 4

HP 131	AC 16	DC 18
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Atk +7 to hit	Dmg 29 (4d12 + 3)
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NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)
Leviathan Counter 3

HP 175	AC 18	DC 20
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Atk +9 to hit	Dmg 42 (6d12 + 3)
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IMP

Daemonic.

An invisible demon leaves behind gruesome crime scenes, as it exacts its end of an infernal bargain. The imp should not be underestimated—there are no small demons, for there are no small sins.

Hooks.

The demonic entity stalking the town might resemble a murderer on the loose, revealing its true nature only when someone investigates closely. Use the following hooks to introduce players to this monster:

Murder House. A horrifically violent murder has shaken the community. Not only were three people slain in an otherwise peaceful neighborhood, the killer smeared the family's blood on the walls, forming pentagrams and other occult symbols in the gory aftermath. Religious leaders are in an uproar, and the authorities haven't yet apprehended a suspect. Teenagers have already dubbed the site of the killings the "Murder House" and made up a few dozen rumors about the event.

Apparently, one woman survived the Murder House, but is now secluded in a secret location, in case the murderer seeks to finish the job.

The Bell Tolls. You wake up in the dead of night to the gong of a thunderous bell. Others hear it too, no matter where in town they chose to sleep, but the sound clearly didn't originate from a bell tower. Each night, another bell at the exact same time. Where is it coming from, and what does it signify?

Inhuman Tracks. A local eccentric—or perhaps more accurately, a local conspiratorial nutcase—claims to have discovered the tracks of a cryptid behind their home. The clawed, tridactyl footprint indeed resembles no easily-identifiable animal, but that hardly justifies the overwhelming level of enthusiasm that the footprints inspire in similarly conspiratorial individuals.

In many ways, the footprints appear to be a hoax. The tracks look to be drawn onto the road with charcoal, and take only four steps before stopping, as if the creature vanished or the hoaxer responsible gave up prematurely.

Mystery.

The strongest lead in the mystery of the "Murder House" is the sole survivor—a woman that is phenomenally difficult to track down.

Her name isn't mentioned anywhere in the records and no one can seem to recall who lived in that house before the murders. Stranger still, documentation about those who died is riddled with errors or conveniently smudged to obscure the woman's surname. Is some sort of cover up concealing her identity?



The Murder House itself reeks of sulfur, and is marred with blood smeared into occult symbols, clawmark along the walls, and unusual burns. Reports indicate that the bodies were mangled as if mauled by a bear, and the splatters of blood that remain confirm that the attacks were inhumanly violent. Moreover, the occult smears on the wall also spell out a phrase in Latin: *Damnatio Memoriae*. Just outside, the characters can find small, inhuman tracks—three-toed and clawed—which take a few steps and simply stop.

Time passes and another violent murder takes place with all the hallmarks of the Murder House: occult symbols, unusual footprints, and gruesome violence. Fewer people die at the site of the second murder, but the characters instantly spot a connection that goes unobserved by others. These people, too, were close friends with the survivor of the Murder House.

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the imp:

Infernal Timepiece. The thunderous bell that echoes through the night doesn't originate from a church or bell tower, but a small timepiece hastily buried in a field not far from the Murder House. Following the ringing each night leads the characters directly to the timepiece's hiding place.

The elegant wood and glass clock is engraved with the runes of an ancient language, spelling out the terms of a contract. For a year and a day, the clock's owner shall be shielded from illness and harm, and at the appointed time and date, they shall be wholly taken—memory and all—to the underworld. It would seem the time has run out for whoever struck this deal, as the clock rings louder each night.

Unseen Fiend. Until the instant it attacks, the imp is completely invisible and about the size of a cat. However, when it finds its moment to strike, the imp reveals itself and reshapes into its true form. It swells and rips out of its own flesh to become a monstrous fiend with barbed, crimson skin and abominable claws. Just as a cat plays with its food, the imp savors every instant of its attacks, frolicking in the massacres and finding creative ways to eviscerate its victims.

Damnatio Memoriae. A subtle magical effect is working to erode the identity of the Murder House's sole survivor. The woman's name is vanishing from records, her likeness is fading from depictions, and everyone who knew her is gradually forgetting or being slaughtered in violent, occult murders.

Only a few select people remember the woman's name—Helena—a fact which imminently marks them as victims for the infernal presence stalking the town. Finding someone who remembers Helena is no easy feat, but allows the characters to track her just out of town, to a hole-in-the-wall inn, where she is registered under a pseudonym.

A Deal Broken. The survivor of the murder house, Helena, a woman in her forties, is gaunt and emaciated, in the final throes of a terminal illness. When she was diagnosed one year ago, she struck an infernal bargain—one year of health and wellbeing, in exchange for her soul. It was an easy choice at the time, as the illness would claim her in months, and the extra time would let her arrange her affairs and set her children up for a prosperous future. Perhaps it would even be a more painless end.

Now that the time has run out, an imp has arrived to exact the terms of the contract, which are far more demanding than she anticipated. The terms demand a *Damnatio Memoriae*—*damnation of memory*—which entails Helena's complete erasure from the world, including everyone who once knew her. Sadly, this included her husband and children, and it now includes the party as well. The imp will only drag her to the underworld once it has slain every last person on its list of victims.

Weakness: Contract. With possession of the infernal timepiece and enough research, the characters can decipher two critical flaws in the contract:

Kill the Contract-Keeper. If the characters slay Helena before the demon's contract has been fulfilled, it enrages and attracts the imp, but severs its anchor to the mortal realm.

Modifying the Terms. By placing the correct rune upon the timepiece, the characters can slightly alter the terms of the contract, including the imp itself in the terms of the *Damnatio Memoriae*. Because the imp knows of Helena's existence, it too must die before dragging her to the underworld.

Lair: Murder House.

The grisly crime scene, dubbed “Murder House” by teenagers around town, has been sealed by authorities for investigation. Slipping into the building when nobody’s looking is a simple feat, but the house contains even more horrors than meets the eye.

Eerie noises echo through the rooms, furniture moves on its own, and spectral figures slip in and out of existence. These are the restless spirits of everyone slain by the imp, tormented by infernal fires and vengeful of the living. As one plunges deeper into the house, the spirits escalate from paranormal signs to a fever pitch, whirling objects around the room like a tornado, shrieking curses, and locking doors to contain their “guests.”

Meanwhile, the imp lingers in the darkest corners of the house, salivating, and waiting for its moment to strike.

While fighting in its lair, the imp can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the slasher can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Large pieces of furniture fly at three creatures the imp can see within 60 feet of it. Each creature must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone.
- Each creature the imp can see within 60 feet of it must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pulled by unseen spirits up to 60 feet to different rooms of the house. The doors then swing close and lock, as per the *arcane lock* spell.
- One creature that the imp can see within 30 feet of it must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or glimpse the depths of the underworld. Until the end of its next turn, the creature is stunned. A creature that can’t be frightened is immune to this effect.



THE IMP

STR 6 (-2)	DEX 17 (+3)	CON 13 (+1)	INT 11 (+0)	WIS 12 (+1)	CHA 14 (+2)
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Transformation. When the imp drops to 0 hit points, it transforms and uses the statistics of The Demon. It can't take actions, reactions, or dread actions until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: slashing damage.

Transform. The Imp prematurely drops to 0 hit points and uses its Transformation trait.

DREAD ACTIONS

The imp takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Invisibility. The imp magically turns invisible until it attacks, or until its concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). Any equipment the imp wears or carries is invisible with it.

Tiny Fiend, Lawful Evil

Speed

40 ft., fly 40 ft.

Damage Immunities

fire

Condition Immunities

charmed, frightened

Senses

blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages

Infernal, Common

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

HP 21	AC 13	DC 13
Atk +5 to hit	Dmg 5 (1d4 + 3)	

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

HP 42	AC 14	DC 13
Atk +5 to hit	Dmg 6 (1d6 + 3)	

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

HP 63	AC 15	DC 13
Atk +5 to hit	Dmg 7 (1d8 + 3)	

THE DEMON

Large Fiend, Lawful Evil

Speed
40 ft.

Damage Immunities
fire

Condition Immunities
charmed, frightened

Senses
blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages
Infernal, Common

STR

19 (+4)

DEX

12 (+1)

CON

18 (+4)

INT

16 (+3)

WIS

14 (+2)

CHA

17 (+3)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the demon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The demon has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Near-Immunity. Damage the demon takes is reduced to 1.

Weakness. When the demon's contract is circumvented, its Near-Immunity trait doesn't function.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* slashing damage.

Hellfire (Recharge 6). Each creature within a 20-foot radius sphere centered on a point the demon can see must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes fire damage equal to two times the amount of damage dealt by an attack. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage.

DREAD ACTIONS

The demon takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Rend. The demon makes a Claws attack.

Move. The demon moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP

114

AC

13

DC

14

Atk

+7 to hit

Dmg

7 (1d6 + 4)

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

Multiattack. Two melee attacks

HP

171

AC

14

DC

15

Atk

+8 to hit

Dmg

13 (2d8 + 4)

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

Multiattack. Three melee attacks

HP

247

AC

15

DC

17

Atk

+10 to hit

Dmg

17 (2d12 + 4)

SERAPH

Daemonic.

Wreathed in blinding light, the seraph is a nightmare from the celestial plane, bent on engulfing the world below in purifying flames.

Hooks.

The seraph's ruinous presence can reveal itself in a number of ways. Use these hooks to introduce players to this monster.

Book of Prophecies. A local bookshop has acquired a staggeringly rare tome: a first-edition *Book of Prophecies*, penned by an anonymous scribe six hundred years ago. Though nobody has seen a complete copy of this book in centuries, a cursory glance reveals chilling prophecies dated to recent years. Natural disasters, famines and droughts, wars, and the deaths of rulers are detailed in sometimes cryptic terms, but with precise dates—each correct to the day. Moreover, the *Book of Prophecies* bears a chilling prediction for the near future: the judgment of a small community, razed to ash by holy fire.

Hideous Flash. As you slipped through a courtyard on your way home, you were suddenly blinded by an unfathomably bright flash. A searing heat struck your skin and your vision went white, remaining white even after you instinctively shut and shielded your eyes. For minutes, everything was lost in that terrible void, a blindness from which you thought you'd never recover.

By degrees, your vision returned, allowing you to assess the damage. Perhaps a dozen others were caught in the flash, most similarly blinded, but some incurably so. Lines of scorch marks traced to the epicenter, where a pair of charred skeletons lay smoldering. Another individual, a young girl named Elise, vanished from the courtyard, leaving her clothing and possessions in a perfect outline of where she sat.

Dream of Songbirds and Flame. Last night, you dreamed of seven songbirds. Each sat among the branches of an apple tree, and plucked the worms from its fruit. Suddenly, a white flame engulfed one bird, and then another, and another. The birds thrashed in agony and fell from the tree's branches, and at once the tree burned from within, a white hot flame that cascaded into a pillar seen for miles around. You hear the screaming of thousands of songbirds in that fire and the light sears your eyes.

You awoke with a start, still blinded by the hideous fire.

Heavenly Host. The grieving family of Elise, the young girl that utterly vanished in the seraph's flash, are driven to hysterics as an invisible force torments their home, and especially their daughter's room. Objects across the house move of their own accord when unobserved, disturbing their daughter's toys most of all. Screaming and hyperventilating, Elise's mother swears she saw her daughter—invisible and wrapped in a heavenly light—still playing in her room, though no one else saw the divine apparition.

Mystery.

The seraph's horror begins with a blinding flash and a mysterious abduction, and its investigation is mired in ominous prophecies. Investigating the seraph's initial appearance yields conflicting accounts: some witnesses saw a serene, statuesque figure in the blinding flash, others saw a conglomeration of animals with myriad wings, and others still saw abstract and surreal creatures, such as wheels of flames with eyes or impossible geometrical shapes.

As the investigation develops, the shadow of overlapping prophecies overwhelm more traditional evidence. The *Book of Prophecies* warns

THE BOOK OF PROPHECIES

Each first edition of the *Book of Prophecies* is a rare wondrous magic item infused with chronomancy, the magic of time. When a creature attunes to the book by spending 8 hours studying its prophecies, it finds an entry describing exactly when it will die. The book contains a vague or cryptic description, such as “under a blood moon” or “by the hand of one most loved.” Once a creature is attuned to the book, it has advantage on death saving throws, and dies only after gaining five death saving throw failures, instead of three. However, when the creature arrives at the moment of its death described in the letter, it dies without making death saving throws if it is reduced to 0 hit points. No other creature can attune to the book until the previously attuned reader has died.

of imminent, fiery disaster for the area, and even bears the name of one character who is fated to die. Meanwhile, other characters are plagued by symbolic dreams that could reference aspects of the investigation. Always, they feature fire, a blinding light, and seven important things that forestall the oncoming disasters. Perhaps, these are the stressful dreams of imminent demise, or perhaps they hold the key to defeating the seraph.

Hours and days tick by, as more flashes claim more victims: some are rendered blind, various numbers are gruesomely incinerated, and one person is abducted each time, leaving clothing and possessions behind where they stood. It soon becomes clear that these abductions are the true purpose of the seraph's visitations, seven pieces of an esoteric scheme that could doom the world as we know it.

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the seraph:

The Other Prophecy. Among the catastrophic events foretold in the *Book of Prophecies*, a particularly ominous entry catches a character's eye: their very own name is listed on one of the pages, complete with their date of birth and that of their death. No other specifics are given, but the chilling certainty of oblivion fixes itself in the back of their mind.

Seven Seals. By unraveling their cryptic dreams in conjunction with the *Book of Prophecies*, the characters can glean some insight into the seraph's ultimate objective: it seeks to hasten armageddon, the final battle between the celestial planes, the mortal realm, and the underworld. To that end, it has peered through the polymorphous well of time to learn that seven unrelated people stand between the world and total apocalypse. None of them are individually noteworthy, but should they die simultaneously, the inscrutable dominos of fate shall cascade over the course of seven years, setting the stage for the End of All Things.

Lambs to the Slaughter. When the seraph abducts one of its victims and leaves behind a perfect outline of clothing, it transports its victim to an infinite plane of glimmering hues. This demiplane drifts between the heavens and the mortal realm, occasionally bringing the seraph's victims close enough to interact with the physical world and make brief appearances.

ABDUCTED PLAYERS

To heighten the stakes, you can choose one of the player characters to be among the seraph's "seven seals." Such a status will potentially lead to their abduction and sequestration in a demiplane in a divine flash, granting them an up-close look at the seraph's plans, but a limited means by which to communicate it. Be wary not to exclude an abducted character from the narrative, as their investigation also drives the plot forward in lockstep with the main investigation.

Their safety is far from assured, however. When the seraph has collected its seven seals, it intends to incinerate them with holy fire to kickstart the apocalypse. Should the seraph be slain, however, these victims will return to the spot from which they vanished, clothing and all.

Weakness: Disbelief. Investigating those who are incinerated in the seraph's flash reveals a trend: only those with religious convictions are harmed. Therefore, it seems that total belief—or a lack thereof—affects the seraph's foothold in the world.

Lair: The Burning Tree.

Careful investigation discovers that the twisted apple tree of the party's visions isn't merely a metaphorical premonition, but is actually a physical tree in the real world. As the seraph is a spiritual being, it relies on a metaphysical anchor, something imbued with resonant symbolism, to bear any strength on the mortal plane.

Among the branches of its apple tree, the seraph cloaks itself as a robin—albeit one with piercing, radiant eyes—and plays out the motions of its metaphorical scheme. Each time it abducts one of its seven victims, the seraph engulfs another songbird in holy fire; as such, the correct number of burnt songbird corpses litter the apple tree's roots. When its plan finally approaches conclusion, the seraph will engulf the tree itself in a white hot, unending flame, just as in the dream.

While fighting in its lair, the seraph can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the seraph can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:



- A brilliant flash fills a 30-foot sphere, centered on the tree. Each creature of the seraph's choice within the area must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of the creature's next turn.
- Leaves shake free from the apple tree's limbs, catch flame, and swirl toward one creature within 60 feet of the tree. This target must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 4d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

- A booming, antediluvian word emanates from the tree's branches like a declaration from the heavens. Each creature within 30 feet of the tree must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature is deafened until the end of its turn and takes 3d8 thunder damage. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't deafened.

THE SERAPH

Large Celestial, Lawful Neutral

STR

16 (+3)

DEX

16 (+3)

CON

16 (+3)

INT

18 (+4)

WIS

18 (+4)

CHA

20 (+5)

Seraphic Light. Any creature that starts its turn within 15 feet of the seraph must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the start of its next turn.

Weakness. A character that disbelieves in the seraph's divinity is immune to its Seraphic Light. A character can use its action to disbelieve in the seraph for 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Blinding Radiance. One creature the seraph can see must make a Constitution saving throw or take radiant damage equal to twice the amount dealt by an attack and be blinded until the end of its next turn.

Judgment (Recharge 4-6). The seraph issues judgment against those it has marked. Each creature the seraph has marked must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw, taking radiant damage equal to the amount dealt by an attack for each mark it has. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage.

If a creature has been marked three times, it has disadvantage on this saving throw. On a failed save, such a creature is also stunned for one minute, and is no longer marked. A stunned creature can repeat this saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

DREAD ACTIONS

The seraph takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Supernal Mark. One creature that the seraph can see within 60 feet of it is marked. A character can be marked up to three times.

Teleport. The seraph teleports up to 30 feet to a location it can see.

Recharge. The seraph rolls a d6, and regains the use of its Judgment on a roll of 4, 5, or 6

Speed

40 ft., fly 40 ft.

Saving Throws

Con +5, Wis +6, Cha +7

Damage Resistances

fire, poison, radiant

Condition Immunities

blinded, charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses

truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages

all, telepathy 120 ft.

SHADOW

1st-4th Level Parties

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

HP

93

AC

18

DC

16

Atk

+8 to hit

Dmg

9 (2d8)

TERROR

5th-10th Level Parties

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP

170

AC

19

DC

17

Atk

+9 to hit

Dmg

22 (4d10)

NIGHTMARE

11th-16th Level Parties

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

HP

229

AC

20

DC

19

Atk

+11 to hit

Dmg

33 (6d10)

The friendly and ordinary characters that the party have encountered so far harbor a secret: under cover of night, they don the cloaks and daggers of a murderous cult, dedicated to destroying and remaking the world through the dread being Erebus.

Hooks.

The omnipresent cult has lingered at the periphery of the entire incursion thus far, rearing its head only when its machinations are close to fruition. The cult reveals its presence in the following ways:

Dark Dungeons. Fear grips the community as the body of a youth is discovered, evidently butchered with a ritual dagger. Widely publicized and discussed extensively by worried parents, the crime scene was littered with blood-spattered robes, oddly-shaped dice, and papers detailing unusual, abstract statistics for demonic creatures and fictional characters. What occult games have the children been playing and who else is endangered?

Thin Dark Lines. You notice a black line the width of a pen stroke streaking across a road, perfectly straight even over bumpy terrain. The line isn't painted or carved; it's as if the ground itself has simply changed color. Following it, you find that the line meets a wall, climbs it and proceeds on the other side for hundreds of feet, marking every perturbation on the way, from rocks to blades of grass in a perfectly straight line. Nearly a quarter mile away, this line meets another at a perfect ninety-degree angle. What laid out these thin, almost unnoticeable lines, what pattern might they construct?

Killer in the Night. You awaken to soft footsteps in your room and the glint of a dagger raised high in the air. Reflexively, you shift and the dagger plunges into your bed instead of your heart. A life or death struggle ensues between you and the faceless, black-hooded assailant. Will you survive? And why might someone want you dead?

Mystery.

The cult's first victim is its most tragic, and becomes its most public. Furthermore, it is the most uncharacteristic. A young student is slain with ritual daggers, evidently by their friends, whilst playing a "roleplaying game." This bizarre and elaborate game involved each player assuming the role of "characters" in a fantasy world, using complex dice and an entire book of rules to determine the outcome of a free-form—and entirely sinister—story. Interviewing the surviving, traumatized players reveals that their story involved infernal demons, magic, monsters, and cults. Each player dressed as their character and assumed faux voices for the occasion, but the last session introduced a new prop: a magic scroll. That is all the children remember, but they suspect that the demon from their story, Erebus, is to blame.

Meanwhile, each day, the thin dark lines snake further and further outside of town, meeting and tracing out parts of a colossal sigil. As they proceed, they thicken, until they reach an inch across, as if painted neatly across the landscape in a perfectly black ink.

LIFE-OR-DEATH STRUGGLE

The Killer in the Night hook should be played out as an encounter with one character. Unless things go terribly wrong, the character should survive the encounter, but the attacking cultist might escape, be critically wounded, or be killed. If slain, the killer is revealed to be someone the character has seen regularly around town, but never interacted with.

As the investigation intensifies, so too does the looming direct threat of the cult. One character is initially attacked in the night to dissuade the characters from digging deeper, but when that fails, the cultists resort to poisoning attempts, improvised traps, silent projectiles, and eventually assaults under cover of night. Though they conduct their occult activities in dark, hooded robes, every slain or unmasked cultist is revealed to be an ordinary member of the community. How deep does the conspiracy go, and who can the characters really trust? Furthermore, how many decades has this cult lurked just under the town's surface?

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the cult:

A Vast Conspiracy. The cult consists of people the characters know and trust, ordinary people around town, and a majority of those in positions of authority. Historical records outline the cult's existence going back decades, maybe centuries, once the characters know what tell-tale signs to look for. A common theme seems to be ordinary people and amateur reporters discovering the fringes of cult activity and suddenly turning up dead under tragic circumstances. Dozens of people have unwittingly walked into the cult's clutches, only to realize too late what they're up against.

In response to the characters' investigation, the authorities and politicians around town invent increasingly conspicuous reasons to push the characters out of the picture. However, the party might find unexpected allies around town as well. Some people have long ago realized that a cult lingered just out of sight and stayed quietly out of its way, until now.

Prop Occultism. The children that survived, or perhaps perpetrated, the roleplaying game killing conceal one critical piece of information: where they acquired their props, the "magic scroll," the daggers, and the hooded cloaks (which are all too large for them). Carefully investigating the home of the murdered child (the so-called "Game Master") reveals a hidden compartment in the closet of the master bedroom, containing hooded robes, curved ritual daggers, black candles, and of course, several obscure mystical scrolls. Naturally, the child stole the props from their parents for the game, but had no idea of the scrolls' magical effects.

The parents are high-ranking members of the cult, and meet the intrusion into their secret closet with violence or subterfuge, attacking directly or compelling the authorities to do so on their behalf.

Furthermore, investigating the parents' place of employment or following them from afar leads the characters directly to the cult's carefully-concealed hideout.

The Stygian Seal. Following the strange dark lines leads nowhere in particular: far outside of town, as lines meet other lines in a pattern stretching miles. It seems that, whatever pattern they form, encircles the entire town. Tracing out the lines and curves on a map reveals an esoteric sigil, which occult experts know as the Stygian Seal, one of the most obscure magical signs known to the mystic world.

Though none of the lines of the seal meet directly at its center, the circular sigil centers on a nondescript building just outside of town—the cult's headquarters.

The Final Ritual. After decades of preparation, the cult is ready to perform their ultimate ritual: physically conjuring a vestige of their god, Erebus. The cultists believe that this manifestation will grant them godlike power to destroy and remake the world, based on their cryptic dogma.

The site of the ritual is within the cult's headquarters, a well-kept secret that has hosted the cult's activities for years. Together, a smaller Stygian Seal within the headquarters can channel the enormous sigil encircling the city to manifest the Vestige of Erebus, a terrible force of evil that even the cultists are unprepared to face.

Vestige of Erebus. Hundreds of feet long and dozens wide, without appendages of any sort, Erebus most resembles a serpent or worm. It is always accompanied by a haunting drone, and a rush of winds surging toward it.

Its most striking characteristic, however, is its incredible maw. Occupying the entirety of what might otherwise be considered a face, Erebus's mouth is always open, ever-consuming, and lined with rows of sharp teeth. Even seeing into it pushes the mind to its breaking point: inside is the deepest black, a strangely enticing Void, from which escapes no light. At its edges, space warps in strange ways, giving it the appearance that everything somehow is perched precariously, ready to fall into its gaping mouth.

Its outer skin—if it can be called that—is stretched relief of tortured faces, whose mouths are frozen in an eternal scream, exposing pinpoints of the abyss underneath. The skin, and its impressions of agonized vestiges, appears to be paper-thin, but extraordinarily tough; there is nothing underneath it, for Erebus's true substance is the Void.

Weakness: Breaking the Seal. A number of cultists are engaged with conjuring the Vestige of Erebus into the mortal realm. Defeating them and breaking the Stygian Seal in which the vestige was conjured, is critical for severing the link to Erebus and pushing it back into the Void.

Lair: Headquarters.

The cult's headquarters has been constructed at the edge of town, lying incognito beneath another, nondescript building. In *Nowhere, USA*, this is the otherwise featureless office building of the Erebus Corporation. In *Blackpost*, it is a scientific sub-basement constructed under the Deep Antenna at the center of the colony. In *Grismoor*, it is a sprawling dungeon constructed underneath the Society Lodge, an opulent manor at the periphery of the city. In your own campaign setting, the headquarters lies beneath any structure the characters have overlooked for the entire adventure so far.

The headquarters has an elaborate front to dissuade unawares visitors, but the moment the characters attempt to access the inner sanctum, the cultists attack in full force, leveraging occult magic and attempting to butcher them with daggers.

When the characters arrive at the center of the lair, the Vestige of Erebus is conjured within a great Stygian Seal by a host of cultists, whose life forces serve as fuel for the terrible ritual.

While fighting in its lair, the vestige of Erebus can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the vestige can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Erebus bellows an inhuman roar, shaking the earth and dislodging rubble. Each creature of Erebus's choice within 60 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 3d6 bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone by falling rubble.

- Fluctuations ripple through the fabric of magic around Erebus. Roll a d6 for each spell within 120 feet of Erebus. On a 5 or 6, the spell ends.
- Magical darkness spreads from a point that Erebus chooses within 60 feet of it, filling a 15-foot-radius sphere until Erebus dismisses it as an action, uses this lair action again, or dies. The darkness spreads around corners. A creature with darkvision can't see through this darkness, and nonmagical light can't illuminate it. If any of the effect's area overlaps with an area of light created by a spell of 2nd level or lower, the spell that created the light is dispelled.



Minion: Cultist.

When the cult recognizes a threat to its anonymity, it responds by sending its most loyal cultists to dispose of the threat. Usually, such cultists work subtly, staging deaths as accidents for the local authorities or poisoning a victim over the course of weeks, but when an interloper is especially persistent, a band of dagger-wielding cultists may simply stab them to death and burn the building to the ground. It's inelegant, but always effective.

Minion.

A cultist is a minion, which is a monster with the following special rules:

Hits. Instead of hit points, a minion has a number of hits (usually 1). It dies if it takes the specified number of hits. A minion takes a hit if it is hit by an attack or fails a saving throw against a spell or effect that deals damage.

Saving Throws. If a spell deals damage on a successful save, it deals 1 hit to a minion on a success and 2 hits on a failure. If a spell calls for more than one minion to make a saving throw, all minions roll one save and use the result.

Initiative. Roll initiative once for all minions, which act on the same turn of initiative.

Massive Damage. Critical hits deal 2 hits to a minion. The GM can decide that other attacks that deal high damage, such as a rogue's Sneak Attack, also deal 2 hits.

Shadow. A 1st–4th level party encounters 3 (1d4 + 1) cultists.

Terror. A 5th–10th level party encounters 6 (1d4 + 4) cultists.

Nightmare. A 11th–16th level party encounters 6 (1d4 + 4) cultists.

CULTIST

*Medium Humanoid,
Typically Lawful Evil*

Speed

30 ft.

Senses

passive Perception 10

Languages

Common

STR

13 (+1)

DEX

14 (+2)

CON

12 (+1)

INT

10 (+0)

WIS

11 (+0)

CHA

10 (+0)

Dark Devotion. The cultist has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

ACTIONS

Ritual Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* slashing damage.

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Hits

2

AC

12

DC

12

Atk

+4 to hit

Dmg

6

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Hits

2

AC

13

DC

13

Atk

+5 to hit

Dmg

8

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Hits

4

AC

15

DC

15

Atk

+7 to hit

Dmg

10

EREBUS AND THE CULT

Each of the settings included in this book contain a conspiratorial faction dedicated to an entity known as Erebus: in Nowhere USA, the Erebus Corporation, in Blackpost, the scientists of the Erebus Project, and in Grismoor, the Society of the Stygian Seal. These factions are ready-made to act as the titular cult.

You ultimately decide the nature of Erebus and the dogma of its cult. The following options might prove fruitful:

Vestige of Oblivion. Erebus is a manifestation of the Void, an infinite nothingness that lies between and beyond the planes of existence. In the primordial universe, the gods leveraged Erebus to unmake their flawed proto-universes as they struggled to craft an infinite utopia. After innumerable attempts, however, the Stygian Seal containing Erebus was damaged by a rebellious angel, halting the cycle of creation and destruction.

Should Erebus be unleashed again, the entity would not only unmake the multiverse, but the gods themselves. To the Cult of Erebus, such a cleansing oblivion represents penance for the gods' antediluvian sins, and offers a chance at some future utopia.

Shadow Infernal. All infernal creatures are a reflection of their infinite, chthonic realm. But the underworld isn't merely a cavernous pit; it is intelligent, malevolent, and above all, hungry. The manifestation of the underworld itself is known as Erebus. It is an interminable shadow from which no light or sound escapes, a being more terrible and more powerful than all the forces of Creation.

The Cult of Erebus wrongly equates Erebus with a kind of supreme devil and believes that such a being might strike bargains or offer power to mortals. Little do they know that their incantations threaten to manifest something entirely terrible that will swallow up the mortal realm and convert it, too, into an underworld.

Godcorpse. God is dead, rotting on His throne in the infinite celestial heavens. The corpse is an abyssal inverse of the creator God's light, a void named "Erebus" by the celestial host. Without a God above, the heavens are in chaos and the underworld broils with chants for war. Seraphim scour the world for any sign that their creator persists in another form, but there is no hope to be found—God is simply dead.

The Cult of Erebus believe they have received a mantle of divinity from the Godcorpse, and that one must only touch the abyss of Erebus to achieve apotheosis. Thus shall begin an epoch of gods, in which all people bear the omniscience and omnipotence once reserved for the Almighty. Perhaps the cult is on the verge of untold power, or perhaps their divine meddling threatens to consume the world in stygian blackness.



THE VESTIGE OF EREBUS

STR 22 (+6)	DEX 8 (-1)	CON 20 (+5)	INT 12 (+1)	WIS 14 (+2)	CHA 19 (+4)
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Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the vestige fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Weakness. A number of cultists are performing a ritual to summon Erebus. Each cultist is incapacitated and can't move while performing the ritual. The vestige loses 10 hit points whenever a cultist is killed. The number of cultists and the number of hits to kill a cultist are detailed below.

Weakness. The vestige is empowered by a Stygian Seal painted on the floor. If a creature uses its action to break the seal, the vestige's damage immunities don't function.

ACTIONS

Vestigial Light. *Ranged Spell Attack:* range 120 ft., one target.
Hit: force damage.

Void Banishment. One creature the vestige can see within 30 feet of it must make a Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes necrotic damage equal to three attacks and is banished to the Void, an endless plane of nothingness, as per the spell *banishment*, until the end of its next turn. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and isn't banished.

DREAD ACTIONS

The vestige takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Ray. The vestige makes one Vestigial Light attack.

Slither. The vestige moves up to its movement speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Huge Aberration, Chaotic Evil

Speed

60 feet, burrow 30 ft.,
fly 30 ft. (hover)

Damage Resistances
necrotic, poison

Damage Immunities
all

Condition Immunities
*blinded, charmed, deafened,
exhaustion, frightened, poisoned,
prone*

Senses

*blindsight 120 ft., passive
Perception 12*

Languages

Celestial, Deep Speech, Infernal

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Cultists 6 (1 hit)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP 135	AC 15	DC 15
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Atk +7 to hit	Dmg 5 (1d10)
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TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Cultists 9 (1 hit)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

HP 182	AC 16	DC 16
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Atk +8 to hit	Dmg 12 (2d10+1)
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NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Cultists 12 (1 hit)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

HP 200	AC 18	DC 18
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Atk +10 to hit	Dmg 18 (4d8)
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LAMB

Daemonic.

The abomination called “the lamb” heralds a coming apocalypse, a final unraveling of the heavens, hells, and the world itself.

Hooks.

The arrival of the lamb presages the End of All Things, a fact which is immediately evident in the heaven and hells but only becomes clear in the mortal realm as the lamb wreaks havoc. Use these hooks to introduce players to this monster.

End of the World. As your day winds to a close, you are suddenly deafened by the roar of rushing waves and blinded by a flare of sourceless light. When your senses return, you are standing in a vast desert at the edge of a howling sandstorm. Within the churning clouds of sand, a fireball of bronze light pierces through the din and grows ever brighter. Your eyes strain against the radiance, but make out the silhouette of a monstrous amalgamation at its center: a humanoid being flying aloft on two pairs of feathered wings. It has at least six limbs and its shoulders bear four separate heads—none of them human.

The heads speak in unison, shrieking like a bird of prey, roaring like a lion, and bellowing like a bull all at once as they speak, rendering a horrifying facsimile of a human voice. It says: “Hosannah! The Lamb is returned. The world ends in five days.” The ground quakes at the lamb’s mention.

You awaken, blinded for a few moments with a terrible pain ringing in your head. A gash on your head streams with blood. You must have passed out and fallen. But that vision felt real.

Grievous Immortality. A plague of immortality has fallen over the town. Fatal events result in gruesome injuries, but never an outright death. No matter the lost blood, no matter the broken bones or amputations, victims linger on in astounding pain, unable to articulate their wish for death’s release. Medical workers haven’t yet grasped the profound implications of their lucky string of survivals, until, perhaps, someone wanders into their ward missing a head.

The near-dead aren’t safe and sound, however. At the stroke of midnight, an unholy creature slinks out of the earth and unhinges its jaw, swallowing an ailing victim whole. It continues to feed on the day’s near-dead, until it borrows back into its blasphemous, extradimensional pit.

Caregivers that witnessed the creature variously report glimpsing some kind of angel or seeing a creature of nightmares.

Kaleidoscopic Threads. You notice the glinting white line of a thread, an impossibly thin strand anchored to the corner of a windowpane. As it catches the light, a prismatic rainbow of colors spills forth, brighter by degrees than its source. Taking the weightless thread in your hand, its source—the entire windowpane—unravels into a flash of colors, leaving nothing but a cold breeze through the now open window.

The universe itself is fraying at the seams. At first, lone objects begin to unravel into threads of matter, energy, and magic, but soon the earth underneath the town and the very air you breathe begins to shed threads. Who knows how long until the entire weave is undone? Perhaps, a single, nondescript thread underpins the entire world, just waiting to be pulled.

Weeping Icons. Streaks of blood flow from the eyes of religious depictions across town: paintings shed tears of blood, statuettes weep, and holy symbols become mottled with tiny crimson beads. This ominous miracle portends disaster to come.

IMMORTALITY

Instead of dying, a character instead gains 1 hit point, becomes stable, regains consciousness, and gains the grievous immortality condition. This condition can be ended via a *remove curse* spell or similar magic, causing the creature to die immediately. While a character has this condition, they can’t regain hit points or die. Creatures with this condition become the lamb’s principal targets.

Mystery.

The arrival of the lamb is heralded by an angelic vision: a four-winged, four-headed being that appears in the center of a sandstorm and warns that the world will soon end. Each day, the character that witnessed the angelic vision is visited again, as the angel counts down the end of the world. The character can ask a few fleeting questions of the divine host, potentially learning that the angel's name is Ophaniel, that the heavens and hells are in turmoil, and some facets of the lamb's true nature. Though the angel nears omniscience, it provides no hints as to the lamb's ultimate weakness; presumably, the angel believes it has none.

Meanwhile, the situation around town deteriorates. Immortality quickly reveals itself to be a horrendous curse, punctuated only by the appearance of the so-called lamb, a creature that resembles nothing like its namesake. It is indeed, part lamb, but also part lion and part dragon, bearing malformed, featherless wings, and a pair of curved ram's horns. A blood red tongue of flame hovers above its head at all times, eerily unperturbed by the world around it. And in place of its eyes, the creature bears two sunken pits, like those of a skull. It swallows anyone that stands against it and then the bodies of the suffering immortals, before sinking into a dimensional hole that reeks of sulfur. Though it is possible to slay the lamb, the creature resurrects itself mere moments later.

NATURE OF THE LAMB

You ultimately decide the nature of the Lamb and why it represents an existential threat to the multiverse. If the party has previously encountered the Cult and the Vestige of Erebus, the following options provide a continuation of the lore explored in that adventure:

Afterbirth of Creation. When the primeval gods spoke the Words of Creation, the world sputtered, cracked, and bled into existence. Its painful gestation was fraught with cataclysmic disasters and titanic monsters, for it was constructed on a deeply imperfect plan. The formless chaos that preceded the universe was perfectly balanced—life and death, good and evil, matter and energy were all homogenous in the waves. But the primeval gods sought an infinite paradise of abundance, order, and good. And so they interfered with the universe's metaphysical balance, locking away cosmic fragments of Death and Evil and casting them into the Void. The Void was Erebus, and Erebus was the Void.

In the Void, the elemental forces of Death and Evil putrefied and metastasized. They became the Lamb, a being of blasphemy and undeath, the afterbirth of creation. Its mere presence in the mortal realm threatens to unravel all of creation, for it can restore the multiverse to perfect balance—as a formless chaos once again.

Souls Forsaken. In the earliest days of the universe, there was but one afterlife. Whether someone lived a just, unjust, wicked, or virtuous life, their soul traveled to the Beyond, a plane of serene pastures and reeds. However, the gods soon realized that the equalization of death robbed their authority of a lasting sting. Thus, a schism formed and an unremembered war raged in the heavens. The victorious gods and angels decided the outcome: the Beyond would be discarded, sequestered from the multiverse, and a panoply of new afterlives, reigned by angels, devils, gods, and monsters would be established in its place.

But the souls trapped in the Beyond could never be truly destroyed, for they are eternal creations. Those immortal souls, cast out of the multiverse, congealed into a being too abominable to imagine: the Lamb. It hungers for souls, and longs to devour the gods themselves.

Stillborn Reincarnation. God is dead, rotting on His throne in the infinite heavens, but He yet commands resurrection. At His final divine breath, God attempted to resurrect Himself in His infinite glory, but He Himself was not written in the Book of Life. Therefore, God's reincarnation was stillborn, a divine undeath that manifested as the Lamb.

The Lamb represents animalistic divinity, ravenous for immortality and contemptuous for all of Creation. Left to its own devices, the Lamb's rampant miracles will unravel the mortal world and the heavens in short order, consuming every last shred of power that once manifested it.

Each time the lamb appears, it grows in ferocity and its rampages grow ever longer. Furthermore, its tongue of flame spreads to the heads of the near-dead sustained only by the curse of immortality, transforming them into fanatical, branded apostles.

As the days tick away, the universal threads become more prevalent, culminating in collapsing buildings and roads that crumble away in a flash of light. However, the weakening universe also confers an unexpected benefit: when the lamb is finished feeding and escapes through its dimensional hole, the portal remains open for seconds and then minutes at a time. The foolhardy, or perhaps suicidal, could follow the beast to whatever plane it calls home.

Revelations.

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the lamb:

Feeble Divinity. When a character attempts to scorch the lamb with divine radiance or track it using a cleric or paladin's spell, they find the magic simply wash over the creature. The lamb is the essence of divinity, and divine magic holds no power over it.

Incarnation of Blasphemy. Extensive research, assisted by Ophaniel's cryptic musings, uncovers the lamb's true nature (see the Nature of the Lamb sidebar). Its very existence is antithetical to the universe itself, and will cause a slow unraveling of the mortal planes, heavens, and hells if it isn't stopped. Furthermore, the lamb bears an unbridled hatred of priests, churches, and any religious iconography, choosing to destroy them first whenever it rampages through the town. However, this also grants the party a surefire way to draw the lamb's attention, if they seek its ire.

Sacred Spearhead. An inscrutable divine message—provided by the angel Ophaniel, the *Book of Divine Prophecies*, or the final words of someone consumed by the lamb—leads the characters to digging up a staggeringly ancient box. Within, the characters find the head of the *spear of Dyogena*, an artifact once said to have slain a god.

Even once the characters have found a suitable shaft for the legendary spear, they are appalled when it fails to slay or even weaken the lamb. Perhaps this fantastic weapon has some other use?

Weakness: Imprisonment. Because the lamb bears the metaphysical spark of divinity, it can't be truly slain, even with the fabled *spear of Dyogena*. It can, however, be permanently sealed away in the Pit from which it spawned.

The lamb's ability to enter and exit the mortal world is linked to a structure in its lair, the Pit. At the

center of that chaotic realm, the wall of an ancient temple houses the dimensional portal which the lamb uses to traverse the multiverse. Though it takes immense force to crumble the doric columns of the temple, the *spear of Dyogena* pierces them with ease. Crushing the four pillars while the lamb is regenerating locks the creature away, and ensures that it can never again threaten the world.

Lair: The Pit.

When the lamb was born (or rather, unborn) it forged itself a new heavenly plane in its own image: a chaotic, fragmented reality, simultaneously in the depths of a cavern and nestled in a dark stormcloud. This fragmentary plane is wholly severed from the rest of the multiverse, a pocket dimensional accessed only through a portal at the plane's center.

When the party arrives by following the lamb through one of its dimensional holes, they are deposited on the many drifting stones and slabs of ruined architecture orbiting the structure at the Pit's center: a temple complex dedicated to the primordial gods, whose names have long been forgotten. The characters soon find that they weigh a scant fraction of their weight in this plane, and can leap great distances. Misjudging a jump, furthermore, reveals that the plane's gravity points inwards, to the temple.

In the heart of the ancient temple, the lamb slumbers and digests the immortality of those it has consumed.

SPEAR OF DYOCENA

Once mounted on an appropriately sized haft, the spear of Diogena is a magic weapon with the following properties:

Spear of Dyogena

Weapon (spear), uncommon

When you take the Attack action on your turn using this magic weapon, you can use your bonus action to make one additional melee weapon attack with it. On a hit, this attack deals extra damage equal to your level. Once this property is used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Living Weapon. This weapon grows in power as you gain levels. At 3rd level, you gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. This bonus increases to +2 at 11th level, and +3 at 17th level.



This innermost chamber bears a dimensional portal on one wall, carved at the center of a vast mosaic depicting the creation of the multiverse. Furthermore, it is supported by four stone pillars, each six feet in diameter and well over 30 feet tall. Destroying the pillars, either through extraordinarily difficult conventional means, or by using the *spear of Dyogena*, seals the Pit away from the multiverse, along with any creatures still within it. The GM decides the statistics of each pillar, but the *spear of Dyogena* can always destroy a column with a single strike.

While fighting in its lair, the lamb can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the vestige can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- The lamb nullifies gravity within the Pit until initiative count 20 on the following round. In a zero gravity environment, creatures and objects hang in the air until they are moved. A creature in zero gravity can move only by pushing or pulling against a fixed object or surface within reach (such as a wall or a ceiling), which allows it to move as if it were climbing. Its speed is otherwise reduced to zero. Once a creature or object is set into motion, it can't stop moving until it collides with an obstacle.

Creatures and objects in an area of zero gravity have no weight, but still may require significant force to move.

When the effect ends, creatures and objects in the air fall if nothing is holding them aloft.

- The lamb spits blasphemies in an antediluvian language. Each creature that can hear the lamb within a 30-foot radius of it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 2d6 psychic damage and be deafened for 1 minute. A deafened creature can repeat this saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.
- The lamb bestows a tongue of flame onto the head of a creature it can see within 30 feet, which must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frenzied for up to 1 minute, or until the lamb uses this lair action again.

A frenzied creature loses the ability to distinguish between friend and foe, regarding all creatures it can see as enemies. While frenzied, the creature chooses the targets for its attacks, spells, and abilities randomly from among the creatures it can see within range, and it must make an opportunity attack if any creature provokes one.

A frenzied creature can repeat this saving throw whenever it takes damage, ending the effect on itself on a success.

BRANDED APOSTLE

STR

13 (+1)

DEX

6 (-2)

CON

15 (+2)

INT

3 (-4)

WIS

14 (+2)

CHA

5 (-3)

Heated Body. A creature that touches the apostle or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes damage equal to one attack.

ACTIONS

Unholy Flame. *Melee or Ranged Spell Attack:* reach 5 ft. or range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* fire damage.

*Medium Undead,
Typically Lawful Evil*

Speed

30 ft.

Damage Immunities*fire, poison***Condition Immunities***blinded, charmed, deafened,
frightened, poisoned***Senses***passive Perception 12***Languages** *all*

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Hits

1

AC

8

DC

12

Atk

+4 to hit

Dmg

3

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Hits

2

AC

8

DC

13

Atk

+5 to hit

Dmg

4

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Hits

3

AC

8

DC

15

Atk

+7 to hit

Dmg

7

Minion: Branded Apostles.

Each time the lamb slithers out of its dimensional pit, its eerie tongue of flame alights on the heads of some of those sustained by its curse of immortality. This unholy fire burns the so-called apostles inside and out, leaving a husk piloted by the spirit of the lamb, manifested in the tongue of flame. These undead speak in a confluence of ancient languages, uttering prophetic scriptures as they scorch the living.

The apostles follow the lamb on its onslaught, and, before the lamb retreats into the pit, it consumes each of its apostles to extinguish their flames.

Minion.

A branded apostle is a minion, which is a monster with the following special rules:

Hits. Instead of hit points, a minion has a number of hits (usually 1). It dies if it takes the specified number of hits. A minion takes a hit if it is

hit by an attack or fails a saving throw against a spell or effect that deals damage.

Saving Throws. If a spell deals damage on a successful save, it deals 1 hit to a minion on a success and 2 hits on a failure. If a spell calls for more than one minion to make a saving throw, all minions roll one save and use the result.

Initiative. Roll initiative once for all minions, which act on the same turn of initiative.

Massive Damage. Critical hits deal 2 hits to a minion. The GM can decide that other attacks that deal high damage, such as a rogue's Sneak Attack, also deal 2 hits.

Shadow. A 1st–4th level party encounters 3 (1d4 + 1) branded apostles.

Terror. A 5th–10th level party encounters 6 (1d4 + 4) branded apostles.

Nightmare. A 11th–16th level party encounters 6 (1d4 + 4) branded apostles.

THE LAMB

Large Celestial, Chaotic Evil

Speed

40 ft., fly 40 ft.

Damage Immunities

fire, necrotic, poison, radiant

Condition Immunities

charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses

truesight 120 ft.,
passive Perception 15

Languages

understands all languages
but can't speak

STR

20 (+5)

DEX

15 (+2)

CON

19 (+4)

INT

17 (+3)

WIS

21 (+5)

CHA

18 (+4)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the lamb fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Anti-Divinity. The lamb can't be affected or detected by spells cast by humanoids, such as clerics and paladins, that draw their power from a divine source.

Resurrection. When the lamb is killed, it is resurrected after 1 minute, regaining half of its hit points and becoming active again.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The lamb makes two attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* slashing damage.

Blasphemous Flame. *Ranged Spell Attack:* range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* fire damage.

Swallow Whole. The lamb makes a bite attack against a creature within 5 feet of it that has the grievous immortality condition and fewer than 10 hit points. On a hit, the target dies and its soul is destroyed. The lamb regains hit points equal to half of its total.

DREAD ACTIONS

The lamb takes one of the following dread actions before each hostile creature's turn. It doesn't take a dread action immediately following its own turn.

Gnash. The lamb makes one Bite attack.

Scorch. The lamb makes one Blasphemous Flame attack.

SHADOW

1st–4th Level Parties

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Multiattack 2 attacks

Legendary Resistance (1/Day)

HP

95

AC

14

DC

16

Atk

+8 to hit

Dmg

7 (1d4 + 5)

TERROR

5th–10th Level Parties

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Multiattack 3 attacks

Legendary Resistance (2/Day)

HP

152

AC

15

DC

17

Atk

+9 to hit

Dmg

14 (2d8 + 5)

NIGHTMARE

11th–16th Level Parties

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Multiattack 4 attacks

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

HP

228

AC

16

DC

19

Atk

+11 to hit

Dmg

16 (2d10 + 5)

MAKING A MONSTER

You can design your own *Insomnia*-style monster to bolster your menagerie of nightmares in a few (fairly) simple steps! Note that monster design can be a bit fiddly and math-intensive at the best of times, so a notepad and calculator are suggested for this process.

The process for designing a monster can be divided into two phases: the Concept Phase, in which you create an outline for which abilities and traits the monster should have, and the Design Phase, in which you decide on statistics for those abilities that result in a fair, engaging fight.

Concept Phase.

The first step in creating a monster is coming up with a concept around it. How does it hunt? What clues might it leave behind? Is it based on a movie or video game? What is its weakness? By finding the answers to these questions, you can translate your monster into a loose outline, ready for the design process.

Weakness and Strength.

Each *Insomnia* monster has a unique Weakness trait and a parallel Strength trait to counterbalance it. Players aren't meant to instantly track down the monster and kill it in a single combat—they should be investigating, researching, and preparing for the bulk of the adventure. To that end, the monster's Strength trait should make it functionally impossible to kill without first finding the monster's weakness.

The Strength trait could be as simple as a set of physical damage immunities or as complex as an aura that imposes a debilitating condition—such as frightened or paralyzed—on any character that approaches. It needn't make the monster literally invulnerable, but it should communicate to the players that attacking the monster head-on is foolhardy and give them a chance to escape.

The Weakness trait should eliminate the monster's Strength when a condition is met. Choose this Weakness to motivate the story directly, as it is the most essential element the players need to seek out. Ideally, avoid cliché weaknesses as well, as players knowledgeable with the genre might simply guess them instead of engaging with the investigation. (An unpredictable monster is a scary monster!)

Attacks.

How does the monster deal damage while in combat? Does it make attack rolls or force players to make saving throws? Does it seek to grapple, frighten, or paralyze players? You might also devise a more powerful ability, such as a dragon's breath weapon, that deals damage to multiple players and calls for a Recharge. These abilities are especially dangerous on *Insomnia* monsters, and will call for careful balancing in the Design Phase!

For now, take some notes on four or five ways the monster might engage with players, and you'll find statistics for these attacks in the Design Phase. Also note if the monster is likely to have Multiattack, a trait you can decide upon later.

Dread Actions.

Monsters in *Insomnia* differ massively from traditional monsters due to their Dread Actions. Whereas other monsters wait their turn, these monsters act between every turn!

Choose two or three Dread Actions appropriate to the monster. At most, a Dread Action should allow the monster to attack once or move up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Lair Actions.

When an entire adventure focuses on a single monster, it helps to give that monster a lair, a base of operations from which the monster attacks. Where has the monster called home? How are players likely to find it? What natural hazards does the lair present?

While fighting in its lair, the monster gains a set of lair actions. All lair actions occur on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties) and offer the monster one of three choices. Lair actions that call for a saving throw always have a DC 15.

Each lair action should focus on different aspects of play and, at most, only one lair action should deal damage. The others can create difficult terrain, obscure the battlefield, introduce a minion to the battle, or apply conditions to players that fail a saving throw.

Secondary Traits.

Finally, the monster calls for a number of traits and statistics that round out its encounter. Compare your monster against statistics of similar creatures and take notes on whether or not your monster should have any of the following:

- Special movement, such as a fly or climb speed
- Special senses, such as darkvision or blindsight
- Skill proficiencies
- Saving throw proficiencies
- Damage resistances or immunities (to types other than bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing)
- Condition immunities
- Languages
- Other traits, such as Keen Smell, that don't increase the monster's damage

You should also decide on the monster's size, alignment, and type.

Design Phase.

Once you have turned your concept into a loose outline, we can set about translating it into balanced, engaging statistics.

Challenge Rating.

At the onset, choose a challenge rating (CR) for your monster. Two or three levels higher than your party's level should ensure the fight is tough but manageable (unless the monster has minions or other creatures at its disposal).

Determine Baseline Statistics.

Using the following table and the monster's CR, determine its combat statistics: Proficiency Bonus (Prof), Armor Class (AC), Hit Points (HP), Attack Bonus (Atk), Average Damage Per Round (Dmg), and Save DC (DC).

You can increase any statistic by one level, as long as you decrease another value by one level. You can do so multiple times, as long as you don't increase a value more than twice. Once you are satisfied with a spread of numbers, note these statistics for later. Some of these values are used directly for the monster's statistics, whereas others provide a useful baseline.

Proficiency Bonus. The monster uses the value determined by the Baseline Statistics table for its stat block.

Armor Class. The monster uses the value determined by the Baseline Statistics table for its stat block. For many monsters, "Natural Armor" makes up for a lack of sufficient Dexterity for a high AC value.

Attack Bonus. The monster uses the value determined by the Baseline Statistics table for all of the attacks in its stat block.

Save DC. The monster uses the value determined by the Baseline Statistics table for any feature that calls for a saving throw.

Hit Points. The monster uses the value determined by the Baseline Statistics table for its hit points. You can roll for this number or use the average listed on the table.

Baseline Statistics.

CR	Prof	AC	HP	Atk	Dmg	DC
3	+2	13	105 (2d8 + 66)	+4	28	13
4	+2	14	120 (2d8 + 111)	+5	33	14
5	+3	15	135 (2d8 + 126)	+6	39	15
6	+3	15	150 (2d8 + 141)	+6	44	15
7	+3	15	165 (2d8 + 156)	+6	50	15
8	+3	16	180 (2d8 + 171)	+7	55	16
9	+4	16	195 (2d8 + 186)	+7	61	16
10	+4	17	210 (2d8 + 201)	+7	66	16
11	+4	17	225 (2d8 + 216)	+8	72	17
12	+4	17	240 (2d8 + 231)	+8	77	17
13	+5	18	255 (2d8 + 246)	+8	83	18
14	+5	18	270 (2d8 + 261)	+8	88	18
15	+5	18	285 (2d8 + 276)	+8	94	18
16	+5	18	300 (2d8 + 291)	+9	99	18
17	+6	19	315 (2d8 + 306)	+10	105	19
18	+6	19	330 (2d8 + 321)	+10	110	19
19	+6	19	345 (2d8 + 336)	+10	116	19
20	+6	19	380 (6d8 + 353)	+10	121	19
21	+7	19	420 (6d8 + 393)	+11	127	20
22	+7	19	465 (6d8 + 438)	+11	132	20

Work Backwards: Attack Ability Score.

Using the monster's proficiency bonus and attack bonus, we'll work backwards to determine the key ability score used to make its attacks. The ability score in question is Strength for most melee attacks, Dexterity for most ranged attacks, and the monster's spellcasting ability for spell attacks. As the designer, you decide on which ability score the monster uses for its attack and damage rolls, as appropriate to the type of attack it makes.

The monster's attack bonus (Atk on the Baseline Statistics table) is determined by the following equation:

$$\text{ATTACK BONUS} = \text{PROFICIENCY BONUS} + \text{ABILITY SCORE MODIFIER}$$

We already know the monster's attack bonus and proficiency bonus from the Baseline Statistics table, so we can determine which ability score is correct for the monster's statistics. Players familiar with determining an ability score modifier when making a character can work out this score easily enough, or you can use the following equation:

$$\text{ABILITY SCORE} = 10 + 2 \times (\text{ATTACK BONUS} - \text{PROFICIENCY BONUS})$$

You can increase this ability score by one, for example from 12 to 13, without consequence.

Work Backwards: Save Ability Score.

Similar to the monster's key ability score used in attacks, we can determine the score of whatever ability is tied to its saving throws. Use your best judgment to determine which ability the monster uses for its saving-throw-based abilities. A dragon's breath weapon is usually based on Constitution, whereas magical abilities are often based on Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma.

The monster's save DC is determined by the following equation:

$$\text{SAVE DC} = 8 + \text{PROFICIENCY BONUS} + \text{ABILITY SCORE MODIFIER}$$

Because we know the save DC and proficiency bonus from the Baseline Statistics table, we can work out the ability score with the following equation:

$$\text{ABILITY SCORE} = 10 + 2 \times (\text{SAVE DC} - 8 - \text{PROFICIENCY BONUS})$$

You can increase this ability score by one, for example from 12 to 13, without consequence.



Other Ability Scores.

The monster's other ability scores have less mechanical effect and largely inform roleplaying. Is the monster clever or single-minded? Clumsy or nimble? Pick appropriate numbers for the rest of the monster's ability scores. If you're unsure about a score, reference similar 5th Edition monster statistics for guidance.

Determine all of the ability score modifiers in the same way that a player does.

Skills and Saves.

If you decided that the monster has proficiency with skills or saving throws, you can determine them by adding the monster's proficiency bonus to its appropriate ability score modifiers.

Calculate Damage.

We can determine how much damage the monster deals with its attacks in a few steps.

Count the Attacks. First, we need to determine how many creatures the monster can hit in a round. To do so, we'll use the following assumptions:

All Attacks Hit. No matter the monster's attack bonus, assume every attack hits and every creature fails its saving throw.

Attacks Deal Average Damage. Use the Average Dice value table to help determine this average.

Three Dread Action Attacks Per Round. We calculate damage assuming that the monster will use its Dread Action to attack every turn. Furthermore, we assume there are three players. You can modify this number to match the number of players you expect will confront the monster.

Area of Effects Hit Two Creatures. If the monster deals damage in an area of effect, we assume that it hits two targets using this effect and that each target takes damage equal to one attack.

Recharge Abilities Count as Two Hits. If the monster has an ability that deals damage and must recharge (such as a dragon's fire breath), we assume it deals more damage than normal: equivalent to two hits against each target.

Average Damage. Once we know the number of overall attacks, we divide the damage from the Baseline Statistics table by this number of hits to determine the average damage on a hit. (Round to the nearest 0.5.)

Estimate with Dice. Now, you should decide on dice that give the closest average damage. Remember that we already know the monster's key ability score for attacks, so that modifier is added to the average value of the dice. Use the Dice Average Value table to assist with this calculation. This value doesn't have to be perfect, but should be within a point or two.

You can determine different values for different attacks and abilities, as long as the total amount of damage is still close (within around 5 points) to the baseline when you add up all the attacks.

Baseline Statistics.

Die	Average	Die	Average
1d4	2.5	2d4	5
1d6	3.5	2d6	7
1d8	4.5	2d8	9
1d10	5.5	2d10	11
1d12	6.5	2d12	13

Modify Statistics.

Finally, you can modify the monster with additional traits and features. Some common ones are listed below, but guidelines for other traits can be found in the 5th Edition rules.

Legendary Resistance. For each use of Legendary Resistance you give the monster (up to a maximum of 3), reduce its hit points by 30.

Magic Resistance. Reduce the monster's AC by 2.

Damage Resistances and Immunities. Divide the monster's hit points by 2 if it has resistance or immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, and most players are unlikely to be able to bypass this resistance.

PATRONS

That Guy
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Donelloth
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Mkscorpio89
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Tyler Kohlman
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Blayne Wilson
Kabe-kun
Austin Kavanagh
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