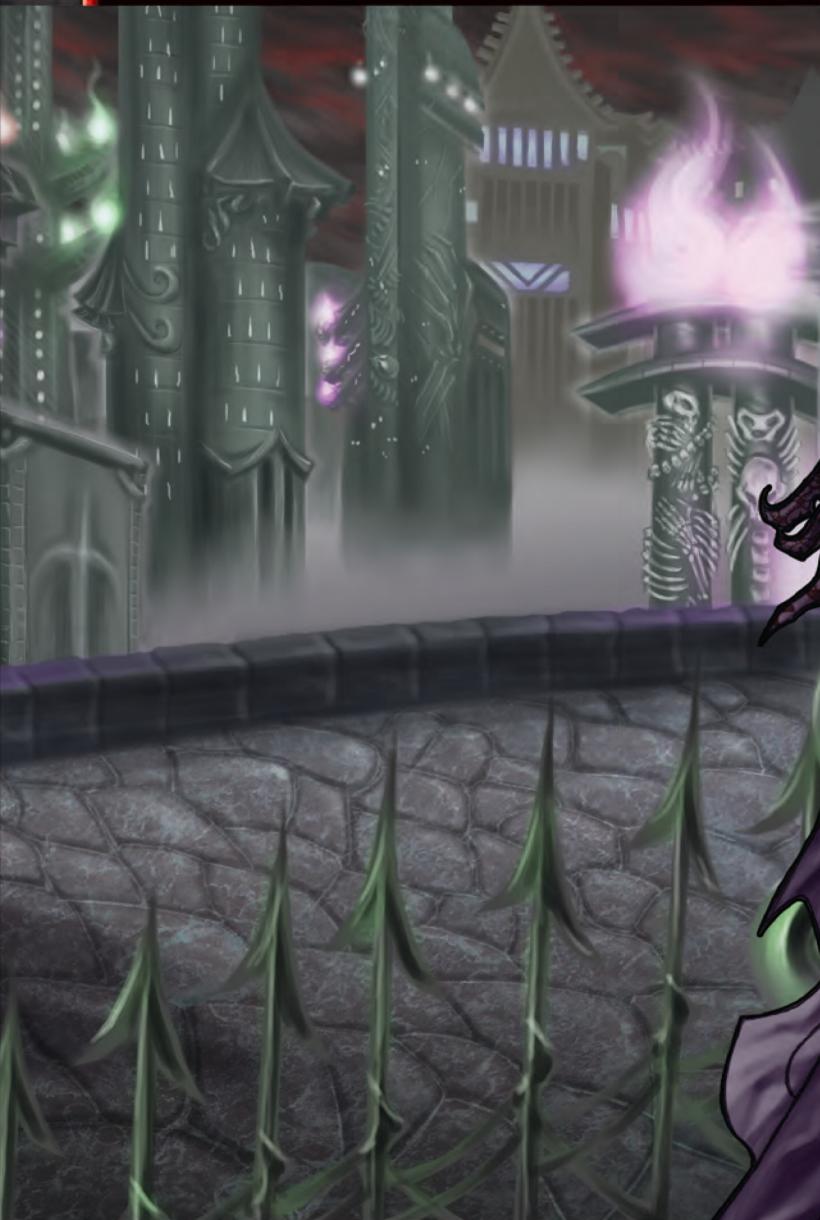


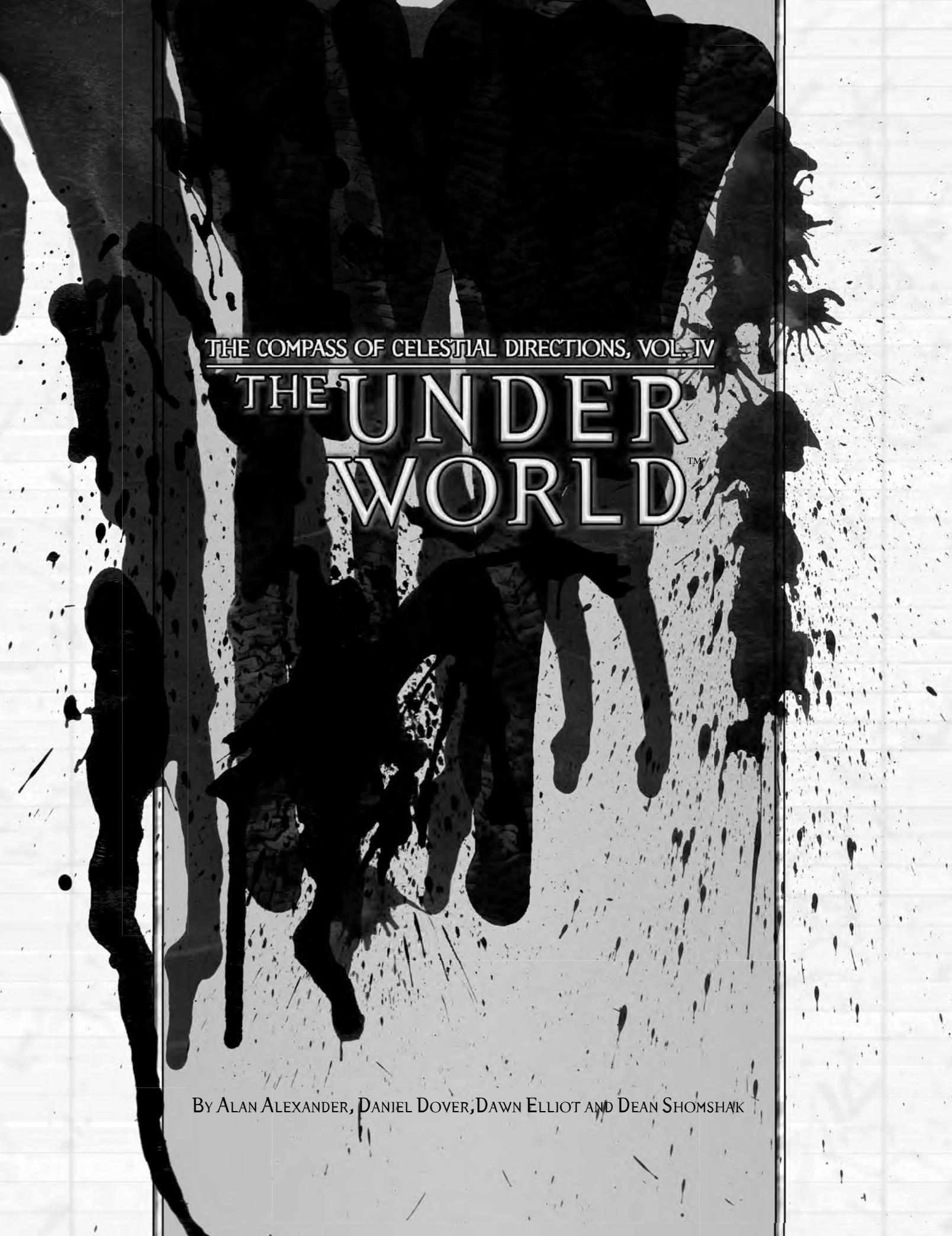
THE COMPASS OF CELESTIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. IV

# THE UNDER WORLD™



A SETTING  
BOOK FOR





THE COMPASS OF CELESTIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. IV

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THE UNDER WORLD™

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In this fifth of *Exalted*'s five Books of Sorcery, the nature and powers of the ghosts and demons that have endangered Creation since the Primordial War are explored. Eschewing the Cycle of Reincarnation, ghosts are an affront to the natural order, bringing more power to the Neverborn through their very existence, and even more so through the Ancestor Cult's worship. Demons, meanwhile, are the spawn of the imprisoned Yozis, called forth from Malfeas to do the bidding of powerful sorcerers or escaped into the world that they might cause havoc and do the will of their trapped progenitors. Will the returned Lawgivers succeed in curbing these spirits' effect on Creation, or are even the Solars endangered by the machinations of these beings and their dire masters?

## COMING NEXT IN THIS SERIES:

### THE COMPASS OF CELESTIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. V — MALFEAS

The fifth of five books dedicated to the supernatural locales of the *Exalted* setting, this supplement focuses on Malfeas. Prison to the Yozis and their demon spawn, Malfeas is a twisted place formed from the flesh of the defeated leader of the Primordials and containing the remainder of his vanquished cohorts. Imprisoned since the dawn of the First Age, these beings have bided their time, waiting for their chance to escape, claim vengeance on the gods and their champions and regain dominion over Creation. And with the rise of the Infernal Exalted, that chance is now. Will Creation's Exalted be able to set aside their differences to end this threat, or will the akuma among them sabotage their efforts from within?



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THE COMPASS OF CELESTIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. IV

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# THE UNDER WORLD™

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# INTRODUCTION

No exorciser harm thee.  
Nor no witchcraft charm thee.  
Ghost unlaid forbear thee.  
Nothing ill come near thee.  
Quiet consummation have,  
And renowned be thy grave.  
—William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*

Born from the deaths of Creation's architects, the Primordials, the Underworld now plays host to billions of Creation's dead. Resisting the call of Lethe, these ghosts reject the cycle of reincarnation, clinging to their identities and passions after death and helping to shape a whole world with their nostalgia.

Once, the Underworld acted as a bulwark between the world of the living and the forces of Oblivion that would devour it. Now, those very forces' champions, the Death-lords, control the Underworld—in fact if not in an official capacity. Will the return of the Lawgivers who once policed this Realm stem the tide of Oblivion's spread? Or have the forces of decay and entropy come too far to be stopped?

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. IV—The Underworld presents the land of the dead as a fully play-

able setting for **Exalted** series. Whether as a home base for games revolving around Abyssal Exalts or heroic ghosts or as a strange world for the Exalts of Creation to explore if they dare, Creation's dark mirror offers a whole new realm for players and Storytellers to explore.

### Chapter One: A History of the Underworld

This section focuses on Underworld history, from the time of its Creation with the future Neverborn's deaths to the present.

### Chapter Two: The Heart of the Underworld

This chapter focuses on the city of Stygia and the island-continent on which that necropolis lies. The most powerful and largest of the Underworld states, the Grand Necropolis houses the Calendar of Setesh, which governs the progression of time in this bleak reflection of Creation, as well as the Dual Monarchs whose worship powers it.

### Chapter Three: Roots and Leaves

The subject of this chapter is the Underworld's East, the most populous of the directions in the land of the dead as in the land of the living. The chapter also explores the influence of this region's native Deathlords and the nature of its most infamous shadowlands.

### Chapter Four: Dust and Ashes

This chapter concerns itself with the Southern Underworld, a land of verdant coasts that quickly shifts to desert as one moves inland. The South is also home to the Thousand, a mountain range honed by the military stronghold of the First and Forsaken Lion.

### Chapter Five: Night Tides

The Underworld's West is the least populous of directions. Yet it is home to the powerful Skullstone empire of the Deathlord known as the Silver Prince, whose only challenge to dominance over the Sea of Shadows is the White Fleet of Stygia and the West's own Lintha dead.

### Chapter Six: Stone Houses

A colder and harsher land than the one they left awaits the North's inhabitants beyond death. The direction's Deathlords compete for its meager resources, especially the vast shadowland of Marama's Fell.

### Chapter Seven: The Labyrinth

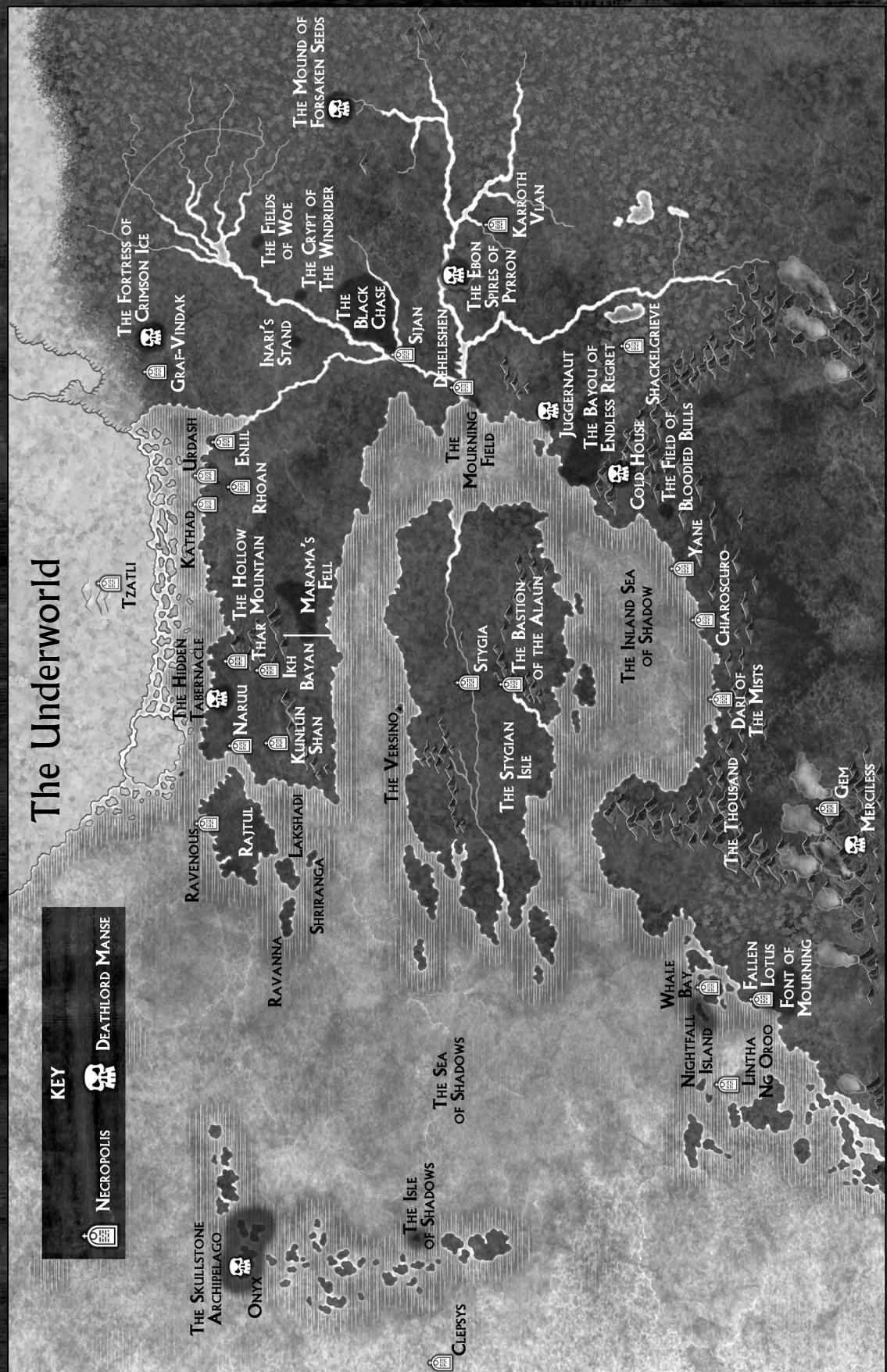
This chapter explores the Labyrinth, a strange world of twisted passages (and more twisted inhabitants) born from the nightmares of the Neverborn themselves. The Labyrinth underlies the whole of the Underworld and occasionally touches upon Creation as well. Some savants theorize it might be larger than both combined.

### Chapter Eight: Underworld Antagonists

The Underworld is a realm of many dangers, and some of the worst of these dangers are outlined here. Deathlords, Exalts, ghosts and spectres of great age and power all call the Underworld home, and the death dreams of the Neverborn give birth to unique entities called plasmics. Plasmic creatures range in power from some who might be a minor inconvenience to a ghost to those whose strength would give pause even to the Exalted.



# The Underworld



HOW LONG HAVE WE DEFENDED  
THIS BLEAK, ABHORRENT REALM?

HOW LONG HAS OUR POWER KEPT THE  
EXPANSION OF THE ABYSS IN CHECK?

IT DOESN'T MATTER.

OUR ERA OF DREAMS IS  
OVER. CREATION IS IN RUINS.

AND THE UNDERWORLD  
IS BURNING.

THIS ARMY OF THE HATEFUL AND HUNGRY DEAD  
LAID WASTE TO STYgia AFTER WE DIED.

IT WILL DEVOUR THE ENTIRE  
UNDERWORLD IN TIME.

IT'S LIKE HAS NEVER  
BEEN SEEN BEFORE.

AND NEVER WILL IT BE AGAIN  
IF WE ARE VICTORIOUS.

I'M NOT THE UNSTOPPABLE FORCE I WAS  
IN LIFE, BUT MY MIND IS CLEAR AT LAST.

HERE AT THE END...

FORWARD!

...I WILL BECOME WHAT I SHOULD  
HAVE BEEN ALL ALONG.



# CHAPTER ONE

# A HISTORY OF THE UNDERWORLD

The Underworld did not exist until the gods rebelled against the Primordials. The immortal gods remember this time and the proper cycle of reincarnation that the Primordials ordained. When people died, their rational, higher souls, called *hun*, left their corpses and immediately entered *Lethe*—not a place, but a state that washed away all memories before the souls entered new lives. The animal, lower souls, called *po*, stayed with the bodies and dissipated as the cadavers decayed.

Of Oblivion, the gods are less certain. Perhaps Oblivion existed as a place or state in its own right; perhaps it existed as part of the primal *Wyld*, which necessarily included the potential for nonexistence along with every other possibility. No entity within Creation ever faced Oblivion, however. Physically and spiritually, there were no true endings, only changes of form and state.

The death of the first Primordial changed everything. Creation's authors had not bound themselves to Creation's rules. A slain Primordial could not reincarnate, but it was too

powerful simply to disappear. The birth of the Underworld resolved this paradox.

Divine and Exalted savants do not understand how the first Primordial death created the Underworld. Did the dying Primordial's memories of Creation pull a second reality from the *Wyld*? Did its death rip away part of Creation's Essence and shape it into a flawed imitation? Is the Underworld all a dream in the eternally dying Primordials' minds? Prudent savants warn that such questions carry the risk of madness, for finite creatures—even gods—cannot fully comprehend their infinite creators. It suffices to say that the Underworld appeared, the slain Primordials became its Neverborn gods, and souls had two new alternatives to forgetfulness and reincarnation. They could linger in the half-reality of the Underworld or cease to exist entirely.

## THE OLD REALM

The dead know almost nothing of the Underworld's ancient history. As in Creation itself, cataclysmic wars destroyed

records and memories, forcing historically minded ghosts to fill gaps in knowledge with plausible supposition. Indeed, much of what the dead know about the Old Realm comes at third-hand, from ghosts of unusually learned savants—some of them former Exalted—who heard tales from gods or studied ancient and fragmentary archives. Nevertheless, the dead have a general outline of the Underworld's early millennia.

The first ghosts appeared in the Underworld almost immediately, for the war against the Primordials slew huge numbers of mortal creatures. No sane creatures from that early time still exist to tell anyone what they experienced. Humans, however, were not the only pioneers in the Underworld. The first Exalted massacred whole populations for siding with the Primordials, and those slaughtered races left many ghosts. To this day, the feathered alaun of the Blessed Isle and the green-skinned, half-demonic Lintha of the West have enclaves of ghosts in the Underworld, still dwelling in regions that correspond to the lands they once ruled. (The Dragon Kings also died in large numbers, slain by the Primordials' servants for siding with the Unconquered Sun, but their souls did not suffer the same attraction to the Underworld that those of other races did.)

At this time, the Underworld was a turbulent chaos wracked with storms and earthquakes—tangible expressions of the rage the Neverborn felt in their death-dreams. The dead created tiny islands of stability by sheer force of will, for the substance of the Underworld reacts to ritual and

concentrated prayer far more easily than does the substance of Creation. This was especially true when the Underworld itself was largely unformed.

The traditions of the Underworld say that once the first human ghosts secured some degree of stability for themselves, they sent expeditions to the center of their new world, whence came the dread tempests of Neverborn wrath. Many great heroes—the heroic dead of the Primordial War—battled through unimaginable perils to reach the Underworld's center, the immense pit called the Mouth of the Void, or the Well of Oblivion.

The annals of Heaven suggest, however, that these courageous souls had help. Within decades after the remaining Primordials' surrender, some Exalted sought to explore the Underworld and discover what this new realm meant for Creation. They joined the expeditions to the Mouth of the Void, sometimes in company with deceased former comrades.

Together, these mighty heroes of the living and the dead strove to contain the storms of wrath erupting from the Well of Oblivion. They hedged the great pit with barriers of sorcery and geomancy, laying the foundation for the city of Stygia. In time, the Neverborn quieted and slid deeper into slumber. The whirlwinds of iron, blood and gall ceased to blow. The land ceased to convulse. The Underworld coalesced as a darkly faded copy of Creation, with a great island-continent surrounded by a Sea of Shadows and a periphery divided into quarters by the influences of



the elemental poles. The Underworld's North was cold and windy; its West, an island-studded sea; great rivers flowed through dark Eastern forests; and great deserts spread across the South, with black fires beyond. But beneath that ersatz Creation lay the twisted, ever-changing caves and tunnels of the Labyrinth, the eldritch tomb-cadavers of the Neverborn and the Abyss itself. Ironically, the Mouth of the Void's position corresponded to Mount Meru and the Elemental Pole of Earth.

The Underworld also differed from Creation in its lack of time and change. The Underworld's sun hung motionless on the Eastern horizon, blotted out by heavy, unmoving clouds, leaving the Underworld in a dim half-light. The early explorers noted strange shifts of time, in which they thought they had traveled for weeks but found that only hours had passed in Creation—or the other way around. Sidereal savants immediately figured out that the Loom of Fate that guides time and causality in Creation had little power over the Underworld... a disturbing discovery indeed.

## MISSIONARY WORK

The Underworld presented the early Exalted with a problem. On one hand, ghosts were just *wrong*. Many early Zenith Castes wanted to guide ghosts back into the cycle of reincarnation to find new life in the light of the Unconquered Sun. Lunar priests of the Waxing Moon Caste and a number of Sidereals also called for a missionary campaign. The Lunars did so because the ghosts' refusal to abandon their own identities was an affront to the Changing Lady. The Sidereals did so because anything outside fate was, by definition, a threat to Creation. On the other hand, however, the city of Stygia needed a populace to maintain it and keep the Mouth of the Void contained. In the end, the Solar Deliberative reached a compromise that pretty much pleased no one. It endorsed Stygia as a city of the dead—hopefully *the* city of the dead. The priestly Exalted could travel and preach as they liked through the rest of the Underworld.

The annals of Heaven say that these missionaries succeeded brilliantly. The missionaries persuaded most of the human ghosts to accept Lethe if they did not want to work in Stygia. For the next few centuries, Exalted priests occasionally visited the Underworld to steer ghosts toward reincarnation. Meanwhile, in Creation, Exalted priests taught mortals that they should not tarry after death, but seek reincarnation at once. The population of human ghosts grew, but slowly.

The Exalted priests did not succeed as well with ghosts of the Lintha and alaun. No force or Charm could persuade many of these Primordial loyalists. Heaven knows little of what transpired among these early ghosts, but it is believed that the most devout ones descended into the Labyrinth in search of their slain gods. They heard the faint whisper of Neverborn dreams there and returned with preachings of their own. No one knows how many alaun or Lintha ghosts entered Lethe, but at least some such ghosts chose the Labyrinth and became the first spectres.

## THE FIRST SHADOWLANDS

The Primordial War scarred Creation with the first shadowlands—some of them from deaths of the Primordials themselves. Some sages believe the first Primordial to die fell on a Northwestern subcontinent called Okeanos. The dreadful battle shattered and inundated the land, leaving the islands of Coral, Skullstone and the Neck. Each of the Primordial's component souls left a separate shadowland in what would become the Skullstone Archipelago, and because these more-than-divine deaths were linked, the shadowlands were linked as well. The core shadowlands of Skullstone are stable, but belts of shadowland connect them in patterns that shift with the seasons and the tides. One night, a certain course might be safe, while the next night, it leads a ship into the Underworld.

Savants of the current Age do not need the annals of Heaven to know which shadowlands were left by the death of a Primordial or one of its component souls. These shadowlands endure. Even at the height of its power, the Solar Deliberative could not reclaim them for Creation.

## STYGIA AND MERU

Like every society, the Old Realm knew changes of fashion and ideology. At first, the Deliberative considered ghostly existence a rather unpleasant duty that some mortals accepted—for a time—to build and strengthen Stygia. Eventually, a time came when many leading members of the Deliberative accepted that the dead did not need to enter Lethe right away. Why should a great dramatist leave his final play unfinished just because he died? Why should devoted spouses and parents not receive a chance to see their loved ones cared for? Why should the wise deny their counsel to later generations? The Exalted applied such compassionate logic first in a few special cases, then generally. The transition happened so gradually that hardly anyone noticed, and even fewer objected.

Naturally, the deceased favorites of the Exalted congregated in Stygia. The ring of monuments built around the Well of Oblivion became an important city in its own right—almost a suburb of the Solars' capital, Meru. At the height of the Old Realm, Exalted heroes often visited Stygia. Dawn Castes and other warriors passed through on their way to hunt hekatonkhires. Zeniths and other priestly Exalted made sure that the dead continued to revere the Incarnae. Twilight Castes sought the mysteries of the dead, the Neverborn and the Abyss itself. They descended the great twin ramps into the Mouth of the Void and laid wards to prevent anyone but a few cautious investigators from doing likewise. Lawgivers of the Night Caste stalked through the Labyrinth, learned the secrets of the nephwracks and convinced the Deliberative to wall away these malign spectres. Eclipse Castes liaised between the living and the dead, explored the furthest reaches of the Underworld and invaded the dreams of the Neverborn themselves to maneuver them into binding oaths of safe conduct. A few Exalted believed they



could bring the entire Underworld under the Deliberative's benevolent rule.

## THE DUAL MONARCHY

At some point in Stygia's history, the city gained rulers of its own. The details are almost unknown. The annals of Heaven are of no use, for Heaven knew only what the Exalted told of the Underworld. If the Solar Deliberative knew about the coming of the Dual Monarchs and their construction of the Calendar of Setesh, the Deliberative chose not to reveal its knowledge. Regardless, the truth is now lost to all.

Four powerful new figures appeared in the city: two male and two female, two clad in black and two in white. The dead soon learned that these were actually two ghosts, who could appear in male and female forms. They used different names when they wore different genders, though, and showed distinctly different personalities as well.

Each of these four entities wielded great power and performed great deeds. The man in white, called Usine, walked among the dead to bring hope and comfort as the Zenith Castes had done. The woman in white, Eset, confronted hekatonkhires and ghosts maddened by Oblivion and drove them down into the Labyrinth. She also quelled the storms that erupted from the Well of Oblivion. The woman in black, Nebthys, knew all hidden things and brought justice to the dead. The man in black, Setesh, wrought the greatest wonder of all: He built a massive machine of metal gears, crystal lamps and jewel orbs and hooked it to the sky, directly over the Mouth of the Void. Below it, hanging like the nest of a wasp, he built a great palace and connected it to the ground by two mighty bridges. Setesh bade the dead to pray for a miracle. The mechanism caught those prayers and began to turn... and the sun of the Underworld rose for the first time. The dead of Stygia acclaimed the two (or four) as their king and queen. The Solar Deliberative, voicing no objection, dealt with them as allies. They became the Dual Monarchs: two rulers, each with two aspects.

Savants in Creation, Heaven and the Underworld sought the identities and origins of the Dual Monarchs for millennia. They found many contradictory "truths." The Dual Monarchs are gods banished from Heaven. They are secret servants of the Unconquered Sun, or of Gaia. They are ghosts of mighty Exalted—Solar and Lunar mates who merged their souls to stay together after death. Setesh, of course, was a Twilight Caste in life... if he wasn't a Sidereal deeply learned in the mysteries of the Loom of Fate. The Monarchs are hekatonkhires who turned against the Neverborn. They are artificial personalities created by the Deliberative. They were sent by Autochthon the Great Maker, from wherever he went after he left Creation. Gods and Exalted have found plausible evidence for all these theories, and more.

Whatever the Dual Monarchs were barely matters now. The original monarchs infused their Essence into their crowns and masks of office. Several times in the Underworld's history, individual Monarchs have stepped down to accept

## UNDERWORLD DEMESNES

The Underworld imitates most aspects of Creation, including demesnes. The Underworld has two kinds of demesnes: Terrestrial zones charged with elemental Essence, and Abyssal zones infused with the necrotic Essence of the Labyrinth and Oblivion. Both sorts can be capped with manses to generate hearthstones.

The Underworld's geomantic Essence, however, is not the same as Creation's. Death taints its elemental demesnes. As a result, Terrestrial hearthstones from Underworld manses lose their power in Creation. They become merely hard rocks, providing neither Essence nor special powers through their resonance with an Exalt's aura. They work just fine in shadowlands at all times.

Terrestrial hearthstones from Creation, however, still supply half their normal Essence to characters in the Underworld, and their full supply of Essence during Calibration. The powerful geomancy of Creation, a complete and living world, is powerful enough to push the Essence channeled through a manse all the way into the deathly copy that is the Underworld. Exalted who carry Terrestrial hearthstones from Creation into the Underworld also retain the hearthstones' special magical powers. Terrestrial hearthstones always operate at full power in shadowlands, where Creation's geomancy merges with that of the Underworld.

Abyssal hearthstones work equally well in Creation, shadowlands or the Underworld at all times. The rot of Oblivion reaches through both worlds. These hearthstones do not work in Yu-Shan or other realms.

Unless specified otherwise, Solar, Lunar and Sidereal hearthstones do not ever work in the Underworld. They provide their normal benefits in shadowlands, but only during Calibration.

Lethe. New ghosts took their place... and from the moment they donned their crown and mask, they became the Dual Monarchs they replaced, knowing all their predecessors knew and wielding all their power.

## SIJAN

One other city also dates from the beginning of the Underworld. When the Primordial War began, the town of Sijan already devoted itself to interring and honoring the dead. In those days, wise folk knew that the corpse meant nothing to the dead. It was a suit of clothes the soul discarded to don the raiment of a new life. Nevertheless, people wanted to show respect to the dead, and a funeral gave them a means to do so. Or perhaps the Sijanese knew what was coming.

The annals of Heaven say that as each Primordial fell, the Sijanese performed funeral rites specially designed for each component soul, urging the dead cosmogon to rest in peace. The annals of Heaven do not describe these rites, however, by express command of the Maiden of Endings. If any records survive, no one knows except the most senior members of the Morticians' Order.

The funereal city soon began dealing with the ghosts of mortal clients too. Before the Lawgivers even thought of exploring it, the Morticians' Order had already contacted the Underworld and knew how to house and appease the dead. Sijan, therefore, rather than Stygia, claims the honor of the first city of the Underworld... something that native Sijanese ghosts enjoy pointing out to visitors, especially visitors from Stygia. In the later centuries of the Old Realm, Stygia and Sijan maintained a mostly friendly rivalry over which was the true spiritual center of the Underworld. Stygia had the Dual Monarchs to whom all prayed, and the Calendar of Setesh; Sijan led in the development of Arcanoi and finding ways for the living to interact with the dead.

## THE BLACK NADIR CONCORDAT

At some point during the Old Realm's history, three Lawgivers and two Lunar Exalted formed a secret group called the Black Nadir Concordat. These Exalts sought to wrest the secrets of Creation and Oblivion from the Neverborn.

### SOULSTEEL

The Primordial Autochthon knew the uses of soulsteel. The pattern spiders he built for the Loom of Fate incorporate the metal in their workings. In the Old Realm, however, soulsteel became the last and rarest of the five magical materials to be used.

Foolhardy people may extract small veins of soulsteel from the depths of the Mouth of the Void. The power of the Neverborn can also convert souls directly into soulsteel—a danger for any ghost who dares to touch their tombs. Most soulsteel, however, is made by smelting a black ore from the Labyrinth with souls of the dead. The ghosts trapped in the black metal cannot accept Lethe or even surrender to Oblivion. They are trapped in eternal torment and despair.

Late in the Age of Splendor, the Solar Deliberative made having one's soul forged into soulsteel the punishment for the most heinous of criminals. No criminal could be condemned to become soulsteel unless a special court ruled that he had destroyed others' lives so completely that their victims either were likely to choose Oblivion after death or had already done so. As time passed, though, and clever artisans found more uses for soulsteel, the sentencing guidelines became more flexible.

It was an audacious goal. Many would have called it insane... which is why the five didn't tell anyone of their plan. They were confident. After all, Twilight Caste sorcerers called up Third Circle demons—the primary souls of defeated and maimed Primordials—and forced them to serve. The Neverborn were *dead*. How hard could it be to compel them?

The Black Nadir Concordat cracked open Neverborn tombs and roused the sleepers. Surviving the outpouring of Primordial shock, rage and fear, the Concordat returned from the edge of the Abyss with the secrets of necromancy. In time, the Exalts told a few other Exalted what they did, and taught what they had learned from the Neverborn themselves.

While the Concordat troubled the dreams of the Neverborn and listened to the nightmares they provoked, the slain Primordials' dreams poured with new force through the Labyrinth. The five daring Exalted were not the only listeners. Countless spectres also heard and gained the same dark knowledge.

(For a more extensive account of the Concordat and its deeds after it returned to Creation, see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The Black Treatise**, pp. 9–14.)

### UNDERWORLD EXPANSION

During the High First Age, the Solar Deliberative expanded Creation by thousands of miles. The Underworld expanded along with it. New lands, such as the Outer Continent created in the West, began as gray, nearly featureless phantasms. They gained solidity and detail as mortal inhabitants of the new lands died, passed to the Underworld and shaped it through their memories and attempts to re-create the lives they had known.

## THE USURPATION

By the end of the Old Realm, the Solars thought they had the Underworld well in hand. Almost every ghost in the Underworld worshiped the Dual Monarchs, uniting the dead in a cult that powered the Calendar of Setesh and established an economy based on storing and redistributing the excess Essence of prayer. The Dual Monarchs supported the Deliberative without making any demands in return.

Oh, there were problems. Quite a number of nigh-mindless lower souls descended to the Labyrinth as hungry ghosts instead of dissipating as they should. Now and then, powerful spectres—nephwracks and mortwrights—gathered hordes of these hungry ghosts and invaded the Underworld to ravage and terrorize the dead. If the local ghosts were lucky, a few Solar and Lunar heroes with gleaming daiklaves and potent Charms arrived promptly to slaughter the invaders, usually returning to Creation in time for dinner. If the



dead were not so lucky, the Exalted annihilated everything in several square miles using magitech and sorcery so they could be home in time for lunch. Either way, the legions of Oblivion didn't get very far.

When the Dragon-Blooded rose up against the Solars, the nephwracks seemed to know almost immediately. They didn't wait very long before armies of spectres battered down the walls and wards that kept them from the Mouth of the Void, then stormed upward and invaded Stygia itself. With them came countless tens of thousands of hungry ghosts. Other legions of spectres and hungry ghosts erupted in necropolis throughout the Underworld. The Dual Monarchs asked the Deliberative for help but found the Deliberative no longer existed. After a week of hard fighting, the Dual Monarchs evacuated Stygia.

This evacuation, more than the other battles against Oblivion's armies, terrified the dead. When the Dual Monarchs no longer reigned and performed their rituals, the Calendar of Setesh stopped—as did the Underworld's sun. At least the Dual Monarchs timed their flight so the sun hovered at high noon, instead of at night when the spectres would have gained the advantage of darkness.

Because the Calendar stopped, the dead never knew how

long the war against the spectres lasted. For the first phase of the war, the armies of Oblivion gained victory after victory. Their nephwrack priests had learned necromancy from the projected dreams of the Neverborn, and the dead could not stand against this terrible power.

## THE SPECTRE WAR

Ironically, the Dragon-Blooded who endangered the Underworld by murdering the Solar Exalted saved the Underworld in the same way. The Dragon-Blooded took care to give each of their victims a grand funeral. Most Solar ghosts were appeased and immediately entered Lethe. Others took the time to look at the Underworld and found *there was a war on!* A war against servants of the dead Primordials, the enemies the Exalted were created to fight!

Dozens of dead Solars saw their duty, or at least one more chance for glory. They quickly rallied the forces of the dead and launched powerful counterattacks. Of course, the Solar ghosts no longer wielded their former Charms, and they had no experience with Arcanoi. They kept their strength of Essence, however, as well as prodigious competence at whatever had interested them in life. What's more, the Dragon-Blooded buried their murdered masters with all their

panoply of weapons, armor and other implements of power. Each artifact buried thus cast a shadow of equal power into the Underworld. Therefore, a dead Dawn Caste general (for instance) was still a tactical genius with a Grand Daiklave of Conquest and millennia of practice at using it.

As the reclamation of the Underworld proceeded, other Exalted ghosts joined the fight. Many a slain Lunar fought beside his Solar mate. Sidereals murdered for opposing the Usurpation joined the campaign, bereft of their former fate-twisting Charms but still wielding powerful martial arts. They saw that the Lawgivers still could be great and good. Even many Dragon-Blooded who died fighting the Solars returned to their overthrown masters' side in the Underworld. They had known the Lawgivers only as jaded despots. Now they saw what the heroes of the Unconquered Sun could be when they had to fight for a world's survival.

The Dual Monarchs themselves acquired a powerful force of their own: thousands of nigh-indestructible effigies of warriors, wrought in black jade and buried with a god-king of the Old Realm. Usine divined the secrets of the white jade key that activated the jade warriors. No one but the Dual Monarchs now know where they found this tomb or whether the Solar god-king's ghost objected to the confiscation or had long ago entered Lethe.

At last, the armies of the dead converged on Stygia and retook the ruined capital of the Underworld. Great artisans from the Varang necropoli assisted the Dual Monarchs in repairing the Calendar of Setesh. Across the Underworld, ghosts rejoiced as they watched the sun move through the bleak sky once more.

After the celebrations ended, most of the Exalted ghosts returned to their tombs and prepared themselves for Lethe. As is the way of Lethe, a ghost can speak one final message to anyone they choose, in Creation, the Underworld or Yu-Shan, before they forget themselves and are reborn. In the month after the Spectre War ended, many people heard such messages. Several Bronze Faction leaders received messages from slain colleagues, saying, *You were wrong*. Many Dragon-Blooded conspirators received similar messages. Some remaining Gold Faction members heard, *We were right*, and gained the assurance that would preserve their movement for 15 centuries more. But other Usurpation leaders heard dead Lawgivers tell them they were right and that their choice had been righteous. Other Solars addressed their final words to the Unconquered Sun. Most of all, these former Solars said, *I'm sorry, and I am ashamed*.

## THE COMING OF THE DEATHLORDS

Not all the dead Solars felt shame for their past misdeeds or desired to protect their fellow (deceased) human beings from the Neverborn. Some of them fought for the glory of conquest and hoped to rule the Underworld themselves. Others felt such rage, hatred and lust for revenge that they didn't care if the spectral armies conquered the Underworld. Creation had betrayed them, the Unconquered Sun had

## DEATH AND THE GREAT CURSE

By the time of the Usurpation, most of the Lawgivers were at least half mad from the Great Curse and from having their every whim instantly fulfilled. The Great Curse, however, is tied to the Exaltation. When the Solars died, their cursed Exaltations no longer warped the thinking of their higher souls. Even in madness, most Solars still wanted to do good. They sincerely thought their megalomaniac deeds were for the good of Creation. Many of their ghosts looked back on their lives and promptly entered Lethe in shame. Others sought atonement for their crimes and saved the Underworld.

Other Exalted ghosts took a very different course. Maybe the Great Curse originally twisted them toward megalomania, but they rejected the chance offered by death to evaluate their lives and deeds. Instead, they chose rage and spite and revenge. No curse from the Primordials forced them to heed the Neverborn and become the Deathlords.

spurned them, their Dragon-Blooded servants and Sidereal advisors had struck them down... even their Lunar consorts had failed them. They must all pay!

No one but the Deathlords themselves could say why each one of them listened to the Neverborn. Some of them, certainly, wanted to punish Creation. Others likely acted from the perverse pride of self-pity. Having lost so much, they chose to throw away what remained to them by surrendering to their ancient foes. The same lure of forbidden knowledge that drew the Black Nadir Concordat surely ensnared other Solar ghosts. A few probably thought they could exploit the Neverborn for power but betray them in the end. Some of them quickly followed the Whispers of the Neverborn. Others succumbed only after many years.

One by one, however, 10 ghosts found their way through the Labyrinth to the edge of the Void. They entered the Neverborn tombs cracked by the Black Nadir Concordat. They came forth changed and consigned their names to the Abyss as a token of their fealty. No more were they merely powerful ghosts. They were Deathlords, the champions and archpriests of the Neverborn and Oblivion itself, sworn by unbreakable oaths to bring an end to all things.

## THE LOW FIRST AGE

While the Shogunate built a new world on the wreckage of the Old Realm, the dead strove to repair the Underworld. The battles of the Usurpation left many shadowlands, and the Terrestrial Exalted created more as they massacred the races and creatures bred by the Solars. The death camp of Marama's Fell, for instance, became one of the largest shadowlands of all time. Some ghosts—particularly those of the Dragon-Blooded's victims—used the shadowlands to raid



into Creation. The Dual Monarchs did not endorse such attempts at revenge, but they did not stop them either. On the whole, however, the centuries of the Shogunate passed quietly in the Underworld.

## DEATHLORDS RISING

The Deathlords did not draw attention to themselves at first. Some Deathlords ruled small domains as scholar-kings. Others posed as priests or philosophers whose doctrines seemed superficially reasonable but led to the Void. The Deathlords could not completely hide their power (assuming they wanted to), but few ghosts realized just how powerful they truly were, or how much influence they acquired. The Deathlords acted slowly. They waited decades between each province conquered, each cult founded or each new magical power revealed.

The Seven Divine Counselors of Stygia spoke against the Deathlords from the beginning. These ghostly savants dated back almost to the founding of the city. They warned the Dual Monarchs, and anyone else who would listen, to shun the Deathlords. The Dual Monarchs dealt with the Deathlords politely but kept them at a distance. Most ghosts, if they thought about the Deathlords at all, thought their restraint in using their power showed they had modest ambitions. Perhaps the Seven Counselors were merely jealous that someone possessed secrets that they did not.

### DEATHLORDS IN CREATION

If the Deathlords acted in Creation during the Shogunate period, they were subtle enough that even the Sidereal Exalted did not appreciate the full danger they posed. It's possible they encouraged activities that led to shadowlands, such as the genocide against the Solars' artificial life forms. Consider, for instance, Marama's Fell. The Dragon-Blooded were not very bright in letting the shadowland grow without limit. Instead of several small shadowlands that they might have repaired, they made one enormous and ineradicable shadowland. They also delivered countless angry, powerful ghosts to the Deathlords, who might have recruited them through remnant conditioning of loyalty to Solars. Storytellers must decide for themselves how the Deathlords might have manipulated the Shogunate and what consequences persist in the Time of Tumult.

### NEPHWRACK EVANGELISM

The Deathlords were not the only apostles of Oblivion. While the Underworld's armies had routed the spectral hordes, sealing off the Labyrinth was no longer possible. Reluctantly, the kings of the dead realized they had to negotiate if they wanted to avert an endless war. Nephwracks and other servants of Oblivion were allowed to leave the Labyrinth, to trade

with other ghosts and to preach the creed of annihilation if they chose, as long as they didn't cause too much trouble. Everyone knew that nephwracks were evil and insane, but their communion with the Neverborn and the Void did sometimes result in useful insights. They persuaded some ghosts to follow them back into the Labyrinth, but there was hardly a mass pilgrimage to the Abyss. Compared to the nephwracks, the Deathlords sounded pretty reasonable.

## THE AGE OF SORROWS

The Great Contagion surprised and terrified the dead as much as it did the living. Never before had so many ghosts appeared in the Underworld at once... and never were so many left without living relatives to pray for them. The nations of the dead struggled to accommodate the vast increase in population.

The dead learned about the Fair Folk attack only after it ended. The Fair Folk dissolved Creation back into the Wyld as they advanced, which dissolved the Underworld's outer provinces too. The ghosts did not know what was happening. Vast lands simply *disappeared*, and very few ghosts moved quickly enough to escape the dissolution. Only after the Scarlet Empress drove the Fair Folk back into the Wyld did the dead have a chance to learn what had occurred in Creation.

### THREE NEW DEATHLORDS

During the Low First Age, the number of Deathlords rose to 13. At least two of the new recruits to Oblivion were ghosts of Solars who hid from the Usurpation. They delayed their deaths for centuries, and it wasn't even the Dragon-Blooded who slew them, but they still accepted the pact with the Neverborn out of wrath and pride. Creation knows them now as the Walker in Darkness and the Mask of Winters. They both feel they have a lot to prove to their older colleagues and rivals.

### DISSENTION AMONG DEATHLORDS

The Deathlords, of course, brought about both the Great Contagion and the Fair Folk invasion. The Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils pulled the Great Contagion from the mystic Well of Udr. It took her 100 years, but she considered the results well worth the effort. The First and Forsaken Lion and Eye and Seven Despairs invited the Fair Folk to invade and assisted them in breaching the defenses the Solar Deliberative left at Creation's rim.

The plague and the invasion were intended to destroy Creation for the pleasure of the Neverborn. The Fair Folk certainly could not have invaded so easily had the Great Contagion not already crippled the Shogunate and slain so many of its Dragon-Blooded defenders. The Deathlords disagree, however, about the reasons why they failed.

The Dowager insists that the Great Contagion would infallibly have slain every mortal in Creation, leaving no possibility of souls passing to new lives. With the cycle of reincarnation broken, all souls would eventually succumb to Oblivion and take the Underworld with them. She accuses the First and Forsaken Lion and Eye and Seven Despairs of spoiling the plan by drawing in the Fair Folk. The Wyld energies the raksha carried into Creation altered the plague so that it slew only nine in ten.

Eye and Seven Despairs, on the other hand, insists that their Neverborn masters commanded him and the Lion to call in the Fair Folk. The Neverborn didn't just want Creation dead, they wanted it annihilated, now. It isn't his fault that Creation survived. Who knew that a mere Terrestrial Exalt could master the Realm Defense Grid when no one had activated it in centuries?

The First and Forsaken Lion merely says that his timing was off. If he had waited a week longer, the Fair Folk would have destroyed Creation. The Neverborn would have received the Oblivion they crave, and all the Underworld with them. The Neverborn punished him for his lapse in strategic judgment. He will not let his impatience master him again.

The Deathlords face a fundamental problem in that they do not fully understand their masters. Despite their vast age, knowledge and experience, they remain finite creatures. The Neverborn are not. They do not think as mortals think or speak as mortals speak. Lesser creatures might "hear" words from the Neverborn... but that is merely their mind's attempt to process a stream of images, emotions and concepts from the Neverborn's dreams. The Deathlords and nephwracks understand the Neverborn better than anyone else can, but even they find their masters' commands difficult to interpret.

## CONQUEST OF STYgia

Once the Deathlords realized that Creation would not die after all, they maneuvered quickly to exploit the chaos caused by the influx of countless millions of new ghosts. They offered to help the rulers of the dead by using Charms to improve governance and educate the masses of confused and frightened ghosts about existence in the Underworld. Ambitious soldiers and bureaucrats found positions of power and respect in the Deathlords' own organizations. The Deathlords likewise seemed to have inexhaustible supplies of Essence, jade, grave goods and other wealth with which to bribe servants and kings alike. In just a few years, the reclusive sages and mystics established themselves as indispensable powerbrokers to the dead.

Naturally, some ghosts distrusted the Deathlords' sudden rise to power. Chief among them were the Seven Divine Counselors of Stygia. Before, most ghosts dismissed their warnings as envy or alarmism. Now, the Counselors' warnings about the Deathlords' power and ambition seemed more plausible. At last, the Counselors issued the ultimate condemnation. They named the Deathlords as the authors of the Great Contagion.

## WHAT DID THE NEVERBORN WANT?

As lesser ghosts are fettered to grave markers, living relatives and other things in Creation that they care about, the Neverborn are fettered to Creation as a whole. They cannot enter Oblivion as long as Creation still exists. The Deathlords believe that their masters desire universal Oblivion—to end their own half-existence and take everything else with them. But is that true? Storytellers can find other motives behind the Great Contagion and other interpretations of what happened, including what happened to the sections of the Underworld destroyed in the Fair Folk invasion.

• **Screw-Up:** The Dowager is right. The First and Forsaken Lion and Eye and Seven Despairs lie when they say their Neverborn patrons commanded them to bring in the Fair Folk. They just got impatient and wanted to steal the credit for destroying Creation.

• **Missed Timing:** The Lion is right. The Neverborn *did* want the Fair Folk invasion, but the two Deathlords acted too soon. If they had waited until everyone was dead, the Wyld would have consumed Creation and the Underworld would have dissolved into Oblivion, Neverborn and all.

• **Suckers:** Eye and Seven Despairs is right, but he hasn't figured out the full plot. The Neverborn deceive their servants. As at Creation's rim, the Wyld consumed the outer provinces of the Underworld. Had the Fair Folk succeeded, they would have delivered the Neverborn not to Oblivion, but to the primal Wyld—which is what the Neverborn intended all along. The Outer Chaos lacks all divisions, including the distinction between life and death. The Neverborn would have become Primordials again, with all their original power and freedom. What do they care if Creation dies? They can make a new one.

A few savants in Heaven, Creation and the Underworld also evolved these and other theories, based on what little they know about the Deathlords and the Neverborn. No one but the Neverborn, however, could know the truth.

All 13 Deathlords knew they could not let the Counselors reveal any more of their secrets. The First and Forsaken Lion took action first. He mustered his army—an army that turned out to be much larger than anyone thought—and marched on Stygia. He used the hosts of Contagion dead newly arrived in Stygia as a pretext, saying that the city could not control its sudden increase in population and needed his army to restore order.

When the Lion arrived at Stygia, however, he found its gates closed. The Seven Divine Counselors advised the Dual Monarchs to resist the Deathlord if they valued existence itself. When the Stygians would not let him into the city, the Lion gripped the gates in his hands and tore them from their hinges. His army surrounded the palace of the Dual Monarchs while he confronted Stygia's rulers himself. Again, the Counselors urged defiance. The First and Forsaken Lion then struck down the seven ancient ghosts, bound them in soulsteel chains, and demanded that they fall down and worship him. A third time, they defied him. The Deathlord then beheaded them all and cast their bodies into the Mouth of the Void. At last, the Dual Monarchs descended from their thrones, knelt before the Lion and swore never again to oppose him or any other Deathlord.

Though few know it, the First and Forsaken Lion still wears the heads of the defiant Counselors on his belt, and forces them to whisper their advice to him alone. The broken gates of Stygia were re-forged for the Lion's own fortress in the city, and no new city gates were ever erected.

The swift conquest shocked the ghosts of Stygia. Many of them tried to resist. The First and Forsaken Lion responded by enslaving thousands of Stygians and condemning thousands more to be thrown to Oblivion.

As the First and Forsaken Lion crushed the Stygian resistance, the other Deathlords were furious. Six Deathlords

came to Stygia with armies of their own. The Lion's Legion Sanguinary not only outnumbered all their forces combined, it included enslaved hekatonkhires and immense bone automatons. The Lion's forces obliterated the armies of his rivals, leaving the six to face him and his army alone.

Eye and Seven Despairs reacted to this defeat by returning to the side of his erstwhile co-conspirator. The other five Deathlords pooled their magic into a spell the like of which the Underworld had never seen before or since. The entire isle of Stygia shook as the gray, twilight sky of the Underworld extruded nine gigantic fists that tore swaths through the Lion's army while countless black spirits rose from the Void itself to harry the remaining troops. The five Deathlords entered the city and challenged the First and Forsaken Lion for its rule.

The next three years saw a running battle through Stygia as the various Deathlords recruited militias to attack each other's followers and neighborhoods. They cursed and counter-cursed each other; they made and broke alliances weekly. In time, all 13 Deathlords joined the anarchic struggle. The battle ended only when all 13 realized that none of them could seize the throne individually, and that none of them would permit any other Deathlord to rule. In a compromise that satisfied none of them, they returned the Dual Monarchs to their thrones as figureheads while appointing themselves as a congress of "advisors." The



Deathlords razed large areas of Stygia to rear fortresses of their own. Ever since then, the city-state has remained under permanent occupation, with garrisons from each Deathlord warily watching the others.

## ASSORTED SCHEMES

Throughout the Age of Sorrows, the Deathlords each pursued their own schemes for power and Creation's destruction. Some of them have worked out better than others. Some plans are not yet complete, or so well hidden that no one in Creation or the Underworld has noticed them.

### A PRINCESS ROUTED

Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers suffered the first great defeat of any Deathlord. She claimed a shadowland just south of the Yellow River and began bullying nearby kingdoms in both the Underworld and Creation. Unfortunately for her, three gods met not far from her shadowland, each leading a troop of refugees and determined to settle down. Mortals throughout the East know how the three divine founders of Great Forks wove a spell of story about a simple youth who found the secret to Princess Magnificent's destruction. The Deathlord fled, lest the gods finish their tale of destiny with the revelation of her secret weakness and her certain doom. The Neverborn punished her by enslaving her to the First and Forsaken Lion.

(For further details, see *The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. I—The Scavenger Lands*, p. 82.)

### A NATION FOUNDED

The Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water enjoyed greater success. He chose the remote Skullstone Archipelago for his plot. Few people lived in these mist-webbed, shadowland-laced isles, but they were enough to found a nation. The Bodhisattva appeared as a holy ascetic who taught how life was merely preparation for death. Over decades, he crafted a highly bureaucratized society consisting of both mortals and ghosts, with a zombie labor force available to wrest a livelihood from the infertile isles. In time, the Bodhisattva faked his own death, but uttered a prophecy that he would come back in the guise of a prince clad in silver in order to return the Skullfolk to ancient virtues. In truth, the Deathlord continued to dwell among the Skullfolk for centuries, using hundreds of false identities as mortals and ghosts. Not long ago, he stage-managed his own return as the Silver Prince. Since then, he has turned Skullstone toward war. Yet his intended conquest of the West is only the next step in a greater and darker plan. He already dominates the Western Underworld to a large degree.

(For a full exposition of the Silver Prince's machinations, see Chapter Four of *The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. II—The West*.)

## A CITY SHADOWED

Most of the Deathlords' plans assumed that they would slowly gather their forces in the Underworld or remote shadowlands, then strike down Creation in one overwhelming blow. This time, they would not act too soon, though they all hoped to strike first and gain the honor of ending Creation and, ultimately, themselves.

And then the Mask of Winters—the last Solar ghost to become a Deathlord—launched a surprise attack on the weakened city of Thorns. Yes, he conquered it with ease and turned it into a shadowland. Yes, he acquired a major foothold for Oblivion's servants near the heart of Creation. But he *gave the plan away!* The Scavenger Lands and the Realm now recognize the danger posed by the Deathlords, when before only a few savants even knew they existed. Through half of Creation, generals plot strategies for fighting the dead, temples train exorcists and Exalted heroes study Charms of holy light and fire.

The Neverborn have not ventured any judgment, however cryptic, about the Mask of Winters' precipitous deed. He believes this silence indicates approval for his audacity. The other Deathlords hope that the Mask of Winters will merely call down his own destruction... and distract everyone from their own plans. The impact of turning a major city into a shadowland remains to be seen.

### THE ABYSSAL EXALTED

Several decades ago, the Neverborn called the Deathlords together—the first full conclave since the decision to evoke the Great Contagion. They had communed with their maimed but still-living cousins, the Yozis of Malfeas, and devised their own plan. The Deathlords needed to contact various Third Circle demons in order to comprehend the details, though. In brief, the defeated Primordials knew how to find the long-hidden Solar Exaltations, take them from their Jade Prison and corrupt them to serve other masters. The Yozis demanded 50 Exaltations as payment, but the Deathlords could keep the rest.

The plan worked, but not completely. The Deathlords' hekatonkhire broke open the Jade Prison but delivered only half the Exaltations. With nephwracks as their laborers, the Neverborn and Deathlords crafted the Monstrances of Celestial Portion that transform Solar Exaltations into Abyssal ones. The various Deathlords now have about 100 deathknights to work their will and fight their battles.

As greatly as the Abyssal Exalted frighten mortals, they terrify the dead even more. Their potent Charms, necromantic magic and enormous reserves of Essence and artifacts make them some of the mightiest entities most ghosts are ever likely to face... and just like the new Solars, they have only begun to develop their power.



MARU'S HAD ENOUGH OF THIS ONE'S LIES!

I'LL DESTROY YOU AND YOUR WITHERED MASTER!

ENOUGH!

MANY APOLOGIES, SERVANTS OF OBLIVION. BUT YOU MUST LISTEN.

THIS IS NOT THE CONFRONTATION THAT MARU PREDICTED.

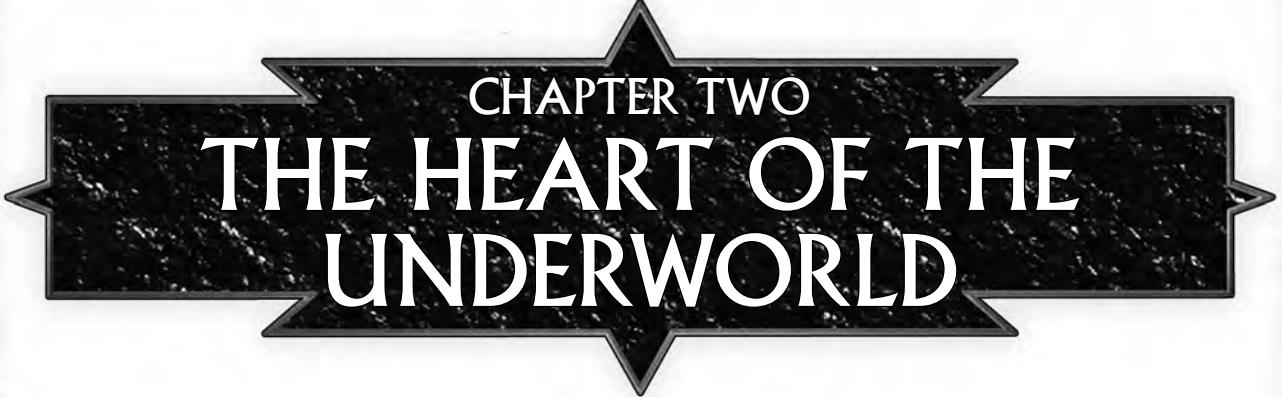
THE WHISPERS OF THE NEVERBORN HAVE MADE THAT CLEAR TO ME.

THIS DAY'S CONFRONTATION IS NOT OF YOUR MAKING AT ALL.

YOU'VE BEEN MISLED BY GHOSTS LOYAL TO THE MIRROR FLAG!

AS HAVE I...

KRACK



## CHAPTER TWO

# THE HEART OF THE UNDERWORLD

### THE STYGIAN ISLE

The Immaculate Order frowns upon the afterlife. According to its teachings, the dead pass on into the cycle of reincarnation, the evil to be reborn as lesser beings, the righteous to ascend in station and be born as something greater. Any being who lingers beyond death, forging ephemera out of sheer, stubborn will, must, by necessity, be a wicked person—a monster who refuses to accept judgment for his unrighteous deeds or a demon who demands that his descendants and loved ones live in the past. When the monks of the Immaculate Order cross paths with the dead, they guide those souls back to the path of enlightenment with the force of their Essence-sheathed fists. The Realm's living do not worship or honor the dead. They only ready themselves for the coming of the reincarnated, taking care of their children who bear the souls of their ancestors.

So when the dead of the Blessed Isle first open their eyes, what greets them is not a paradise akin to magnificent,

wonderful afterlives crafted for the dead in the other parts of Creation. They receive no slaves, mementos, offerings or grand mausoleums, nor do they find the open arms of their ancestral community. Instead, they find a hellish world of twisted briars, screaming monsters and twisting, haunted paths. This dark world, crafted by the beliefs of the Immaculate Order, awaits all who die yet linger in the mightiest empire of Creation, a purgatory of their own making.

The dead who cling to their existence in the Stygian Isle display greater will and courage than the dead of any other part of the Underworld. Suffering the beliefs of the Immaculate Order sends most of the Realm's dead straight into the arms of Lethe, and only those who grip their existence with the fervor of desperation manage to evade their fate. Cast adrift in a world far from Creation, filled with wandering nightmares and predatory dead, they must carve out a place for themselves among the thorns and ruins of the Stygian Isle. Some become the very demons the Immaculate Order believes them to be, while others grow gaunt and frail



as they weep in agony over their isolation. The rarest few, the luckiest few, cast off their old ways, abandon hope of finding Creation again, and make their homes in the vast necropolis of Stygia.

## THE FUNERARY RITES OF THE REALM

The funerals of the Scarlet Dynasty serve to edify future generations, extolling the life of a fallen hero to inspire her children and those who knew her to live up to her example. Funerary proceedings carefully exclude any offerings or any other ways to strengthen a ghost that might linger behind, while honoring the memory of the deceased and casting her as a valued member of the extended family.

When a Dynast falls, a plaque is created in her name. The plaque is often crafted of jade, bearing the name of the deceased, the seal of her House and, more recently, a small saying or phrase appropriate to her personality (though the Immaculate Order frowns on this practice). Poorer families and patricians use dried alabaster instead of jade. The family displays the plaque on the entranceway of their household and goes into a three-month mourning period, during which it drapes the windows, instructs its slaves to remain mute and remembers the honorable deeds of the deceased.

The funeral gathers the family to the central household. If a head of a family dies, the entire extended family might journey to his abode. Even outcasts and wayward children may return during this time. Indeed, a popular play in the Realm depicts the prodigal soldier returning to the funeral of her scheming mother, detailing the sort of backroom politics and faux politeness rife in such affairs. Once everyone has gathered, the scions of the family recite the ancestral scroll that details the lineage of the deceased, then ceremoniously adds the new name to it. They carry the plaque to the family's central shrine, laying it in its final resting place while burning incense and intoning prayers meant to speed the dead onto their next life. Once the ceremony ends, the family gathers with its lawyers to look over the will of the deceased, divide the inheritance and tend to any lingering debts.

The Realm has a variety of ways to dispose of the body of a fallen Dragon-Blood, each based on the Immaculate Dragon the Dynast favored in life. The followers of Pasiap receive a burial in a well-crafted coffin. Followers of Daana'd receive burial at sea. The followers of Hesiesh are cremated. Melaists are laid upon a Tower of Silence, exposed to the scavengers of the air. Followers of Sextes Jylis find their final resting place beneath the earth in a frail shroud with vegetation or a tree planted above them, so their bodies may rejoin the

cycle of life. For Dragon-Blooded whose bodies cannot be recovered (such as those who die on a battlefield far from home), their families construct ivory and parchment effigies, and cremate or bury those instead.

The patricians imitate the traditions of the Dynasty. The lower classes often do so as well, though in a far cheaper manner, with wooden plaques and simple burials, or using the traditions of other lands. Slaves, in particular, use the traditions of their homelands, when they are allowed to do so. The Immaculate Order quickly quashes any funerary traditions that might offer strength to the dead, but the actions of the slaves and peasantry grant the dead of the Realm's lower classes a little more strength than the dead of the Dynasts. When Dynasts deal with the body of a dead slave, its disposal usually occurs in the most efficient, least expensive manner possible, such as burial in a forgotten ditch or cremation with the rest of the trash.

## THE SHAPE OF PURGATORY

A fallen Dynast opens his eyes, perhaps expecting to see the glory of the Immaculate Dragons or the might of the Realm spread before him. Yet the bedrock of his existence, the Imperial Mountain, is gone. In its place hangs a vast mechanical construct of aging, creaking metal and huge lamps and gems of burning Essence. Where mighty cities stood in life instead rest forgotten ruins with overgrown briars climbing up crumbling walls. Sheer cliff faces fall away to reveal haunted valleys below. The heavy silence suddenly breaks under an unearthly chorus of screams as a murder of four-eyed raitons erupts into flight like an amorphous, hungry mass of black feathers, seeking new prey elsewhere. Where the Dynast expected to find his righteous reward, he finds hell instead.

This profound revelation devastates the newly dead of the Blessed Isle. Most stagger about, wandering aimlessly with tears streaking their gaunt faces and their once-fine clothes tattered and ruined. Taught their entire lives that ghostly existence is an abomination against the right and proper order of things, most succumb to the call of Lethe, finally surrendering their existence to what they hope is the proper path of reincarnation. Only a few manage to cling to the passions that made them rise up in the Underworld in the first place and steel their resolve, forging themselves into the very monsters that the Immaculate Order believes them to be. As a result, the Isle of Stygia is empty, populated with a few scattered villages, clustered survivors lurking in decayed, skeletal structures or mad, twisted, mask-wearing wretches who found the Whispers of Oblivion preferable to the memories of their lives.

The blame for the darkened state of the Stygian Isle doesn't lie solely at the feet of the Immaculate Order. The fabric of the Underworld, the layer between it and the Labyrinth, thins on this central region. The tombs of the Neverborn lie deep beneath the isle, and their nightmares grip the afterlife of the Blessed Isle tightly. Paths in the tangled forests shift and twist when a traveler doesn't watch them

warily. Dark caverns open upon hills like gaping maws, filled with the stench of decaying gods and the lazy buzz of flies, beckoning wanderers to delve into their pools of darkness and explore the mysteries of death.

No great empires or mighty cities dot the isle beyond the magnificent necropolis of Stygia. Even so, the Underworld reflection of the Realm is every bit as large and varied as its counterpart. Despite lacking any kind of infrastructure or communities, the ruined isle rewards those ghosts who seek to explore it with forgotten treasures, strange mysteries and a chance, however slim, of fulfilling their burning, unending passions.

## TRAVELING THE STYGIAN ISLE

The closeness of the Labyrinth to the surface of the Stygian Isle twists its geography. In many ways, its paths resemble the twisting, treacherous corridors of the Labyrinth more than they do the reliable roads of the rest of the Underworld. Any attempt to navigate the unintuitive and nightmarish wilds of the Stygian Isle incurs a -1 external penalty. Sufficient familiarity with the workings of the isle negates this penalty, however, and anyone with a Survival specialty in either the Labyrinth or the Stygian Isle may ignore it.

## THE EAST

The eastern reaches of the Isle of Stygia most closely resemble the rest of the Underworld, with the flat, still, glassy waters of the Styx stretching its fingers across the broad plains in a reflection of the Imperial River Basin. Small villages cluster close to the water, tilling the rich, loamy soil and reaping pale melons and white rice. Occasionally, the vessels of the White Fleet of Stygia glide through the waters, stopping near a village to trade or to bring aboard some eager passengers seeking their fortunes in the fabled necropolis. Wandering ghosts might find shelter here, even a place to settle down and begin their existence anew, but not all is as pleasant as it seems.

### WHITE FLEET CREW

**Description:** Each of the White Fleet's vessels is crewed by an experienced group of sailors. They are used to counting on ghosts' fear and respect of the Dual Monarchy to quell threats to their person and ship, however. When forced into a real fight, they battle with gusto but little practical experience.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies by ship

**Armor Color:** White uniform with a black kerchief

**Motto:** Varies by ship

**General Makeup:** Though not as well trained as the Fleet's marines (see "Haggard's Keep Patrol" on p. 86 for an example), White Fleet sailors are capable of repelling a boarding action in a pinch. The sailors are typically unarmored and armed with slashing swords.



**Overall Quality:** Good  
**Magnitude:** 2  
**Drill:** 2  
**Close Combat Attack:** 1  
**Close Combat Damage:** 2  
**Ranged Attack:** —  
**Ranged Damage:** —  
**Endurance:** 5  
**Might:** 2      **Armor:** 1  
**Morale:** 3

**Formation:** White Fleet sailors typically fight in impromptu unordered or skirmish formations if their ships are boarded (or in the occasional bar brawl).

They are led by the ship's trierarch or first officer, with the ship's proreus acting as a relay.

The darkness of the Stygian Isle and the guilt of the Realm's dead weighs as heavily here as it does elsewhere, and the soil grows more than just crops. Tangled forests of briar and thorn grow thick just beyond the bor-

ders of most villages, with only unreliable and treacherous paths to guide uneasy travelers through them. Heavy forest shadows hide the silhouettes of predators, and the thick foliage dapples the ground with ghostly, shifting hues of green, gray and black. When ghosts wander through wetlands and marshes, the thick soil drags at them and clings to them hungrily, pulling them into their embrace. The ground smells of overturned graves, the forests smell of must and fungus, and the water tastes acrid. While some villages manage to survive for centuries, others vanish without a trace, the forests slowly reclaiming the empty homes of the dead.

The villages here tend to resemble the farming communities of the Realm, but the funerary rites of the Blessed Isle make their mark as well. The ash of cremation lines the roads and settles on the simple furniture of the ghostly peasants like a morbid dust. The finely carved coffins lay discarded at the edge of the village or become the bedding of the dead when they slumber in their small, huddled huts. The trees in the village have skeletons buried in their roots, and the water-buried dead often cough up salt water or find it pooling in their homes. Scavenger birds, particularly raitons, linger on the outskirts of the villages, watching implacably and hoping for yet another taste of corpus. Many of the "peasants" are humbled, wraithly Dynasts or patricians—haughty in life, tattered and muddy in death.

## THE SWAN AND PHOENIX TEMPLE AND THE DISCIPLES OF SLUMBER

Even Immaculates can rise as ghosts, in defiance of their own vaunted doctrines. Most who do so gave little more than lip service to the scriptures in life, using the Order as a tool for political power. Their ambition fuels their passions in the afterlife. Some Immaculate dead, however, lived righteous lives that exemplified the ways of the Order. These ghosts cast about in bewilderment when they find that unfinished business prevents them from passing on to the next life. Some manage to surrender to Lethe, but most, having practiced rigid self-control in life, find they cannot let go so easily in death. Madness quickly grips them, and some turn to the Whispers of Oblivion rather than suffer the guilty weight of principles betrayed.

One such Immaculate ghost by the name of Talis struggled for decades to justify his continued existence in defiance of his own beliefs. Unable to surrender to Lethe until he had found final enlightenment, yet unwilling to abandon his faith, he finally found a solution as he sat upon a broken hilltop overlooking a small village on the banks of the Styx. Laughing, he slashed out his own eyes, for he no longer needed them. He quietly entered the village and proceeded to slaughter everyone.

With the remnants of their village and the stone of the hill, he built a magnificent temple to the precepts of the Immaculate Order. A gate and a long passageway with walls covered with script and scripture marks the entrance. Within lies a vaulted cathedral lined with candles and frescoes of the Immaculate Dragons in abstract. Here, hollow-eyed Talis, the Disciple of Slumber, gives throbbing sermons to his acolytes, who meditate on the rapture of Lethe and the importance of bringing it to all the ghosts of the Underworld. The agonized screams of their victims occasionally accompanies the murmurs of their chants, for radiating from the central vault are five chambers, each dedicated to one of the Immaculate Dragons, where torturers encourage the dead they have captured to succumb to the call of Lethe. Listening to their cries, the Disciples can quietly justify their blatant hypocrisy by remembering that they bring enlightenment to all the Underworld.

Unfortunately, this sect is but one of many heresies that make up the greater Disciples of the Abyss.

## NORTH

The Shadowed Coast of the Blessed Isle only darkens as one passes the veil that separates the living from the dead. Towers of Silence dot the hills, with swarms of raitons quietly perched atop, watching those who pass by. The whispers of the dead echo from the distant cliffs, distorting and returning in a constant wash of barely audible whispers. At the edge of the sea, the land suddenly falls away, the cliffface below sheer, as though the land had been wounded by a rough and rusty knife. Strange ghosts wander silently here, ignoring everyone they meet until someone calls their name, at which point they stare in horror at the offender before fleeing.

The north of the Stygian Isle is a land of monsters. Flashes of white through the trunks of trees, and the clatter of beetles, announce the presence of a Portee dog. Cobblers stagger though abandoned villages, hunting for food or a new kill. Nephwracks build temples outside the entrances to the Labyrinth here, and Walkers of the Midnight Sun gather at the darkest hour in clearings to speak in their strange tongue about how best to go about their malevolent work.

Those dead who risk the journey to this dangerous land receive rewards for their efforts. While the Immaculate Order has had great success in ridding the Blessed Isle of its cults, its victory is less than complete. Particularly in recent days, since the fall of Thorns and the return of the Anathema, more in the Realm secretly carry out the rites of the ancestor cults. Slaves offend the most, clinging to the ways of their homeland, but in recent days, even members of the Scarlet Dynasty have experimented with necromancy and the ways of the dead. The greatest concentration of this activity lies in the north of the Blessed Isle. In the north of the Stygian Isle, the dead can find trees that bleed with the offerings of the living or haunting calls of their prayers and memories. Offerings quietly pile up in vacant clearings, waiting in the moonlight for any ghost who wishes to claim them. Slowly but surely, a small community of the dead grows on the gifts from their mortal kin, seeking some way to enter the sunlit world and reward the living for their generosity, while they struggle against the horrors that grip this darkened land.

## THE SOUTH

The southern reaches of the Isle of Stygia grow flat and arid, filled with vast, empty plains unlike the overgrown cliffs that decorate the rest of the region. Thick red clay the color of clotted blood covers the land where tall blades of nearly black grass don't wave slowly in the wind. The burial domes of the Plains of Rusted Iron rumble with movement and sighs as many-boned monstrosities churn and struggle to hatch from their grotesque, earthen eggs. The dead here move quickly, watching the horizon for threats and slipping from what bit of cover they have to the next, never looking back. A heavy rot hangs in the air, a faint and distracting stink that brings to mind an immediate sense of mortality. When the wind dies down, flies rise from the grass to fill the air with hazy black clouds.

Ruins cover the lands of the south, ancient buildings of some lost, alien civilization. These creeper-covered wastes resemble nothing built by man. Their asymmetric patterns, unpleasant rooms, bizarre scripts and misproportioned construction suggest that they came to exist during the era between the death of the first Primordial and the rise of the Solar Deliberative. Strangely, the ruins seem to suggest that this span of time lasted longer in the Underworld than it did in Creation, for they chronicle a slow rise and rapid fall of this inhuman people, or even several disparate, unconnected civilizations. Perhaps, instead, these ruins represent the dreams of a Neverborn, pushed into reality by his tenacious need to express the madness within.

## THE WEST

Where the Calendar of Setesh sends the sun to set, the Stygian lands fall away and submit to the oceans of the west.

### THE BASTION OF THE ALAUN

South of Stygia, high up in the rugged mountains that separate the rest of the Stygian Isle from its southern reaches lies the last sanctuary of a fallen race. The alaun, once proud worshipers of their Primordial masters, now hunker defensively behind their half-built walls, watching all traveling dead with wary malice. Their eyes drain light like pools of shadow. Their thin necks look broken and shriveled, too small to support their beaked heads. The long, black feathers of their body seem to fall like a cloak around them, parting to show their bony legs and their thin, pale fingers. Ancient, proud and paranoid, they almost never allow any visitors to enter their bastion. Almost. Nephwracks sometimes merit entry, if they can behave, and the alaun have occasionally been forced to parley with their enemies.

The bastion itself is under constant construction. Tall, broken-topped spires reach for the skies, while crude cranes slowly creak as they swing new stones into place. Skeletal frameworks cling to the sides of unfinished, black-stone walls, and one can see the structure's steel-girder guts behind the façade of incomplete buildings. With tall, narrow doors and high, minute windows, any who enter the sanctuary can instantly see that it wasn't built for human occupants.

In recent days, the bastion has swarmed with a flurry of activity. Recent contact with a Neverborn has brought good news. The alaun have come to believe that an old prophecy announces that, with this Time of Tumult, they might find forgiveness if they avenge the fall of their maker. Although not all alaun agree with such bold steps, they have dispatched their princess and an entourage to explore the possibilities of a distant alliance with the Deathlords.

## THE HAUNTING TALE OF PELEPS VARUNA

Two hundred years ago, a contemporary of Mnemon and an equally powerful sorceress resided on a small island off the western coast of the Blessed Isle. She retired there after a long career as a naval officer to enjoy the company of her beloved horses and the fruits of her many victories. Among her spoils of war, she kept with her always an impossibly beautiful slave boy with silver hair. In time, stories drifted to the mainland of debauchery bizarre even by the standards of the Scarlet Dynasty and wicked, blasphemous acts behind closed doors. When the Immaculates learned that Varuna's precious concubine was, in fact, a monstrous, shape-shifting Anathema, they made a move to destroy her and her companion. She defiantly decried their actions and enchanted her island with all manner of insidious traps. Weeks later, when the Immaculates finally broke through her wards to enter the manse itself, they found the torn bodies of Varuna and her lover clutching at one another's throats. Their wanton ways had apparently driven them to murderous insanity. By the order of a Sidereal posing as a Celestially Guided Itinerant, they sealed away the island to let whatever malevolent magic therein expire and had the entire manse surrounded with an unbroken ward of salt.

Because of the manner of her death and the sealing of her estate, the entire island (complete with the bodies of her fallen slaves and her many riches) acts as Varuna's tomb. Where most Dynasts enter the Underworld as paupers, she awoke surrounded by an army of servants and with a magnificent manor at her disposal. During moments of lucidity, she exerts her power and forays onto the Stygian Isle to snatch up new ghosts to add to her collection. During darker times, she races about her manse, tearing her clothes and screaming out the name of her treacherous lover, a wild monster intent on revenge. With the isle acting as a shadowland, even the living of nearby villages can hear her tortured cries.

Despite the danger it represents, House Peleps would certainly enjoy seeing this powerful manse and its hearthstone returned to its care. The Immaculate Order suggests the place should be purged and burned, the cursed place entirely cut off from the living world. Meanwhile, Mnemon quietly suggests to her advisors that it could be worthwhile to see if Varuna's residence still has a few correspondences that Mnemon shared with the woman before Varuna lost her mind...



The water here is still and unmoving, like black glass that extends out to the horizon. Even bringing a hand to the water barely disturbs it, and a ghost can sink away with barely a sound. Occasionally, something out in the ocean roils the water as a massive form brushes the surface and sinks away from view. Storms ferociously lash the western lands of the Stygian Isle, showering the ground with drops of gore, bits of bone and violet lightning, sending the dead who wander here scattering for what cover they can find.

With one end of the Styx leading to the west, the region sees frequent ships and occasional pirate vessels hiding their ragged sails and tattered hulls behind the varied islands and peninsulas scattered across the region. Because trade remains vital to Stygia and the mouth of the Styx is of great importance, this region sees slightly more security than the rest of the isle. Effigies silently patrol the banks of the river to make sure monsters do not molest any traffic.

## THE GATES OF CREATION

No single point in the Underworld lies as far from Creation as the Stygian Isle. The stabilizing influence of the Imperial Mountain, the Elemental Pole of Earth, naturally regenerates the fabric of the Blessed Isle, pushing away any Wyld or necromantic influence so that no shadowland can easily haunt the Realm. When concentrated efforts or holocaust exceeds the preserving ability of the Imperial Mountain to heal, the Immaculate Order goes into action, dispatching its agents. They tame the dead who have dared to enter Creation, then salt the boundaries and begin the work of restoring the land to its proper state. No major shadowlands exist in the Realm to this day.

Even so, the desperate dead have a few ways to slip into the living Realm. The most ambitious find passage on the ships that travel the Sea of Shadows, making their way to the outer regions of the Underworld. There, they can trudge to the nearest shadowland, enter Creation and make their painstaking way back to the Blessed Isle. Less extreme measures also exist. Hidden from the watchful eyes of the Immaculate Order, a few death cults flourish in the basements of furtive Dynasts, and quiet necromancers ply their illicit trades in the back alleys of major cities. After all, even among the Dynasty, some mortals will eagerly pay to hear just one last word from a loved one or to wrench the final secrets out of a slain enemy. Illicit cultists and necromancers maintain tiny and well-hidden shadowlands—often little more than a cellar or a closet. In the Underworld, these places appear most peculiar indeed: an open door that stands erect in a grove of trees, or a peculiar passageway in a hill that leads directly to the living world. Treading these strange and incongruous passages invariably leads directly to a sealed and warded chamber controlled by a priest or necromancer who is more prepared for the dead than the dead are prepared for the living.

The dead appeal to such practitioners with caution. While many necromancers and most ancestor cults genuinely

mean well, some do not. For in the Realm, the presence of a ghost indicates a failure of the Blessed Isle's protective institutions, a growing rot in its core. The authorities move quickly against anyone who is found to aid and abet the "monsters" of the Underworld. Even if a family can prove conclusively that it had nothing to do with the presence of the ghost, people will gossip anyway. (What sort of family encourages its ancestors to linger, even without meaning to?) The simple presence of a ghost can do a great deal to harm a noble family, and most will pay a considerable amount to simply have the problem go away discretely, a fact not lost on less scrupulous necromancers. Some thaumaturges slip through their own shadowlands, hunting through the Isle of Stygia for the ancestors of some wealthy family. When they find what they're looking for, they offer aid and assistance to the ghost, then reveal the ghost to the wealthy family, blackmailing it. Episodes such as this further alienate the dead from the living and further darken the names of necromancers on the Blessed Isle.

So the dead must learn to survive without the constant adoration and connection to the living that the ancestors of the Threshold enjoy. Many accept the condemnations of the Immaculate Order. Their exile from their loved ones and the lack of fulfillment of their passions twists them until they resemble the very monsters the Realm believes them to be. These poor, tattered souls easily accept the Whispers of Oblivion, tormenting their fellow dead while whimpering piteously out of loneliness and despair.

Some ghosts, however, refuse to accept their condemnation and learn subtlety instead. They carefully thread influence throughout the Underworld as best as they can, finding ways to reach into Creation and offer assistance to their descendants so that their names are remembered in such a way that nobody realizes the dead continue to influence the living. Such efforts, however, take decades, or even centuries. Many of the dead on the Stygian Isle lack the time and patience for such efforts, and turn their passions inward instead. They settle with the huddled communities in the eastern or northern regions of the Isle, finding love and hatred with the other, scattered denizens of their region. Some manage to eke out an existence for a while before some monster destroys all they've managed to build. Others wander carefully and quietly, survivors who find companionship and fulfillment where they can.

And a few—the luckiest few—manage to find their way into the necropolis of Stygia itself, casting off their old lives and joining the society of the Underworld.

## THE DARK JEWEL OF THE UNDERWORLD

Stygia. It stands at the very center of the Underworld, a capstone sealing away the horrors of the Labyrinth. Above it, the magnificent wonder of the Calendar of Setesh slowly spins on creaking gears, sweeping its many facets and



lanterns across the sky, a beacon to the entire Underworld. Crafted by the dead, for the dead, Stygia stands apart from the other necropoli. It is not some constructed afterlife to appease the ancestors of the living, but a magnificent and ancient monument to the dead and their desire to see an endless repetition of days. Stygia secures political power, so the dead can enjoy their minor wars without destroying the delicate empires they have crafted. It secures economic power, so the dead can find whatever trinkets they need to play out their little games of abuse and victimization. It secures the very fabric of their world, so they can once again enjoy the sight of the rising sun and sleep when night falls. Stygia stands as a testament to humanity's ability to rise beyond its own mortality and craft something lasting, even in death.

Rather, it was thus until the coming of the Deathlords. Where Stygia once held the fury of the Neverborn at bay, it now serves as their jewel-encrusted throne. Nephwracks openly walk the streets, screeching their blasphemous doctrines of nihilism and void. Deathlords politely pretend to respect the power of the Dual Monarchy while quietly ruling behind closed doors. The Well of Oblivion yawns wider, and Stygia sinks a little deeper, while its dead scurry about their unlivings, desperately pretending their world isn't slowly crumbling.

All of Creation, from the farthest reaches of the Wyld to the core of the Blessed Isle, faces a Time of Tumult, and the Underworld is not exempt. While the grip of the Deathlords tightens on the empires of the dead and the forces of Oblivion spread their taint past the veil of life and death into the sunlit world, Stygia finds itself at a crossroads. Either its dead drag themselves free of their self-satisfied rut to restore the once-magnificent ceremonial capital of the Underworld to its former glory, or it succumbs to its own frightened apathy until the world its denizens had so carefully crafted unravels around them.

## THE SHAPE OF STYGIA

From a distance, one might mistake the Grand Necropolis for the absent Imperial Mountain. The Calendar of Setesh pierces the very sky, casting its light like a slowly turning lighthouse crafted of aging black steel. Towering monuments reach up to touch it, giving the necropolis artificial slopes in the shape of obelisks and teetering piles of apartments. The rest of Stygia sprawls outward, its small buildings, walls and streets spilled across the Stygian Isle's central plains. Stygia not only exceeds the breadth of any mortal city, but it exceeds them in height and depth as well.

Stygia stands at the very center of the Underworld. Here, the River Styx parts to spread its fingers all throughout the loamy soil of the isle, its otherwise acrid waters bringing fertility to the grave-like grounds that surround the Grand Necropolis. On the banks of these many tributaries, small farming villages quietly work their fields, many inhabited by the native dead of the Blessed Isle or the long-surviving

dead of the Old Realm, who quietly trade the fruits of their labor for Stygia's magnificent trinkets.

Three pathways lead the dead to Stygia. The Styx stands as its foremost route, the one still used by the dead. The White Fleet of the Dual Monarchy regularly travels up and down its length, keeping it secure from the monsters and bandits that plague the Stygian Isle. Barges bearing the offerings, trade goods and hopeful passengers of other lands slowly slip past these protective vessels and sail into Stygia's welcoming harbors. For those in the Isle of Stygia, white-stone roads once led to the gates of the Water Runs Red district, but they have decayed since the fall of the Old Realm. Now, the wanderers of the Stygian Isle can sometimes find scattered pathways of pale brick with crumbling remains of some protective effigy that once walked the fine highway. A few ghosts still manage to follow the patchy, uncertain roadways to find safe haven in Stygia, but most have long since ceased their usefulness. Finally, the Labyrinth leads inevitably to the Well of the Void, which stands directly beneath Stygia. Navigating to the Grand Necropolis via the Labyrinth, thus, tends to be easier than navigating away, but this dark entrance usually only finds use by the Deathlords and their minions.

Stygia's dead are unique throughout the Underworld. Where most dead rise up in the echo of the land they lived in, interacting regularly with their descendants through shadowlands, offerings and blessing, the dead of Stygia have no such luxury. The Blessed Isle has no shadowlands to speak of, and its people disdain the dead. Those who travel to Stygia travel far from any possible contact with the living. Therefore, the Stygian dead turn away from their mortal lives and their descendants, turning their passions inward. The dead of Stygia do not linger to complete unfinished mortal business. Instead, they continue on for the sheer passion of existence. As a result, many of the services of Stygia specifically cater to furthering the passions of the dead. Without these constant reminders of the need to defy Lethe and Oblivion, Stygia would empty as its dead faded away.

## SPIRES AND MONUMENTS

Stygia looms over its inhabitants. Multi-tiered cathedrals, covered in baroque imagery and flying buttresses, blot out the sky, while stacks of minute apartments teeter and sway in the wind, curling like impossible works of abstract art. From the streets looking up, Stygia seems to close in claustrophobically, revealing the stars only in the narrow cracks between its monuments and spires. Delicate and slim walkways bridge the gaps between buildings like a collection of metallic cobwebs, allowing the regal elite of Stygia to avoid mingling with the common dead.

Stygia reeks of reverence. Beyond the light-scattering stained-glass windows of mighty cathedrals, the clerics of the Dual Monarchy swing their thuribles as they chant, filling stony inner chambers with a smog of potent incense. The rise and fall of prayers, like waves of murmured adulation, crash against the otherwise silent streets of the Grand Necropolis,

and echo constantly in a reminder of the Underworld's eternal duty to support the workings of the Calendar of Setesh. None can escape the Cult of the Dual Monarchy within the bounds of Stygia, for with each breath, the heady taste of prayers in the air fills the lungs of the dead.

Steeped in tradition and fueled by the unending passions of the dead, Stygia's inhabitants move in a clockwork dance. Entrenched in their stations and bound by the expectations of their inferiors, the elite waltz around one another in tragic, pointless ceremony. An endless feud between two aristocrats continues not because of any lingering enmity, but because they and their minions have come to rely on it to feed their passions. Princesses and princes fall in and out of love, toying with one another's emotions until the cycle of pursuit, rejection and pain devolves into petty jealousy, treachery and the slaughter of any ghost who foolishly tries to bring peace to both sides. The dead of Stygia do not want peace. They want passion and predictability, for these shreds of existence are all they have left.

The most powerful ghosts of Stygia occupy these ceremony-filled, prayer-drenched high-rises and spires. Like all the Stygian dead, these ghosts have severed their ties with the lands of the living, but most have done so because they have accomplished all they can there. Their descendants have also passed beyond the veil of life and death, and the ghosts no longer remember or care for what remains of their family line. Each has achieved great power in her native afterlife and seeks to take the next step up. Stygia offers great riches and Essence in every breath, and a chance to climb to the top of its overwrought, bejeweled heap proves irresistible for many of the dead. To achieve control of a Stygian district or a vaunted place in the Court of the Dual Monarchy represents an ultimate culmination for the ambitions of many of the dead.

### THE STREETS OF THE DEAD

Far below the vaunted walkways and vaulted cathedrals that clutter the skyline of Stygia, the more common dead reside. Here, homes and shops huddle beneath the crushing mass of the monuments above, squeezed up against the claustrophobically narrow streets. The roadways zig and zag, seemingly at random as they scatter between the buildings, filled with blind alleyways and dead ends. Here the lesser dead walk, moving with a slow and stately grace.

Unlike the cities of the living, Stygia is largely quiet beneath the monotone of chanted prayers and the occasional, wrenching cry of some abuse-addicted ghost finding the torment she seeks in a dark alleyway. Merchants and shoppers engage in an inaudible pantomime of negotiation, their overly long fingers gesturing gracefully. Throngs of working dead flood the street never speaking as they travel to their workplace. Even the zither music of a teahouse seems muted beyond the doors, and its staccato tones only emphasize the poignancy of Stygia's stillness.

Where the wealthy dead enjoy opulent manors and vast mausoleums, the common dead must contend with the lack of

space and the absence of tombs within Stygia. Where the rest of the Underworld's denizens pattern their homes from the crypts and graveyards of the living, the Stygian dead prefer homes closer to what they had when they lived. (Such homes usually consist of tiny apartments with bedding, a kitchen and a scattering of furniture, as well as plaques, tokens and memoriam hang from the walls like bric-a-brac.) Of course, the dead have little need for any of these things, but the dollhouse-like homes exist not for their creature comforts, but rather to allow the ghosts to play at living once again. A ghost need not cook in his kitchen or sleep in his bed, but most enjoy pretending to do so.

Like all the dead of Stygia, the common citizens of the necropolis lose all contact with the living world when they move here. Unlike the wealthy, they lack the resources for long trips to check up on distant ancestors. The bulk of the common dead in Stygia are desperate and desolate—those who had no connection to the living world to begin with, or those who have nothing left to lose. Beggars who died forgotten and unloved in ditches, former Realm citizens who know they can never return to their families without shaming them, or criminals whose names and memories hang under a pall of hatred rather than adulation, all make their way to the hallowed streets of Stygia. There, they can cast off what they once were, remaking themselves in the vast melting pot of the Dark Jewel of the Underworld, molting themselves into something unique and native to the land of the dead.

### THE SINKING CITY

Stygia does not rest on stable ground, for all the Underworld is slowly sinking. The Mouth of the Void draws all nearby into it, slowly consuming the very matter of Creation's afterlife in the Underworld's unique form of erosion. Standing at the center of the Underworld, Stygia experiences this erosion in a more profound manner than most necropoli do. What stood above ground a century ago lies buried beneath the rubble of today.

For their part, the dead of Stygia pretend it doesn't happen. The leaders of the 13 districts engage in their petty power struggles, shifting boundary stones, tearing down homes and building new ones. This planned chaos results in a constant churning of construction within the Grand Necropolis, rebuilding on the sunken ruins of yesterday's Stygia, and giving the illusion that Stygia remains constant despite its eternal construction efforts. Only the Monarchs' Way district is immune to the effect, as the Calendar of Setesh dangles from the very sky above it. At the end of the world, it alone will linger above the incomprehensibly wide Well of Oblivion, the last island-memory of Creation before it, too, slips into nonexistence.

Further, the raging storms of the Underworld aren't manifestations of godly design, but lingering outbursts of Neverborn rage. Before the building of Stygia, these storms routinely lashed the Underworld, making peaceful existence nearly impossible. The Calendar of Setesh and the ordering

influence of Stygia acts as a lightning rod for the worst of these storms, drawing more than its fair share of raging torrents and punishing winds. When a storm strikes, the dead simply slip into their homes and wait it out. If allowed to fester, however, the pooling gore and necrotic Essence would slowly change Stygia into something more closely resembling

the Labyrinth. Therefore, the Dual Monarchy mandated the presence of storm sewers beneath Stygia to drain away the dangerous refuse of the storms that lash the necropolis. These dark places drip with the dangerous Essence that fuels the storms above, making traveling them nearly as dangerous as walking the Labyrinth.

## GETTING AROUND STYGIA

The Grand Necropolis sprawls out beyond what most mortal cities can even conceive of. Crossing Stygia by foot takes a traveler several days. To alleviate this inconvenience, the necropolis offers several forms of transportation.

For the upper parts of the Necropolis, the metal walkways between spires offer quick shortcuts from one structure to another, if one's journey is close. Those who need to travel farther can glide on moliated wings or artifact cloaks that draw the dead onto the winds, sweeping across the night sky like bats. A few ghosts offer to carry others like cargo.

In the city below, the dead prefer to walk. They often have the time and patience to endure a day-long trip to another part of the city. For the wealthier dead, servants carry palanquins bearing their masters, trundling down the street with their passengers swaying back and forth like gothic floats in a parade of the dead. Those who need a quicker route can make use of Stygia's proximity to the Labyrinth and its unusual geography. The side roads away from the major thoroughfares have their own rules, and a clever ghost can use them to take quick short cuts by succeeding at a (Wits + Survival or Occult) check. The canals that feed from the river Styx share a similar geography, and the gondoliers who quietly pole boats along the mirrored surface of the water offer similarly quick passage, able to cut a day-long trip into a single hour.

Of course, the dead can always make use of the Labyrinth proper: Nearly all of Stygia connects to it in some fashion. Given its dangers, however, it's a path seldom used outside the ranks of nephwracks and the servants of the Deathlords.



This constant rebuilding of Stygia and the storm drains mingle to create a strange underground world beneath the necropolis. One can slip below the streets to walk strange passageways, catacombs and sewer tunnels filled with forgotten monuments, buried homes and half-remembered cellars. The Labyrinth brushes this underground realm, and the line between one and the other frequently blurs. Some ghosts slip through the cracks of Stygian society and end up down there, eking out an existence by sipping at sewage and collecting the cast-off treasures of their betters. Most of the creatures there are little more than monsters, preying on any ghosts unfortunate enough to be caught there. Stygia occasionally sends its soldiers and effigies beneath the streets to cull the worst of the monstrous population.

Stygia stands directly atop the Mouth of the Void, and its presence taints the culture of the necropolis meant to imprison it. The Disciples of the Abyss walk its streets, preaching the gospel of surrender and hopelessness. Its whispers slip into the dreams of the dead, taunting and tempting them. Any ghost who spends sufficient time in Stygia grows conscious of the palpable nearness of the Void and its promise of nonexistence. As a result, a peculiar desperation tinges the actions of Stygia's dead. They indulge in vice and passion, feasting and throwing galas to stave off the gnawing fear that one day soon, the weight of Oblivion will grow too heavy, and they too will succumb to its grasp.

## AN ECONOMY OF PRAYERS

More than anything, the Underworld's dead crave a stage upon which to perform their melodramatic passion plays. They want the sun to rise in the morning and set at night. They want winter to follow autumn. They want war, but not so much that it destroys the kingdoms to which they have tied their passions. They want to see destruction and tragedy today, with a guarantee of rising up the next day to do it all over again.

Stygia provides these things. The Dual Monarchs stand at the center of the political world, ceremonial puppets without any real power, but with sufficient influence to make sure that the faux wars of the Underworld do not, in a fit of overwrought spite, boil up into something more. Stygia provides a harbor and marketplace to all the Underworld, smoothly moving goods from one side of the world to the other, while offering up its own treasured resources, such as rare Labyrinthine ores, Essence-soaked gemstones or services specifically tailored for the pleasures of the dead. As a result, Stygia's dead—even those who enjoy the illusion of poverty—have sufficient resources to play their endless games. Most importantly, the constant turning of the Calendar of Setesh and the attendant dance of its ritual Monarchs keeps the Underworld's heavens moving as they should so the dead can enjoy their repetition of days without suffering the nightmarish chaos of Neverborn rage and whim.

These services make Stygia utterly central to the Underworld, both the source of its power and its greatest curse.

Not even the Deathlords wish to topple the Dual Monarchy, for those imperfect servants of Oblivion would welcome the return of Neverborn storms, a chaotic afterlife and the triumph of the Labyrinth over the stable lands of the Underworld. The Deathlords, who base their temporal power in the stability of their Underworld empires and their ghostly slaves, welcome the Underworld's sun when it rises in the morning. They don't offer prayer to the Dual Monarchy, but they certainly tolerate those who do so in their domains. Yet the very thing that protects Stygia from the wrath of others makes it vulnerable to covetousness. Those who control Stygia control the Underworld. A whisper to a councilman, a rumor in court or a suggestion to the Monarchy can result in the fall of an empire, a famine in an impoverished land, or even turn night to day. Whether one wishes to save or damn the Underworld, the battle to decide the fate of Creation's dead will begin and end in Stygia.

## THE CALENDAR OF SETESH

So iconic to Stygia is the Calendar of Setesh that all who visit the grand Necropolis stop to stare at its magnificence. Almost all imagery of Stygia depicts the grandeur of the Calendar towering over the sprawling cityscape. Black, grease-spattered gears larger than men slowly grind creaking machinery to the constant clicks of massive escapements. Shrunken and shriveled creatures, inhuman extensions of the will of Setesh, scuttle through the shadows within, maintaining and adjusting the clockwork in a struggle to keep the ancient machinery functioning. Mirrors, lanterns and blazing gems of Essence the size of houses slowly sweep across the face of the Calendar, lighting the sky and tethering the stars. So vast is the Calendar that the dead sometimes slip within to meet in secret, to conspire against their enemies or just to gaze in awe at the magnificent wonder from within.

The Loom of Fate clearly inspired the Calendar of Setesh. Naturally, the hands of dead mortals cannot compare to the awesome brilliance and perfection of the Great Maker, but they did not need to. The Loom of Fate forges a dynamic world, one of constant change and balanced perfection. The Calendar of Setesh merely makes sure that the sun rises and sets, that the seasons flow as they should, and that the Underworld matches the basic expectations of the dead. Indeed, the Calendar of Setesh can't even extend the life of the Underworld. It uses the gravity of the Well of Oblivion to power many of its mechanisms, counting down the days until final entropy decays all the universe into gray nothing. Still, for something crafted by the hands of once-mortals, it defies expectation—a true wonder in the world of the dead.

The Calendar craves sustenance. It cannot maintain the shape of reality for the Underworld on its own. Instead, it acts as a lens for the prayers of the dead, taking their accumulated expectations and reflecting them back onto Underworld, reinforcing the landscape with the will of the dead. Thus does the Cult of the Dual Monarchy drive the



very stability of the Underworld. The dead believe they must worship the masters of Stygia to make the sun rise, and they are literally correct. In all empires, in all kingdoms, even in the domains of the Deathlords, one can find small shrines bearing the visage of the Dual Monarchy as the dead present their hopes and dreams to the Calendar of Setesh.

The mechanism of the Calendar serves only as the very core of this system. The Dual Monarchs themselves act as a focal point for the prayers of the dead, gathering them up and focusing them into the machinery of the Calendar. The heavy weight of the expectations of the dead and the ceremonial demands of the Calendar itself ensures that the Dual Monarchs are little more than puppets, slowly moving in a graceful and well-timed dance that suits the needs of the dead. Even Stygia itself serves a greater purpose in the designs of the Calendar. Its economic might makes sure that its parts are well oiled and constantly replaced. Its political might makes sure that no one damages or disrupts its workings. The districts of Stygia even serve an occult purpose, geomantically funneling the vast power of all the prayers of the Underworld to the Dual Monarchy. Each unpredictable roadway or haphazardly placed monument creates powerful geomantic lines within the necropolis along which the Essence of the dead travels to the Calendar, and through which its ordering influence travels back out. Each district represents one of the 12 constellations along the zodiac of the dead, and the very events of each district leave a lingering echo on the rest of the Underworld. While the repercussions of such events are well documented, they are unpredictable. The leaders of these districts cannot use their political power to create real occult power. Yet the astronomers of the dead often treat all of Stygia as some vast orrery: the star city of the dead.

### A SURPLUS OF REVERENCE

The machinations of the dead are far from perfect. Their artificial geomantic lines leak, and even the focus of the Dual Monarchs cannot push all the torrent of adulation into the Calendar of Setesh. As a result, these leaking prayers lend Stygia its reverential miasma. To an engineer's eye, this may seem a grand failing of the Dark Jewel of the Underworld, but the dead find themselves invigorated by the seepage of prayer. They have discovered many uses for the excess of Essence their necropolis generates.

The Dual Monarchs wear opulent clothing laden with rich, blood-red jewelry, and they do so for practical reasons, as well as for aesthetic value. Every morning when the Monarchs rise, tailors pluck free all the old jewelry the two wore the day before and stitch in brand new baubles. Throughout the ceremonies of the day, the Dual Monarchs shed their excess Essence constantly into these gem-receptacles, filling all of them by the time they lie down to rest.

These gems form the backbone of the Stygian banking system. The Clerics of the Dual Monarchy take the daily crop of Essence-soaked gems and store them in huge vaults

### BREATHING PRAYERS

No place in the Underworld is as saturated with reverence as Stygia. The prayers of the dead pour in from all over the world, and every mausoleum and temple hums with it. The very air is spiced with the aromas of incense and aromatic oils. As a result of this intense piety, the dead of Stygia can regain Essence more quickly in their necropolis than they could elsewhere, as though they had a Cult rating of 1 for free. This benefit is inherent to all dead who have resided longer than a few months within Stygia. A Storyteller running a ghostly series in the Dark Jewel of the Underworld should not require players to spend the Background points for the benefit. This extra respiration is lost outside the city, however. Furthermore, this benefit does not stack with an existent rating of Cult.

beneath Monarchs' Way and V'ije. Should someone require excessive amounts of Essence, perhaps to forge a powerful new weapon or to power some significant spell, the Clerics loan their gemstones out, after receiving proper collateral. They charge only a nominal fee for their services, which meant to insure the vault against unforeseen losses, as the vaults constantly fill with new Essence gems.

### THE RICHES OF STYGIA

Stygia brings more to its citizenry than just Essence. The vast necropolis couldn't exist without constant imports of grave goods and foodstuffs, and its marketplaces burst with riches. Centrally located as Stygia is, trade barges from the farthest corners of the Underworld make their way to the necropolis, their crews hoping to sell their goods and buy something from some other land. The kings and emperors of the Underworld also offer tribute to the honor of the Dual Monarchy. The tributes are usually small, but they quickly pile up and trickle down to enrich all of Stygia.

What Stygia does not import, it crafts itself. Far from poor, the Grand Necropolis sits atop the Labyrinth and mines its strange ores and resources. While the work to gather them is dangerous, these ores see use in everything from soulsteel to the pyre flame that powers smelting plants and refineries. The River Styx enriches the loamy soil at its banks, and the flood plains surrounding Stygia burst with fine crops, which the Stygian dead either eat or export back to the rest of the Underworld. Finally, where the dead of other lands seek ways to influence and please the living, the dead of Stygia seek to please the dead with services legendary throughout the Underworld. Tourists and visitors pour in to enjoy its fine brothels, playhouses and cathedrals, or even just to sip at its magnificent air.

## CLERICS OF THE DUAL MONARCHY

Serving as bureaucrats, tax collectors and priests to the Cult of the Dual Monarchy, the Clerics maintain the integrity of everything the lords of Stygia try to accomplish. They wear loose leggings and tight-fitting sandals, their chests bare and their faces shrouded in colorful jade masks, the color of which denotes their station and the markings of which denotes their rank. Each carries a scroll of parchment in one hand to record the sins and righteous deeds of the dead, and a thurible in the other to sweeten the air and remind the dead of the sanctity of the Dual Monarchs.

Frequently seen in Stygia, the Clerics also journey to all corners of the Underworld to maintain the Cult of the Dual Monarchy, which sustains all of the Underworld. In the courts of kings, they make sure that proper offerings are made to the Dual Monarchy and proper oblation offered to Stygia. Among the common dead, they offer guidance and lead in prayer. In Stygia, they maintain Essence banks filled with the cast off gems of the Dual Monarchy, speak the pronouncements of their masters and root out any heresy that springs up within the Cult.

## MASKS OF POWER

Stygia stands astride the Underworld as the greatest monument ever constructed to the dead. Its might extends far beyond its economic influence or even beyond the power of the Calendar of Setesh. Its armies of jade effigies and the might of Usine's bright panoply dwarf the strength of any wraithly force except for the strength of the Deathlords. Its immortal, ineffable masters command powers beyond those of the dead emperors and kings from beyond the Sea of Shadows. Perched atop the Grand Necropolis, the Deathlords will allow none to overshadow their favored city. When Stygia rouses, the rest of the Underworld watches; if Stygia falls, the Underworld falls with it.

### JADE EFFIGY FANG

**Description:** Some long-forgotten god-king of the First Age commissioned the construction of an entire army of jade statues as part of his funeral panoply. The jade soldiers passed to the Underworld and became weapons for the Dual Monarchs and a few of the more powerful nephwracks. Jade effigies move as quickly as any mortal soldier despite being made of solid stone. Even without their jade weapons, their jade fists strike with tremendous, crushing force.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** Carved in the shapes of armored warriors from pure white jade

**Motto:** N/A



**General Makeup:** A fang of five jade effigies armed with jade swords, jade spears and bows

**Overall Quality:** Excellent

**Magnitude:** 1

**Drill:** 5

**Close Combat Attack:** 4

**Close Combat Damage:** 4

**Ranged Attack:** 3

**Ranged Damage:** 3

**Endurance:** — **Might:** 5

**Armor:** 4

**Morale:** —

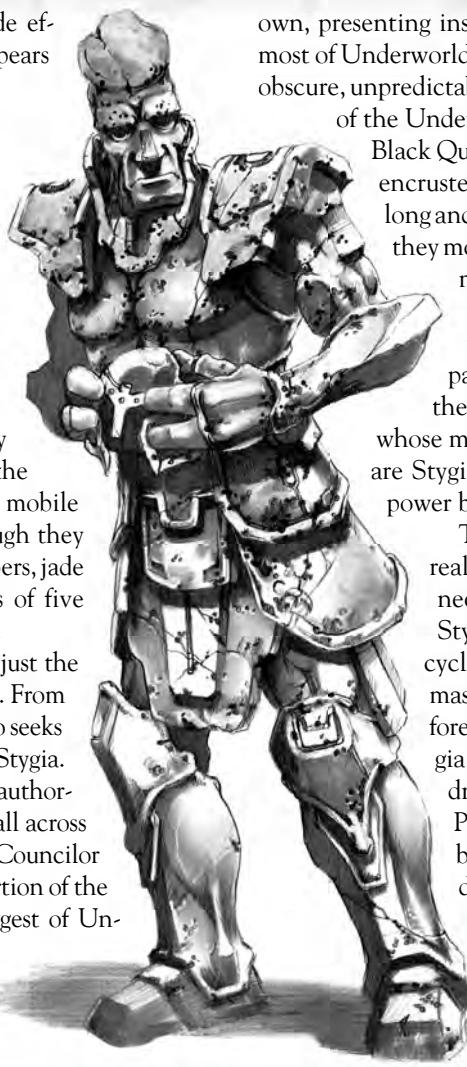
**Formation:** Jade effigies are typically deployed in close formation, with the pitiless intimidating statues acting as mobile stone walls as much as soldiers. Though they are sometimes deployed in larger numbers, jade effigies are usually deployed in units of five under the command of a single ghost.

Stygia's beacon draws more than just the hopeful, it draws the ambitious as well. From all over the Underworld, any ghost who seeks to attain a new, higher station comes to Stygia. Even a minor position within the port authority can allow one to influence events all across the Underworld. The lofty position of Councilor grants a huge cult and power over a portion of the Grand Necropolis larger than the largest of Underworld cities. Those who enjoy the opulence of the Court of the Dual Monarchy look down upon those who rule empires. Even the greatest kings eventually come to Stygia to seek some way to increase their power and prestige.

Those who wish to expand their power base by exploiting the riches of Stygia must navigate a Byzantine, often nonsensical power structure. Those who seem to rule in Stygia often do not, and those who seem but pawns often pull the strings of their seeming masters. The strange, circular passions of the Stygian dead cause some powerful ghosts put themselves beneath the heels of weaker masters, or give rise to rivalries contrived for the mutual enjoyment of the opposing parties. Complicating matters, Stygia has no single ruler. Power in the Grand Necropolis divides between the ceremonial rulership of the Dual Monarchy, the pragmatic might of the Stygian Council and the de facto reign of the Deathlords. Whether one wishes to seize a seat on the Council, slip into the Court of the Dual Monarchy or catch the eye of a powerful Deathlord, each route to power has its advantages and its limits.

## THE DUAL MONARCHY

For many, the Dual Monarchy embodies Stygia. The ceremonial masters of Stygia have no real personality of their



own, presenting instead ancient caricatures that predates most of Underworld society. Their every action pertains to obscure, unpredictable rites meant to maintain the stability of the Underworld. When the White King and his Black Queen descend from their thrones, jewel-encrusted hands in one another's gentle grip, long and ornate garments flowing behind them, they move as though in a dance, with sweeping movements and stately gestures. When the Black King and the White Queen rise to the vaunted parapets of their palace to overlook their great necropolis, they offer cryptic pronouncements, riddles whose meaning slowly unfolds over time. They are Stygia's rightful rulers, but they have little power beyond their ritualistic positions.

The Dual Monarchs are, paradoxically, real ghosts with true passions and wraithly needs who have ruled since the dawn of Stygia, and representatives of a constant cycle of new rulers who have donned the masks and crowns of rulership. At a time foreordained by the Calendar of Setesh, Stygia holds a lottery, where every ghost within draws a stone from vast vase within the Palace of the Dual Monarchy. Most draw blood-red stones that dissolve within a day, but one draws forth a white stone, and another draws forth a black stone. At that moment, the ghosts fade from the memory of the Underworld, their names lost. They then don the masks of the Dual Monarchs, becoming them in every action and mannerism.

The fate of those who previously held the masks is unknown. Perhaps they are consumed by Lethe or Oblivion. Perhaps they even lead new unlives among the dead of Stygia, their former existences scrubbed from their minds.

Despite their ceremonial nature and their ritualistic rulership, a flicker of free will dances behind the Monarchs' masks. While most ambitious ghosts dismiss them as unimportant figureheads, puppets to the Deathlords and the Stygian Council, the Dual Monarchs often display a surprising flexibility and canniness. They have accumulated power and wisdom for millennia and represent the closest thing the dead have to gods. While the needs of the Calendar and the Underworld restrain these puppet-kings with powerful strings, they have just enough freedom to make small, subtle moves in a dangerous, eternal game against the powers of the Labyrinth. Every time they outsmart their foes, they buy the Underworld yet another day. Some of the powerful elite within Stygia even serve the Dual Monarchy as directly as they can, believing that a supreme and benevolent intellect lurks behind their ritual actions.

## THE COURT OF THE DUAL MONARCHY

The rites of the Dual Monarchs demand attendants. When the lords of Stygia sweep from their thrones, an equally baroque and elegant crowd must part before them. When they speak, whispers must echo in the central chambers of the palace. To fill these roles, the Dual Monarchy employs courtiers and sycophants, the sort of dross one might expect in any court. The heady air of the Court, so central to all of Stygia and thick with the prayers of the dead, intoxicates and influences the ghosts who step within it. They intuitively know the roles they should play and how to properly behave during the rites. No ghost can accidentally disrupt the actions of the Dual Monarchs. The atmosphere of the Court, laden with heavy taboos, makes this impossible. And so, the denizens of the Court become almost extensions of the will of the Dual Monarchy, extras in their grand play.

Almost.

The Court of the Dual Monarchy offers considerable benefits to those who manage to find a station within. While they have little free will when caught up in the rituals of the Dual Monarchy, such dances don't last forever. When the lords of Stygia sit once more, the courtiers can erupt into whispers and intrigue, setting the stage for the next set of rites. Like the Dual Monarchs themselves, the courtiers have enough freedom to nudge the rituals in the way they wish, influencing and impacting the laws of Stygia, and even the realities of the Underworld. All of Stygia looks to the Court of the Dual Monarchy with admiration, so a courtier can set fashion trends or receive invitations from powerful ghosts, acting as a celebrity who has almost literally walked among the stars. Simply residing within the Court brings power to the courtier. The Court grants its inhabitants a "phantom" Cult rating of 2, just as Stygia provides all its citizens with a Cult rating of 1 (see "Breathing Prayers," p. 32).

bers with the Mandate, always found behind the volume, quietly reading or scribing its latest words. He knows every page, every passage by heart. Master Amenti controls the police forces of Stygia and acts as the ultimate arbiter of the law, should the court systems fail or a dispute arise over just how the words of the Dual Monarchy should be interpreted. A devout servant of the Dual Monarchy, he uses his bureaucratic influence to manipulate the Court of the Dual Monarchy and the Clerics to maintain their safety. Yet the decrepit master of the Mandate is sometimes petty when he uses his influence, especially when it comes to dealing with his nemesis, the Courtier of Silk and Shadows.

*The Mandate of the Dead* (and, by extension, Stygian law) tangles into a hopeless, convoluted mess for anyone who wishes to know the particulars. In practice, however, it serves three primary roles. In the first and least important role, Stygian law helps to maintain the peace among the city's dead, ensuring something of a level playing field and keeping the streets from disintegrating into anarchy. In the second role, the Keepers of the Mandate march forth, arresting the inevitable rabble that clutters the streets of Stygia and shipping them to prisons, mining camps or beyond the Sea of Shadows. They do so to keep Stygia clear of any excessive accumulations of useless beggars or faltering dead.

In its final and most important role, the law of Stygia serves as a constant source of amusement and passion for the dead, especially the wealthy and powerful citizens of Stygia. The Keepers investigate forgotten murders or implausible plots. They arrest upstanding citizens on trumped-up charges. Those caught in the grinding wheels of the Stygian bureaucracy find themselves stripped bare of their finery and weighed down with sackcloth and heavy, oversized chains. In the courts of the dead, skeletal judges leer at the defendants from atop looming podiums, their bony fingers clicking impatiently as they listen to the dramatic rants of lawyers and the wailing pleas of their witnesses. The courtroom drama enmeshes whole communities of the dead, as rivals take the chance to tear down their enemies and allies gleefully conjure implausible alibis to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their friends. When the final exposition has closed, the court hands down its verdict. Many courts find defendants innocent, clearing them of all charges—to either the great relief or the shocked outrage of the community. Other courts vindictively find popular defendants guilty—particularly those who have obviously done no wrong—allowing everyone involved to enjoy a rich reaping of angst as convicted ghosts are sentenced to long and torturous terms in the worst of Stygia's many prisons.

## THE COUNCIL OF THIRTEEN

Although it is far below the Dual Monarchy in station, the Council of Thirteen generally wields far greater power. Each district in Stygia has its master, and within the realm of his own district, that master's word is law. The Keepers of the Mandate regularly impose Stygian law on all corners of

## THE MANDATE OF THE DEAD

Deep in the bowels of the Dual Monarchy's palace lies *The Mandate of the Dead*. This massive tome, written upon ancient parchment with a cover decorated in silvery chasing and a huge lock that secures it when the Keepers of the Mandate do not need it, contains every pronouncement given by the Dual Monarchy: the laws that govern Stygia. Mastering the contents of this ancient manuscript takes more than a mortal lifetime, and is left to the most dedicated of the dead.

His name is Master Amenti. The ibis-masked lord of Stygian law secludes himself away in his subterranean cham-



### THE FOUR FACES OF THE MONARCHY

The Dual Monarchy consists of four rulers, a white and a black monarch, each with male and female aspects. The Monarchs always appear at each other's side, never alone. When the dead speak of the Dual Monarchy, they generally speak of it as one institution, and the dead never favor one aspect over the other, except for specific applications. Each aspect of each monarch has its own unique powers and capabilities, representing some facet of the Underworld.

**Usine:** The male aspect of the White Monarch bears the white jade key that represents the Monarchs' Way district. He controls the magnificent jade effigies that guard the borders of Stygia. Usine's "Bright Panoply" contains the greatest riches of the Underworld, and their presence brings joy to the dead.

**Eset:** The female aspect of the White Monarch serves as the Mouthpiece of the Void. She knows the secrets of the Whispers Oblivion, and can control those truly devoted to Oblivion. By lifting one hand, she can call up the terrible storms of the Underworld... or calm them.

**Setesh:** Much is made of the master of Stygia's Calendar, but he is only one quarter of the Dual Monarchy's power. Setesh's tower, the tallest spire in Stygia, rises nearest the Calendar above it, and his mastery of that mechanism grants him the power of prophecy when it comes to matters of the Underworld. The Black King oversees all rites associated with maintaining the stability of the Underworld and the workings of the Calendar.

**Nebthys:** The female aspect of the Black Monarch hears the last whisper of dying and knows many secrets of the living world. She never makes proclamations or revelations, but she does occasionally whisper her secrets into the ears of others, setting events in motion that favor whatever mysterious agenda she has. In recent days, an Abyssal has caught the fancy of Nebthys, and some fear that this new lover might gain a great deal of power as she whispers her knowledge to him between the sheets of her bed.

the necropolis, but each Councilor employs his own forces to maintain his power, arbitrate local arguments, decide who may engage in trade, choose who enjoys access to Stygia's finer

mausoleums and manses, and enforce personal edicts. The 13 Councilors meet yearly in an unimposing, sprawling complex filled with secret hideaways, coat rooms and long, isolated

hallways—a perfect venue for quiet conspiracies. There, the Council decides on more mundane matters considered beneath the Dual Monarchy, charting the course of Stygia in an open vote. Technically, the Council's role in Stygia's governance is advisory, as its members supply their decisions to the Dual Monarchs, who may enact or dismiss them as they see fit. In practice, though, the Monarchs routinely pass all Council legislation with little or no change, especially since the arrival of the Deathlords has forced both the Council and the Monarchy to cooperate more closely.

Councilors gain their position by force of arms or guile. No political process governs succession, and whoever holds the symbol of the district holds dominion over that district. Some, such as the Hollow King, manage to hold onto their seats for centuries; others change hands several times a year, as with the leadership of the District Where Shadows Walk. The political realities of Stygia make sure that each Councilor is a strong man, a politician who gains and holds his power through the sheer force of personality combined with mastery of Arcanoi, legions of soldiers and alliances with powerful citizens of Stygia. A seat on the Council isn't usually a route to power in and of itself. Rather, it serves as a crowning achievement for a ghost who has already achieved great power.

For those with great ambition in the Underworld in general and Stygia in particular, the Council offers some attractive options. Controlling a district grants a considerable cult and astonishing pull throughout the Underworld. The Dual Monarchy cannot be directly controlled, and even if one could, it has limited power. The Deathlords stand beyond the grasp of any ghost and most Exalted, and they wield only unofficial power. A Councilor genuinely shapes Stygian policy, enjoys quite a few benefits and finds himself in a position to offer favors in return for alliances. As a result, many ambitious ghosts seek such a position, meaning that competition for the 13 seats is fierce.

### THE MASTERS BEHIND THE DUAL THRONES

The Deathlords rule Stygia, though they bow deeply, offer oblation and silently observe the proceedings when they enter the Court of the Dual Monarchy. Their servants acknowledge all the laws of the necropolis, and more than a few have found their way into the courts. They make no plays for Council seats and simply enjoy their fine estates surrounding the Well of Oblivion. Yet Stygia lies fully in their grasp. Should they offer advice to the Dual Monarchs, the rulers of Stygia quickly enact it. They entertain Councilors, who listen very carefully to every utterance. When their minions request favors from the Keepers of the Mandate or entrance into the darkest crypts beneath the Palace of the Dual Monarchy, they receive it, however grudgingly.

When the Deathlords invaded Stygia, they understood enough about the necropolis and its central role to the Underworld that they restrained themselves. Should they break the Calendar or cast the Dual Monarchs into Oblivion, the heavens would cease their movement and

the dead would cry out, diminishing the realms of all. And while no ghost could truly oppose the might of a Deathlord, all Deathlords find Stygia terribly interesting. Should one attempt to take it for himself, he would find 12 powerful enemies arrayed against him. Instead, the Deathlords all content themselves to sit back and rule Stygia by suggestion and subtle tuggings of strings. A favor here and a request there represents the extent of Deathlord's power, unless the 13 decide to act together, or one manages to outmaneuver the rest.

For the Deathlords, Stygia is neutral ground. Their minions may not harm one another within its boundaries, for they cannot risk outright war in the delicate, geomantic streets of the Grand Necropolis. Moreover, the Mouth of the Void lies at the heart of the city, a sacred place held in higher esteem even than the tombs of the Neverborn. The Deathlords gather here for diplomacy with one another or for grand conclaves, deciding the fate of all the Underworld together.

### FACETS OF THE DARK JEWEL

Stygia is vast. Populated by ghosts with eternal passions, the Grand Necropolis can only grow and grow, spreading out like a bloodstain across the tangled wilderness of the Stygian Isle. Much has been written of the Dark Jewel of the Underworld, but even the greatest tome in the sunlit world or the land of the dead can only shed light on a fraction of its diversity and strangeness. Even when divided into 13 separate regions, Stygia still dwarfs the cities of the living, as a single Stygian district covers more ground and contains more inhabitants than any mortal city in living memory.

Superficially, the 13 districts of Stygia resemble the divisions of living cities. Each region within the Grand Necropolis proudly displays its own version of Stygian culture and houses its own collection of artisans and craftsmen: here an industrial area, there the homes of the wealthy and famous, over there a scandalous neighborhood of whores and drug dens. But the comparison with the cities of the living must end there, for where mortals slowly build their districts based on constantly evolving economic and cultural differences, the dead of Stygia built theirs on occult necessity.

Each district corresponds to one constellation of the Stygian zodiac and represents an aspect of Underworld life. For example, Little Shoe represents the rage of the oppressed and the corruption of the oppressor, and corresponds to the constellation of the Dancer. These occult correspondences can never change, as they serve to empower the Calendar of Setesh. Just as the Dual Monarchs dance like puppets, their strings tied to the needs of the Calendar, all of Stygia moves to the clockwork drumbeat of the Calendar's ordering influence, acting as lenses to magnify and direct it to its proper destination. Therefore, no matter how much effort an activist might put into cleaning up Little Shoe's corruption and caring for the plight of the poverty stricken, that district will always remain a place of oppression and the oppressed,



a place eternally tied to the Dancer. The best any reformer can hope for is to reinterpret the meaning of “oppression” and diminish the strength of Little Shoe, or to move as many ghosts as she can to more prosperous districts (assuming they even wish to be “saved”).

While the nature of Stygia’s districts remains stagnant, their influence and power does not. Each district has ancient and powerful boundary stones, created during Stygia’s founding to demarcate where one geomantic area ended and another began. They established the initial boundaries fairly and equally but failed to cement the boundaries in place. When the first ghost realized he could pick up a boundary stone and shift it to claim even more of Stygia for his district, he sparked the first of many quiet and subtle wars between the Stygian districts. Now the dead constantly struggle to claim more and more of Stygia, and the size of each district has swollen and shrunk considerably over time. Little Shoe remains the largest at the moment, but the constant growth of the District of the Whispering Streets means it could eventually eclipse it.

Every year, the leaders of the districts stage grand parades where they display the token-hearts of their districts and anoint their border stones with living blood and gold-flecked ambergris oil to restore their aging occult power. These magnificent parades, filled with dark pageantry, chimes of glass, the scent of incense and the stately motions of masked, skeletal dancers, display the full influence of each district’s ruler. While the display of the symbolic heart of the district in public, away from the safety of its stronghold, would seem to spark yearly succession, it seldom does, as the dead intuitively refrain from stealing the tokens during this time.

All 13 districts are detailed here, each listing its leader, symbol and corresponding constellation for quick reference. When the constellation is known by different names in other lands, the alternative appellations are also noted.

### MONarchs’ WAY

**Leaders:** The Dual Monarchy

**Token:** A white jade key

**Constellation:** The Pole Star

While officially a district of Stygia, Monarchs’ Way has no representative on the Council of Thirteen, and it has no place on the Stygian zodiac. Instead, it forms the seat of government, housing the Palace of the Dual Monarchy, the Council’s complex and mansions for the Deathlords and other powerful figures in Stygia.

Like the constellation of the Water Runs Red district, the star of Monarchs’ Way does not belong in the Stygian zodiac but plays an important part in Underworld astronomy nonetheless. The Pole Star represents stability, as it never wavers in the sky and its bright point marks where the sky and the Calendar of Setesh meet.

### WATER RUNS RED

**Leader:** The Scarlet Empress (Officially)

**Token:** A black cauldron

**Constellation:** The River

On the outskirts of Stygia, tall cast-iron fences with spiked tops and creaking gates line the border between the Grand Necropolis and the wilderness beyond. Far from the rich center of Stygia, the Water Runs Red district receives little money for renovation. Its buildings hunker low to the ground, rough places filled with poorly groomed ghosts and shifty-eyed visitors. Broken stones stand upright in otherwise empty fields of overgrown grass. The croaks of raitons or the strains of a spry song on a harpsichord occasionally break the silence.

For many ghosts, their first step into Stygia treads the broken roadways of the Water Runs Red district. It tenuously controls the gates and the wells of the Grand Necropolis, granting access and support to all other parts of the city. Those who enter here can find passage down one of the district’s many thoroughfares or catch a ride with a gondolier down one of the many canals for a small fee. Water Runs Red lacks the hospitality of the other parts of Stygia, however, and the district’s harshness puts the newly dead through a grueling crucible, discarding the unfit and welcoming the strong into the deeper, more rewarding parts of Stygia.

When the ravishment of Stygia at the hands of the nephwracks ended, the ghosts of Water Runs Red discovered that the border stones to their district had vanished. Without the stones’ power, the stability of all Stygia faltered and strange monsters lumbered into the city through unprotected gates. The heroes of the war struggled to contain the menace while valiant ghosts searched in vain for the stones. Only when a ghost answered a summons in the Imperial City of the sunlit world did Stygia discover that the Scarlet Empress herself held the stones. Demanding control over Water Runs Red district in exchange for the stones, the Empress gained a seat on the Council. Other ghosts sit at her place now, maintaining appearances, but they merely act as mouthpieces for her wishes. The latest in the long line of puppets is Devlin, the Somber Gray. Since the Empress’s disappearance, however, this aged, corpulent ghost hungers for control over the whole district. He sends his agents to find out who, if anyone, has inherited control of the district from her.

The constellation of the Water Runs Red district, the River, is a beautiful, thick band made up of thousands of stars sweeping across the sky of the dead. While it doesn’t truly belong to the Stygian zodiac, it nonetheless takes up an important role as “the edge of heaven,” the border between the known and the unknown. Some ghosts in Stygia reference it when they say, “See you on the other side of the River”—a poetic admission that they do not know when they will see one another again.

### THE THREE-TIERED PALISADES SENTINEL SQUAD

**Description:** The heroes who defended Water Runs Red from the monsters of the Stygian Isle did not vanish when safety was restored to Stygia. They constructed an imposing edifice on the outskirts of Water Runs Red, built with thick, square stones. Its windows are barred with black steel;

its long corridors echo with the sounds of blade on blade and the whispers of secret traditions. Today, the soldiers trained within call themselves Stygian Sentinels. They wear lamellar armor and hide their faces with masked helms. Trained in all manner of warfare, they favor the thick-bladed axe or long, graceful slashing blades. The Sentinels of the Three-Tiered Palisades, servants of the Veiled Grandmaster, specialize in slaying monsters. They fill their ranks with the dead who battled impossible odds in life and cannot give up on that thrill. While founded and stationed in Stygia, the Sentinels often travel to other parts of the Underworld to ply their trade in the defense of the dead.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** Monochromatic mixture of white and black

**Motto:** "For Stygia and the Monarchy!"

**General Makeup:** 15 warriors in lamellar armor, armed with slashing swords or axes

**Overall Quality:** Excellent

**Magnitude:** 2

**Drill:** 5

**Close Combat Attack:** 4

**Close Combat Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** — **Ranged Damage:** —

**Endurance:** 8      **Might:** 3

**Armor:** 3 (-2 mobility penalty)

**Morale:** 4

**Formation:** Varies according to circumstances

## LITTLE SHOE

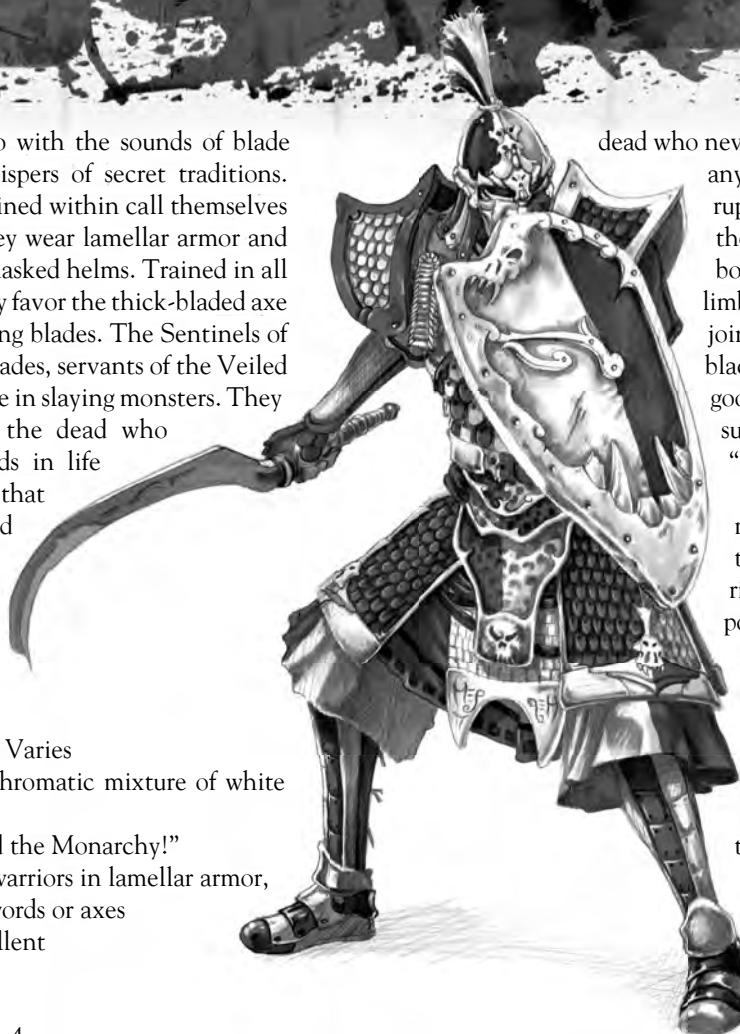
**Leader:** The Hollow King

**Token:** A bloody workman's maul

**Constellation:** The Dancer (a.k.a. the Laughing Man, the Trickster)

The largest of Stygia's districts, Little Shoe swirls with conflicting imagery and clashing cultures. The towering structures here aren't the results of prestigious projects to craft magnificent monuments, but rather accumulations of homes piled atop each other into teetering, unstable towers. By day, the varied dead scurry from their homes to flood Little Shoe's streets in a tide of poverty-stricken gray. By night, the knives of the dead come out as thugs and brutes assail willing victims, leaving pooling stains of black blood on the grainy bricks of back alleys.

For the poor dead who see Stygia as a shining beacon of hope, Little Shoe offers sobering reality. With cheap housing and plentiful employment, the dead quickly find themselves trapped here, and bitterness marks those elder



dead who never found a way out. As with any underprivileged land, corruption runs rampant through the streets of Little Shoe. Mob bosses and guild lords break the limbs of any ghost who refuses to join their ranks, and a thriving black market of stolen grave goods lurks just beneath the surface of the district's many "legitimate businesses."

The Hollow King has managed to rule over this tumultuous cesspit for centuries. A skilled orator and a deft politician, he uses Little Shoe's rage against his enemies and plays faction against faction in an effort to stay on top of the heap. Despite his obvious corruption and apparent flirtation with the forces of the Abyss, he ardently supports the Dual Monarchy behind the scenes. For more details about the Hollow King, see pages 133-134.

## THE FESTIVAL OF ASHES

Once a month, the dead of Little Shoe sweep aside the homeless, clear out the grandest square in the center of the district and invite all of Stygia to join them in the celebration of the Festival of Ashes. Black and white confetti peppers the gray stones of the square, and ghosts float from stall to stall, peering at all the strange merchandise and negotiating with salesmen, while they hold sticks of black, twisted carnival meat in one hand and silvery baubles and trinkets in the other. Amidst the subdued chaos, the dead put nearly everything on sale, from ill-gotten grave goods to Labyrinth relics to their own freedom. Denizens of the Labyrinth sometimes make the journey upward to bargain for less tangible things, offering Whispers and glimpses of madness in exchange for nuggets of sanity or beautiful memories. Sometimes, even the living—usually necromancers or well-connected followers of the ancestor cult—come to Stygia for the event, offering mortal wares in exchange for the wonders of the Underworld. If the dead seek something, anything, chances are they can find it at the Festival of Ashes.

## THE DISTRICT WITH THE BONE LANTERNS

**Leader:** The Mistress with the White Hands

**Token:** Eternally blooming branch of a cherry tree

**Constellation:** The Sisters

Beautiful, tranquil and scandalous, the District with the Bone Lanterns fascinates the dead of Stygia and those who visit the Grand Necropolis. Beyond the soft blue lanterns that mark its border, a constant rain of snow-white cherry petals showers the streets. The soft pattering of artificial streams and fountains marks staccato accompaniment to the soft chords of zither music and the floating songs of flutes. The intoxicating scents of perfumes and tea leaves add spice to the air. The dead come to the District with the Bone Lanterns as though entranced, their passions aroused and their dreams bright in their otherwise dull, vacant eyes.

The District with the Bone Lanterns is the red-lantern district of Stygia. While the dead sometimes attempt to dress up this fact, extolling the elegance and wisdom of the district's inhabitants, the dead who reside here know and understand their roles as the playthings of the Underworld. The whores of Stygia are marvelous creatures. Graceful, eloquent and demure, they wear subtle fashion and carefully paint their exquisitely molliated features to match the ideals of their customers. They understand the needs of the dead and carefully cultivate a sense of melodrama and tragedy, artfully arranging for revelations of romantic betrayal and other methods to stir the hearts of the dead to rapturous jealousy. The dead hunger for passion, not physical satiation, and when the act of love is merely a motion gone through for the sake of memory, a skilled harlot knows to arouse her client's emotions rather than the physical reactions of his long-ago-decayed body.

The Mistress with the White Hands rules this district of Stygia. She once served as a whore on its streets, an abused toy for those better than her. Now that she has power in her grasp, she dallies only with those who delight her. For more details on the Mistress with the White Hands, see pages 136-137.

## V'IJEA

**Leader:** Princess Annuaski

**Token:** A white jade spear

**Constellation:** The Feather

The soaring buildings of V'ijea contribute almost as much to Stygia's skyline as Monarchs' Way. Massive monuments of glass and granite scrape the sky, their bulk shadowing the entire district and plunging it into darkness, even by day. The many statues and the green mirrored windows that decorate the edifices create a surreal wonderland of half-seen reflections and unmoving figures poised just beyond the edge of one's vision.

Standing beside Monarchs' Way, V'ijea serves as the financial center to Stygia, as the Clerics of the Dual Monarchy center their bank-cathedrals here. When the wealthy,

## THE WHITE-FIRE RIVER

Deep in the bowels beneath V'ijea lies a secret, a slowly building threat ignored by Stygians too busy to stop and notice. In an ancient chamber that predates the founding of Stygia, six blood-red seals written in still-gleaming ink hold a Neverborn presence prisoner. One has broken. A ghostly glow of brilliant white light splits the center of this ancient subterranean chamber, containing enough power to send a ghost to Lethe with just a touch and to annihilate any object that directly touches it in an implosion of soundless consumption.

The dead know of this place. Stygia's scholars have noted it and documented it as a curiosity. Some centuries ago, a leader of V'ijea even saw fit to tap it for power, adding to the overall Essence flow of the district. Occasionally, a ghost descends to note the decay of the seals and make ominous proclamations about the fate of Stygia should the seals collapse fully. Such ghosts foresee an eruption of power as whatever lies sealed away bursts free of the Labyrinth, tearing Stygia apart in its release and toppling the Calendar of Setesh. But because the dead have no solutions for the problem, they quietly ignore it, hoping the White-Fire River won't erupt while they exist.

mercantile dead have finished with the marketplaces of Little Shoe and the pleasures of the District with the Bone Lanterns, they frequently come to V'ijea to finance new voyages, make alliances with masked, Stygian syndicates and generally engage in mercantile drama.

V'ijea historically had strong ties with its sister city, Chiaroscuro, before the Contagion laid it low. Even to this day, the powerful of the district send forays into the shattered, haunted parts of Chiaroscuro, attempting to tame the city and strengthen its dead. Despite their best efforts at diplomacy, Grandmother Bright continues to oppose their project and keeps the city's inner shadowlands sealed away with a permanent ring of salt, infuriating the dead who reside within.

Princess Annuaski, an empress from the east, rules the district, but she does so with a light hand. She remains in her native country when possible, enjoying the district's riches and the flow of Essence, and nothing more. When truly important matters come up in Stygia, she drags herself away from her home to cast a quick, apathetic vote, and then returns to her throne. For more information on Princess Annuaski, see page XX to XX.

## THE DISTRICT OF THE WHISPERING STREETS

**Leader:** Unwanted Whisper

**Token:** A bronze bell whose clapper has rotted away

**Constellation:** The House of Houses (a.k.a. the Secret Room)



## THE HOUSE OF DOLLS

At the center of the District with the Bone Lanterns, the grand mansion of the district's mistress towers above the rest of the brothels and drug dens, both in reputation and in size. Emphasizing its width rather than its height, this multi-tiered building has long-reaching, curved roofs tiled in bright red. Just beneath the eaves, silhouettes cast by soft lanterns move behind the silk-draped windows. Within, finely dressed ghosts kneel at low-lying tables, playing games with the gentle click of ivory tiles, eating finely prepared, savory meals of rice, peppers and meat, or enjoying the company of exquisitely moliated whores with faces of porcelain and robes of red-sashed white.

Part restaurant, part inn, part brothel and part casino, the House of Dolls seeks to serve every possible desire the dead might have. Each floor caters to a different vice the dead enjoy, while discretely hiding its customers behind beautifully decorated silken screens. The House of Dolls even specifically caters to the living, for what pleases the dead more than the blood of a mortal? Should a denizen of the land of the living, whether mortal or Exalt, enter the House of Dolls, the servants flutter about him, serving even the most extraordinary whim as well as they can manage. The House of Dolls even stocks up on mortal fare, paying exorbitant shipping fees for the privilege of feeding a mortal within Stygia. In return for such grand hospitality, the mortal must make a daily offering of blood when the sun rises. The Mistress with the White Hands takes this offering and presents it as a favor to those ghosts whom she wishes to please. In this manner, she earns many allies. The Mistress even trains her whores in the arts of pleasing the living. In addition to delighting those mortals who reside in Stygia for a time, they quickly become favorites of necromancers as well.

A malevolent presence haunts this once-glorious district of Stygia. The quiet of the streets is routinely broken by half-heard whispers and snatches of incoherent conversation so soft that they seem imagined. The district's roads twist and writhe treacherously at the edge of sight, so a traveler in the

district who turns will find the way behind him closed or completely different. Abandoned houses watch the streets hungrily with gaping front doors and vacant, broken windows. Indistinct black things scuttle out of the corner of one's vision, malevolent monsters breathing heavily just around the corner.



The only dead here are those who cannot escape, lost forever in its labyrinthine layout. Tattered, skeletal and wearing little more than rags, these wretches watch any newcomer with a desperate hunger, aching perhaps for attention—or for a taste of Essence wrenched from a ghost's still-writhing corpus.

Before the nephwrack invasion stopped the turning of the Calendar and devastated the district, it exceeded even the district known as Twinborn's Death in mastery of lore and education. The ruins of libraries and universities dot the district, many containing very valuable works, such as books of prophecy, tomes of necromancy and the secrets of ancient Stygia. While many of Stygia's dead would pay dearly for access to such troves, only the most daring treasure-hunters dare slip beyond the district's border stones. Most who do never return. A few ghosts do so out of desperation, knowing no authority will follow them. Some who have mastered the intricacies of its strange geography make use of it as a dangerous haven. The rest of Stygia ignores it, hoping it will quietly go away. Still, they might need to deal with it someday, for every year, when Stygia's other districts hold their processions, the District of the Whispering Streets pushes its border stones back as its taint slowly spreads into the rest of Stygia.

Few ghosts would bother to take control of such a place, so the mantle has fallen upon a child-like ghost called Unwanted Whisper. She and her band of ghostly orphans lurk within the district, part child-bandits, part idealistic guerillas, struggling against the encroachment of the Deathlords and seeking some way to cleanse the horrors of their district. For more information on Unwanted Whisper, see pages 137-138.

### TWINBORN'S DEATH

**Leaders:** The Eye of White; The Eye of Red

**Token:** A small, golden mirror

**Constellation:** The Veiled One (a.k.a. Kore, Corah, the Stygian Bride)

The oldest of Stygia's districts hides beneath the taller, more imposing parts of the necropolis. Dust layers atop everything, from old tomes to spiraling streets, and any movement creates a haze of motes that glitters in the dull blue lanterns that light Twinborn's Death. Asymmetrical buildings reminiscent of the ruins in the south of the Stygian Isle lean and jut over the streets like a primordial sculpture, with indecipherable hieroglyphs and pictograms covering their walls. Ghosts strange even by the standards of Stygia occasionally venture from their homes, scuttling on dozens of legs or stalking on huge, spindly limbs, wearing rune-marked masks or robes of an impractical cut and fashion.

According to its denizens, Twinborn's Death marks the grave of the first mortal to rise up in the Underworld. True or not, the district attracts those ghosts most fascinated with secrets, knowledge and the past. Its many libraries and places of knowledge whisper with the turning of pages and the low murmurs of scholars. Those who wish to explore the district

### THE FOUNTAIN HEART

Every street of this district eventually leads to its cursed heart. In this empty, stone-cobbled plaza, the whispers fall silent, and the only sound is the bubbling of the small, marble fountain at its center. A stranger frequents this odd, dreadfully calm place. Some who enter see a beautiful maiden sitting at the edge of the fountain; others see an old man, his back always turned to the viewer. Still others see a child of indeterminate sex playing a repetitive and endless game. The Fountain Heart is the center of the curse of the District of the Whispering Streets, and those who linger too long vanish, their fates forever unknown.

Few know the secret of what resides in the center of the district, for few dally long enough to study it. Its monstrous presence makes the streets whisper and ripple, as it gathers up travelers with its street-tendrils, guiding them toward its hungry maw or whispering to the more powerful ghosts in half-heard pleas for release. Those who seek to lift the curse must focus their efforts here, at the den of the beast, for only by freeing or destroying it, can they hope to bring this part of Stygia back under the ordering sway of the Dual Monarchy's proper rule.

and its knowledge find themselves confronted by a gauntlet of long-forgotten customs, dead languages and strangeness that seems to exist solely for its own sake.

The Eye of White and the Eye of Red hold the small, golden mirror that marks the rulership of the district. Appearing to be vibrant and beautiful youths of opposing sexes, these twins wear only the most revealing garments and seem enrapt with one another, finishing each other's sentences and falling silent to stare soulfully at one another. Rumors abound about their private relationship. The twins also rule an empire in the South. One holds the Council seat of Twinborn's Death for a year, while the other holds the throne of their Southern empire. At year's end, they trade positions.

### THE STREET OF SWORDS

**Leader:** Lord Stalwart

**Token:** A great, two-handed sword

**Constellation:** The Chain Bearer (a.k.a. the Offerer)

Like a monstrous nightmare of steel and industry, this hellish region of Stygia looms above its neighbors, belching smoke and hungrily consuming ore and the freedom of its dead. Raging furnaces paint the dark streets with an ominous red hue, their light interrupted by the shifting shadows cast by smiths and refinery workers. Massive constructs of grease-spattered, riveted steel tower above the skyline like spidery monsters. A cacophony of grinding gears and the clang of metal constantly assails the ears of

the dead here, drowning out any sounds of suffering they might otherwise hear.

Hated for its ugliness, both in form and spirit, the Street of Swords nonetheless provides vital services to Stygia. The ores of the Labyrinth and the skills of elite dead artisans come together to create some of the finest artifacts of the Underworld. Their trade contributes greatly to Stygia's coffers. So wealthy is this district that a lowly apprentice often has superior wages to the finest craftsman of Little Shoe or the skilled doctors of Twinborn's Death, but this wealth comes at a price. The harsh fires and pragmatic industrial needs of the district harden the dead within, and most merchants or dwellers on the Street of Swords simply speak more loudly when some slave carted off to feed some soulforge cries out desperately for help.

Stygia's patience with the district has grown thin. Where it once armed the effigies and soldiers who valiantly defended the Grand Necropolis and the rest of the Underworld, Lord Stalwart now serves the Deathlords, turning the assets of the Street of Swords to their needs. The monstrous creations of the district now serve to oppress Stygia rather than liberate it. For more details on Lord Stalwart, see pages 134-135.

## SOUL'S LOST

**Leader:** Queen Nefere

**Token:** A small bottle with a lead stopper

**Constellation:** The Mask

Near Monarchs' Way, this striking and magnificent district perches on a series of tall, steep hills, coiled by fine brick roadways. Elegant mansions line the streets, tall and spacious, with high walls to keep out unwanted visitors. Ghosts here wear the finest garments available in Stygia: elegant monochrome silks, richly embroidered with silver, gray or green thread. Highborn in life, the dead display impeccable manners and disdain the commoners from other parts of Stygia. They enjoy the opulence of their own district, with its fashion circuits, its talented tailors and its prestigious playhouses.

Despite its grand appearance, though, a rot pervades Soul's Lost. Behind the fine façade of its mansions, only emptiness fills its rooms. Cracks crawl up the walls, and old, brown stains mottle the floors and ceilings. The dead here wear fine garments, but their bodies are gaunt, their gaits weak, as they spend all their coin on garments and appearances, rather than on pursuit of needful sustenance. Soul's Lost attracts those who had much in life, but little in death, particularly former Dynasts who want to pretend that they never fell. And so, more than most parts of Stygia, this district plays games and displays savagery against those who dare to point out the obviousness of Soul's Lost's deceptions.

Queen Nefere exemplifies her district. Only the sheerest of silk adorns her lovely body, and soulfire crystals and other jewels drip from her throat and wrists. Her neck is

long, her cheekbones high and her eyes the same sparkling blue as her favorite gemstones. Her soprano voice dominates the Council chambers, always laughing, dropping names and calling out to others. She despises the Mistress with the White Hands, who cannot be pulled away from more important matters long enough to notice Queen Nefere. The master of Soul's Lost turns her allegiance to anyone who strokes her ego—currently the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears. Queen Nefere knows that the Deathlord intends only malice to the Grand Necropolis, and she fully intends to end the relationship at some point. Right now, though, Queen Nefere is having far too much fun enjoying the company and patronage of such a beautiful and fashionable Deathlord.

Like all Councilors, Queen Nefere bears the token of her district, a small bottle of blue glass with a lead stopper. Within, an indistinct mass of gray and silver slowly swirls. Nobody—except perhaps the Dual Monarchs or the few dead present at the founding of Stygia—remembers precisely what lies inside the bottle or why it was sealed away.

The constellation of the Mask marks the district's portion of the night sky. When the Sidereals broke the original in Creation with their efforts to hide their involvement with the Usurpation, the constellation fell through the veil of life and death and took its place in the Underworld sky. The constellation it replaced is forgotten, its existence and memory wiped away by the usurping stars.

## ICELORD'S HEART

**Leader:** The Emperor Without Hope

**Token:** A plain, serviceable shield

**Constellation:** The Effigy (a.k.a. the Imposter, the Burning Man)

Like the edge of a knife, Icelord's Heart favors function over form. Straight streets dissect the district into gobbets of steely industry and cold living complexes. Few ghosts walk them, leaving the district empty and silent except for the hum of its machinery. Thick, black shadows separate the pools of illumination cast by the blazing green streetlights, which lend an unearthly air to whatever their light touches. Cold grips Icelord's Heart, a soft frost riming nearly everything with strange, almost-coherent patterns. An electric tingle hangs in the dry air as though *something* will happen at any moment. With so much uniformity dominating the district, outsiders quickly become disoriented and lost as they wander through a bleak grid of metal walkways and sprawling structures, with the uncaring, selfish eyes of ghosts watching them with disdainful amusement.

Even the most prestigious necropoli must turn their attentions toward practical matters. In that way, Icelord's Heart is the very core of Stygia. Unafraid to tackle the messier aspects of necromantic management, the ghosts of Icelord's Heart quietly guard and maintain the treacherous storm sewers beneath the city, they house Stygia's criminals in buried prisons, and they maintain pristine courthouses

with imposing and towering effigies guarding the fronts. The ghosts of Icelord's Heart revel in the display of power and fortitude that their merciless district exudes.

The Emperor Without Hope recently took control of the district from the ghosts of his own descendants. Ruling both his own empire in the cold reaches of the Northern Underworld and his newly acquired Stygian district, the Emperor Without Hope has his hands full pacifying the district. He seldom involves himself in Stygian politics.

## THE WAILING WALL

**Leader:** Mortician Aldis Nerin

**Token:** A narrow-bladed dagger of red jade

**Constellation:** The Eye of Night (a.k.a. the Void)

Tragedy and sorrow blankets the Wailing Wall, home to the remnants of Stygia's original outer wall. Black drapes everything. Homes shroud their windows and doors in shadow-colored curtains, and all the dead here wrap their bodies and veil their faces in the darkest of garments.

## THE PAPER GARDENS

In the center of Soul's Lost, at the valley between the many steep hills that surround its edges, lies a place of impossible beauty. Past the tall, concealing walls that guard the park, rolling hills unfold, clothed in the bright green of grass. Brilliantly red or violet flowers dot the landscape, carpeting everything in their soft-scented perfume. Clusters of trees offer visitors some shade and privacy while lending a sense of grandeur to the scenery. Completing the picture is a bright-blue creek that splashes merrily along, winding through the landscape, spanned by a quaint, arched stone bridge.

The Paper Gardens are fake. The gardens were constructed at the request of Usine, for he wished to offer those ghosts who longed for the world they left behind a place to meditate and remember. Each blade of grass is a delicate piece of green cloth. Each flower is precisely woven and designed to complement its neighbor. The river's color comes from dye. A team of gardeners toils ceaselessly to maintain the illusion, often working at night to endlessly replace faded or torn leaves and flowers. Many ghosts linger here, weeping in the confines of a grove of trees or smiling blissfully from atop a flower-covered hill. No mortal, however, is ever fooled by the place. The living are unable to ignore the darkness of the gravel beneath the grass, the somberness of the sky above and the lurking things that hide in the canopies of the trees. Like everything in the Underworld, the Paper Gardens are nothing more than a vain attempt by the dead to recapture their lives.



Even those from outside the Wailing Wall don the veils worn by its denizens, for covering the face offers respect to the grieving dead. Soft sobs and distant cries constantly echo throughout the district, muffled by the many drapes and veils. The heavy weight of the air brings to mind heartbreaking memories of home and loved ones.

The dead come to the Wailing Wall for many reasons. Ghosts from all over the Underworld make long, slow pilgrimages to Stygia just for a chance to touch the old wall and reminisce about the golden glory of the Underworld-That-Was. The dead of Stygia attempt to make the pilgrimage at least once a century. Even the Dual Monarchs descend from their thrones to weep at the wall. Other ghosts come for funeral processions, to mourn the loss of a ghost who has passed on into Lethe or Oblivion. These peculiar twice-fallen funerals serve to honor the memory of the departed less than they serve to invigorate the remaining dead with passionate hunger for revenge or long, lingering emotions of utter despair. The Wailing Wall churns with a quiet industry of grief, and skilled, ghostly performers regularly accost visitors, wailing loudly and rending their garments, or joining in the processions of the dead to make the fallen ghost seem more beloved than he was.

Completely shrouded in black garments, his face hidden by the shadows of his cowl, the lord of the Wailing Wall keeps only his hands, pale, beautiful and expressive, visible. Aldis Nerin, a native of Sijan and a mercenary fighting on the behalf of the Scavenger Lands in their wars against the Realm, knew his violent death would come sooner rather than later, and he carefully planned accordingly. Skilled in the mortuary arts, he set aside all the money he could to build himself the finest tomb and offerings he could afford, making sure that his spirit would enter the afterlife wealthy and powerful after his untimely death. Naturally, he rose quickly among the ranks of the dead. Still fascinated by the trappings of funerals, seized the token of the Wailing Wall for his own. He retains the fervent desire for freedom he had in life, and he often speaks loudly and eloquently of his shock and disgust at the ascendancy of the Deathlords, but remains curiously inactive against them. Aldis Nerin maintains close ties with both the living and the dead halves of Sijan.

## THE DISTRICT WHERE SHADOWS WALK

**Leader:** Maru

**Token:** A paper lantern that casts blue light and deep shadows

**Constellation:** The Many Arms (a.k.a. the Tree, the Guardian)

While outwardly normal enough, the District Where Shadows Walk slowly and quietly descends into madness beyond the edges of its boundary. The deeper one travels into the district, the black cobblestones of its streets slowly grow ragged and torn, the streets rougher and pockmarked by neglect. The tall spires and towers that are universal

throughout all of Stygia grow twisted and jagged-topped. Instead of the soft, murmured priestly chants found elsewhere in Stygia, the holy men of the District Where Shadows Walk scream and mutter in tongues. On the street corners, crazed prophets to Oblivion call out the nearness of the end of time, each one demanding all come to his bizarre cult. The denizens within keep their heads low, offering whatever holy gesture is needed to appease the nephwracks that hold the district in their grasp.

When Stygia fell to the nephwrack invasion, the spectres forced the Dual Monarchs to sign away the dominion of one of the districts to them. Although the Dual Monarchy still officially rules this part of Stygia, packs of mortwrights have replaced its guards, and monsters openly roam the streets. The nephwracks provide nothing resembling unified rule, constantly fighting among themselves over power and dogma. The favored cult leader today could become a despised pretender tomorrow when the followers of some new nephwrack overthrow the previously popular faith. Those who work within the district must carefully navigate the treacherous currents of power and popularity, as those who do not offer proper obeisance to the right cults find themselves hunted or tossed into Oblivion as an offering. Favoring the wrong cult, however, can result in becoming the enemy of tomorrow's ruler, who will happily re-educate the mistaken dead with the edge of knives and the crack of whips.

The latest among the rulers of the district is Maru, whose madcap faith demands its adherents sew their eyes shut, so they see nothing but the perfection of Oblivion's darkness, and sew their mouths shut, so they can utter no word Oblivion would not. He has proved successful, ruling the district for a record-breaking year, but a new prophet, the Emissary of Righteous Victory has stepped forth from his Stark Monolith and garnered considerable support. The Emissary of Righteous Victory claims to have no interest in Maru's throne, but Maru despises him nevertheless. For more details on Maru and his nemesis, see pages 135-136 and 139-141, respectively.

## SUNBORN'S LAST STAND

**Leader:** The Father of Orphans

**Token:** A broken arrow with torn fletching

**Constellation:** The Cross (a.k.a. the Crossroads)

Sunborn's Last Stand once represented hope and beauty within the Dark Jewel of the Underworld, but since the fall of Stygia, neglect has taken a heavy toll. Laundry lines crisscross its alleyways, filled with billowing, gossamer sheets and curtains that hide what lies just beyond them. Ugly brick façades cover or support the decaying remnants of once-beautiful Old Realm structures. Shards of broken red glass and scattered black gravel cover the streets and grind underfoot. Even the ghosts here dress savagely, wearing patchwork tatters or heavy black leather, their eyes sullen and angry, their stances aggressive or distracted. Yet a surreal beauty inhabits the place despite its decay. The unseen sun



shines brightly here, casting the district in a hazy white light that blurs the harsh edges of buildings. The air carries the scent of nostalgia, a tingling memory in the back of one's mind that suggests that something precious, once lost, might be found here. More than a few ghosts have tarried here for the rest of their existences, searching for that indiscernible happiness the district promises.

When the nephwrack armies came, the leader of this district—Sunborn, a hero both in life and death—battled them here. She defiantly held them back while the innocent dead fled, her bow gleaming with the power of her righteousness and Arcanoi, for all the good it did her. In the streets just outside her home, the servants of Oblivion cut her down and tore her to pieces, conquering Stygia despite her valiant struggles. Still, the dead of Sunborn's Last Stand remember her martyrdom and speak, improbably, of her return. Quiet rebellion against the Deathlords seethes in this unruly slum, and the servants of Oblivion know that, should Stygia find a way to free itself from their grip, such efforts will begin in Sunborn's Last Stand. As a result, they carefully make sure that all funds, all strength, all hope, is quietly funneled away from the district. Their efforts seem only to worsen the situation, however.

The leaders of Sunborn's Last Stand walk a fine line between the desperate, revolutionary citizens they represent and the frowning Deathlords who quietly rule Stygia. Most prefer to feign incompetence or disinterest, and the Father of Orphans is no exception. Black tear-marks trail down his handsome cheeks, and he keeps his mouth bent in an eternal, infuriating smile. He never laughs, but he always seems on the verge of it. He wears elegant robes, but dust always coats them, puffing about him whenever he moves too quickly. He bears no outward ambitions and bows quickly to the wishes of others. The Deathlords agreed to his dominion of the district because he seemed uninterested in any further power. Thus far, they seem to be correct in their assessment.

## COWARD'S WAY

**Leader:** Master Wun

**Token:** A mailed glove

**Constellation:** The Spiral (a.k.a. the Unspoken, the Broken Circle)

At Coward's Way, the River Styx bends itself into a coil to form a deep harbor of silvery, gleaming water. At night, one can spot the unseeing eyes and unmoving faces of the countless, self-drowned dead trapped beneath the still waters. The rest of the district mirrors its harbor, with a lovely mask covering a troubled core. Small shops and adorable, nostalgic homes cluster close to the port, where young and attractive dockhands move quickly to catch and knot the ties of incoming barges. They smile in welcome but pull away from any offers of lasting friendship. By night, the district darkens to pitch black. Clotheslines tie themselves into nooses that dangle in rows above alleyways, shopkeepers fret over mounting debt and eternally impossible obligations, and the shouts of brokenhearted lovers cut through the thick silence.

The natural harbor of Coward's Way delves deep into the earth, with stony walls upon which the district itself builds its foundations. As such, even the deepest keeled vessels can make their way to this part of Stygia, though no further. Many ghosts visiting Stygia first set foot on the surprisingly rustic and appealing streets of this district, but few linger. The harbor seems outwardly hospitable, but the dead of Coward's Way tend to be insular, suspicious of lurking outsiders who peer too deeply at their homes and ways.

Master Wun, a courageous leader, has ruled the district for centuries. He's a foreigner, but his efforts on behalf of Coward's Way have won him the trust of its dead. His wife, Miyo One-Hand, warms his throne in his Western nation while he resides in and rules his Stygian district.

### Stygia, a magnitude 6 Dominion

**Military:** 3      **Government:** 1      **Culture:** 5

**Abilities:** Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 4, Craft 3, Integrity 5 (Dedication to the Calendar +2), Investigation 1 (Records of the Ancient Past +1), Occult 4 (The Labyrinth +1), Performance 4, Presence 4, Stealth 1, War 2 (Defending Stygia +3)

**Virtues:** Compassion 4, Conviction 3, Temperance 7, Valor 2

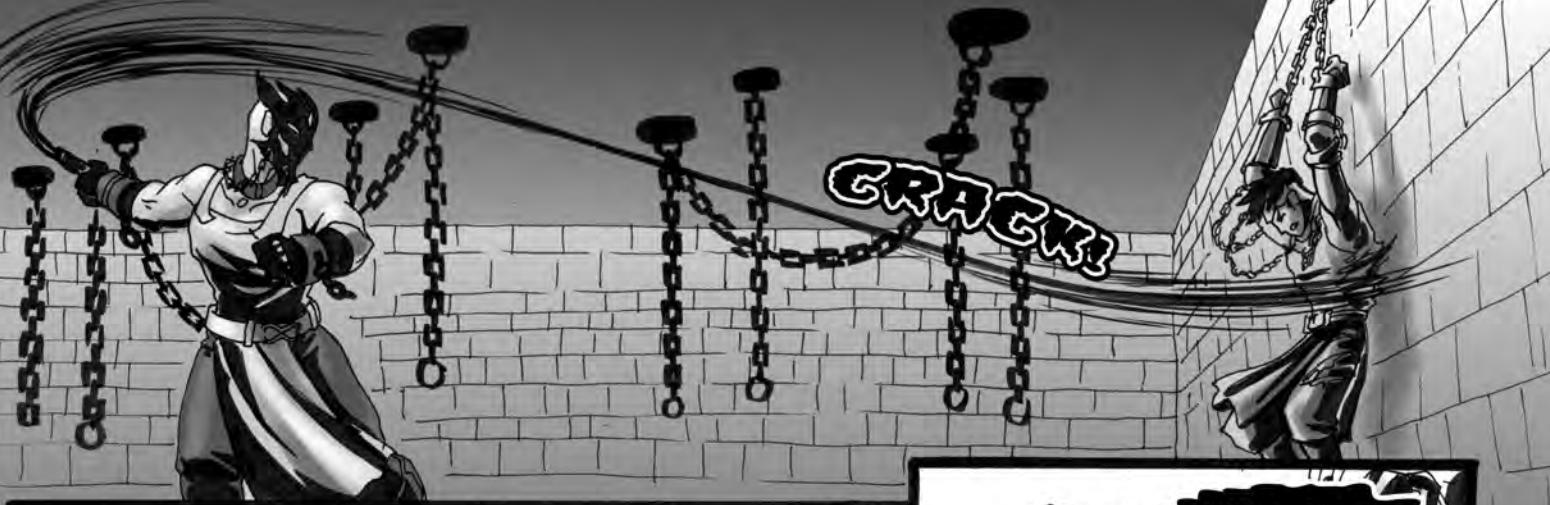
**Virtue Flaw:** Temperance **Current Limit:** 8

**Willpower:** 11

**Bonus Points:** 30    **External Bonus Points:** 0

**Notes:** Only the Dual Monarchy can exist as legitimate sorcerers of Stygia. All the rest of its rulers, from the district councilors to the Deathlords, exist as savants.

Stygia's Virtue Flaw represents its citizens' tendency to ignore the plight of others around them, preferring to remain aloof. When things grow terrible, they become introspective or engage in debauchery, rather than deal with the matter at hand.





## CHAPTER THREE

# ROOT AND LEAVES

Like in the East of Creation, rivers and forests dominate the Eastern Underworld. Across the Inland Sea of Shadows from the mouth of the Styx, the mighty Acheron corresponds to the Yanaze and Yellow Rivers in Creation. It begins as a trickle escaping the ghastly Noss Fens, but gathers size and strength as it flows west until it becomes a mighty, fast-flowing river miles across. Many ships of reeds and the pale woods of the Eastern Underworld travel the Acheron and its tributaries on the business of the dead.

As the first and greatest of the Acheron's tributaries, the River Phlegethon corresponds to Creation's River of Tears. In the Far Northeast, ice chokes the Phlegethon for much of the year. The Eastern forests press close to the Phlegethon's banks; their high branches spread over the river so it remains dark as night at midday. Ships on the Phlegethon carry lanterns to light their way and avoid each other, and so the Phlegethon is also called the River of Fire.

Northeast of Sijan, the Phlegethon receives the flow of its own tributary, the Aornis. Like the Silver River it resembles,

the Aornis is born from the joining of five smaller rivers, and it too flows past the shadowlands called the Fields of Woe, the Crypt of the Windrider and the Black Chase.

The second great tributary of the Acheron, the River Eridanus, rises in the Far Southeast and corresponds to Creation's Gray River. The dead also call it the River of Amber, because many deposits of deep golden amber are found near its banks. The Eridanus is relatively shallow and flows quickly. Its waters have the clear darkness of obsidian rather than the opaque blackness of other Eastern rivers.

More than 1,000 miles further east, the Acherai, or Little Acheron, joins the main river from the south. It, too, reaches deep into the mysterious depths of the Far Eastern woodlands.

Only one great river of the East does not join the Acheron. The Cocytus forms the border between the East and South of the Underworld. The so-called River of Lamentations flows slowly, with many braids and meanders that lead into mazes of small streams and bogs. Undergrowth frequently

blocks its passage. So confusing is this mazy mire that ghosts who travel the Cocytus often become lost and surrender to Oblivion out of sheer despair. The Cocytus merges with the mortal world at its mouth, in the shadowland called the Bayou of Endless Regret.

The trees of the Eastern Underworld tend to be black or pale. Northeastern conifers almost always have pitch-black bark and very dark needles; the white cypresses form a notable exception. Further south, black oaks, ash trees and poplars and white aspens frequently dominate the forests, with occasional stands of wild apples and pomegranates that bear blood-hued fruit. Black ivy, myrtle and mistletoe choke many of the woodlands. In the Southeast, the forest becomes dark, decaying jungle, dotted with swamps, before giving way to bare savannas. The folk of the river lands know little of those distant veldts of the dead, just as few among the living have visited the jungles and savannas of Creation's Southeast.

## DOMAINS OF THE DEAD

In Creation, it's a toss-up whether the East or the Blessed Isle supports the higher population. In the Underworld, it's no contest. More ghosts dwell in the East than in any other direction—maybe more than any two directions combined.

The dense population of ghosts leads to a dense patchwork of ghostly nations. Every petty kingdom and city-state of the East's mortal history still exists in the Underworld, or at least some ghost wishes it did. This gives the Eastern

Underworld thousands of tiny kingdoms, from long-defunct administrative districts of the Shogunate to hopped-up bandit camps that managed to raise a flag before its inhabitants were slaughtered.

All of the Deathlords have some influence in the Eastern Underworld, no matter where they keep their seat of power. Each Deathlord receives tribute from at least a few of the myriad kingdoms of the East. The Walker in Darkness and Mask of Winters enjoy the greatest influence, of course, since they dwell in the East full time. Their scattered vassals add up to considerable empires. The Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears and Eye and Seven Despairs also dominate many Eastern domains, concentrated in the Northeast and the Southeast, respectively. Other Deathlords have far fewer Eastern tributaries, but only because they focus their interest on faraway lands (or in the case of the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils, because she sees no need to rule the dead).

## THE VALLEY PEOPLE

The great majority of ghosts dwell along the immense rivers of the East, in the region corresponding to the Scavenger Lands. Along these river valleys lie the ghosts of great cities exterminated by the Great Contagion. Here, where the plague struck most heavily, daimyos frequently burned entire cities of the dead and dying, hoping in vain to stem the disease's spread. Sometimes, a daimyo gave the order while dying himself, and an entire city passed to the Underworld





as a burned offering. Afterward, the region saw countless new kingdoms, duchies, republics, city-states, freeholds, satrapies, shogunates, confederations, abbacies, electorates, empires and leagues.

Of course, territorial claims overlap extensively. A single village might be part of an Old Realm tributary, a Shogunate prefecture, two or three kingdoms, a confederation of city-states and a short-lived empire. In Creation, such overlapping historical claims can (and do) provoke countless petty wars. The Underworld, however, developed alternative strategies for conflict resolution. For one thing, war is largely futile. There's a good chance that any soldier "slain" in battle will come back, bearing a grudge for the brush with Lethe or Oblivion. The easiest solution is simply to divide the land in such a way that each group gets a little bit of the territory it considers its own.

Easterners also accept multiple citizenship. Unlike the living, the dead have only one commodity of use to a monarch: their prayers. A ghost can pray to several different figures, though. Everyone worships the Dual Monarchs because their prayers power the great Calendar that keeps time moving. Whether bandit chief or Shogunate daimyo, heads of state usually insist on worship from the ghosts they rule. As long as the ruler seems useful (or too dangerous to defy), their subjects oblige. If two, three or more ghostly monarchs all want worship from the same village, why, they can make it worth the ghosts' while to pray in rotation.

A few famous ghosts attracted widespread cults. For instance, ghosts throughout the East send the occasional prayer to the legendary warrior Aki the Sword. Ominously, growing numbers of ghosts join the cult of the Mask of Winters, thinking to curry favor with the Deathlord who increasingly dominates Eastern affairs.

Eastern domains face another problem: whole dynasties of ghostly monarchs and nobles, who all want to keep the ranks they held in life. A proud queen, buried with pomp and a profusion of offerings, doesn't easily accept that, in the Underworld, her great-great-grandmother still rules and has no intention of stepping down. Many Eastern domains accept serial monarchy, where each member of a ghostly dynasty holds the throne in rotation for a season, a month or some other period. Once the Eastern dead accepted cyclical rulership, it was only a short step to cyclical citizenship. One month, a village might be part of Bell Garden Prefecture and pray to its daimyo. Next month, it becomes part of the Nine Sabers League, which dominated the region five centuries ago. The month after that, the Prelacy of Avashrin claims its allegiance.

All these transfers of power and loyalty happen according to rituals. Indeed, these ceremonies become nearly as important as the Calendar of Setesh at defining the passage of time. The Calendar creates the passage of day and night, but the seasons change by the will of the dead. Prayers and rituals melt the snows of winter and impel the new grass to sprout, ripen the grain in the fields and tell the leaves when to drop before winter comes again. In many lands along the

rivers, the rites that turn the seasons also transfer power from one ruler to the next.

## THE EMPIRE OF AKI

Of all the self-styled empires in the Eastern Underworld, none can compare to the Empire of Aki. It stretches more than 1,000 miles along the north shore of the River Acheron. The great hero Aki the Sword conquered this empire and ruled it until her disappearance two centuries ago. Aki mollified defeated heads of state by giving them places in her Council of Royals, and this body now rules in her name as a parliament. Her subject dukes, daimyos, mayors and mandarins do not like working together, but they cannot bear to cede the collective power of the empire by breaking away. Without Aki's iron hand, petty conflicts between provinces are all too common. If squabbles do not begin in the Council, they often end up there. At this point, fistfights are almost accepted parliamentary procedure.

All the Royals and their own vassals must swear fealty and offer sacrifices to the imperial cult of Aki, even though everyone suspects the great conqueror entered Lethe. The Royals collect the prayers in Essence-containing gems, which form the national currency. Oaths of mutual defense among the component kingdoms assume new importance as the Deathlords assert ever-greater power in the Underworld. The western end of the empire comes near the realm of the Walker in Darkness across the river, and his communiqués to the Council now show a disturbing arrogance. The empire's lords muster and train new troops while smithies work night and day to arm them.

### AKIAN SWORDSMAN TALON

**Description:** The vassal states of the empire supply a wide assortment of combat troops, but the example of Aki makes the sword the empire's favorite weapon. Soldiers turn their blade practice sessions into devotions to Aki's memory. Every province's army, therefore, includes units armed with slashing swords. Aki also insisted that her army build and use catapults, so every talon of troops has a few heavy onagers (see *Scroll of Kings*, p. 138) for support and siegework.

Imperial troops usually operate in talons of 120. These talons may combine into dragons of 600, the largest unit of imperial command.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** Green and black

**Motto:** "I bear the sword of Aki! Victory in her name!"

**General Makeup:** 120 medium infantry in lamellar armor and pot helms, carrying slashing swords, three javelins and target shields

**Overall Quality:** Good

**Magnitude:** 3

**Drill:** 3

**Close Combat Attack:** 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 2

**Ranged Attack:** 3

**Ranged Damage:** 2

**Endurance:** 6 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 3 (-3 mobility)

**Morale:** 3



ebulations fill her palace—all illusion, unable to nourish even ghosts. The fruit that hangs heavy on the bough of Hanau's orchards is full of maggots and gall. Annuaski's ministers tell her subjects to rejoice in their prosperity, and they do, if they want to avoid her soldiers and her torturers. Only in Hanau do people hopefully anticipate the coming of winter cold, darkness and hunger.

That hope grows sharper. Long has Princess Annuaski needed "reminding" about performing the rites to turn the seasons and return Queen Defiance-in-Shadow to power. This year, she is a full month late despite numerous reminders. The trees keep their leaves; the birds refuse to fly South. Princess Annuaski has taken personal control of the V'jea district in Stygia and gains great power of Essence from the city's mausoleums. Her new diviner uses that Essence in powerful rites to prevent the change of seasons. The princess has brought other strangers of unique powers into the shared kingdom, as well.

Queen Defiance-in-Shadow inspects her own troops in the fortress that is hers alone, for she knows that the dual kingdom faces civil war. She also knows that Hanau and Tyoka cannot afford civil war, for

the power of the Mask of Winters reaches even to the kingdom's borders. Hanau and Tyoka must accept fealty to Thorns orally to some other Eastern power, such as the nearby Empire of Aki.

#### HANAU AND TYOKA INFANTRY SCALE

**Description:** Hanau and Tyoka prefer heavily armored troops armed with poleaxes or similar weapons. Both monarchs officially agree on the need to chop invading spectres and hungry ghosts into little bits. Princess Annuaski's infantry also threatens



**Formation:** These soldiers usually fight in relaxed formation. Each unit has three relays, two artillerists who function as sorcerers and one second-in-command who can take over as a hero if need be.

#### HANAU AND TYOKA

The dual kingdom of Hanau and Tyoka, located on the coast north of the Acheron's mouth, was, until recently, a typical example of cyclical monarchy. Queen Defiance-in-Shadow and her great-granddaughter Princess Annuaski managed to quash all the other claimants to rule their territory and divided the year and the monarchy between them.

Queen Defiance-in-Shadow rules a land of winter and hunger. The kingdom of Tyoka began in the harsh years after the Great Contagion, when famine killed thousands of people who had escaped the plague and the Fair Folk. Ghosts in Tyoka become thin and desperate from the Queen's memory of those hungry years. They beg on the streets for a crust of bread or a whiff of ritual incense. All food, fuel and shelter are rationed. Queen Defiance-in-Shadow goes hungry with her people, and no one doubts the fairness of her rule or the honesty of her soldiers and officials.

Princess Annuaski rules a land of summer abundance in the kingdom of Hanau. She herself, with her wide green eyes and welcoming smile, embodies her kingdom... especially if one discovers that her fine silk robes hide a body of tattered, rotten flesh and twisted bones. In life, Princess Annuaski squandered the prosperity the people had nurtured through decades after Queen Defiance-in-Shadow's time, and the Underworld reflects her rule. The guest-fires in every home burn cold and drain Essence for the Princess. Feasts and cel-

discontented citizens quite effectively. The kingdom's soldiers usually operate in scales of 30, or in fangs of five when engaged in civic law enforcement.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** Dull gold and green (Hanau), white and gray (Tyoka)

**Motto:** "For the Honor of the Princess!" (or Queen)

**General Makeup:** 30 heavy infantry in plate-and-chain and slotted helms, carrying poleaxes

**Overall Quality:** Average

**Magnitude:** 2

**Drill:** 2

**Close Combat Attack:** 2 **Close Combat Damage:** 4

**Ranged Attack:** — **Ranged Damage:** —

**Endurance:** 5 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 4 (-4 mobility)

**Morale:** 3

**Formation:** While these warriors train to fight in close formation, they usually fight in relaxed or skirmish formation—it's easier. Each scale includes two heroes with special prowess at melee combat and two sorcerers with special prowess and weapons for ranged combat.

#### DEHELESHEN

The people of Lookshy follow the Immaculate faith, so they do not usually become ghosts. Nevertheless, it does happen. Lookshy is a mighty city; its dead dwell in a modest but well-fortified town they call Deheleshen, after the city's destroyed predecessor.

The ghosts of Deheleshen retain the castes they held in life. The helots still till the fields, while the soldiers still train for war. Ghostly nations throughout the East hire mercenaries from the Fallen Legion of Deheleshen to train their own soldiers and fight in their battles. After all, that's what these ghosts did in life. Lookshy's dead receive minimal gestures of respect from their living kin, such as a yearly cleaning of their headstones, but the Fallen Legion pulls in an impressive revenue of Essence-laden soulfire crystals.

Of course, the Seventh Legion doesn't bury its dead with magitech weapons or any other artifacts. The living need those items too badly. Lookshy soldiers are often buried with mundane armor and weapons, though, so the Fallen Legion is well equipped with grave goods.

The dead also include a number of sorcerer-technicians and sorcerer-engineers. They have worked for centuries to duplicate Lookshy's famous magitech in the Underworld. By now, they have reconstructed enough of the city's magitech laboratories to build ghostly analogs of ashigaru armor, light implosion bows and small concussive Essence cannon (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age*, pp. 79, 130 and 131). At the Storyteller's option, they may have reconstructed other magitech items, but nothing with an Artifact rating higher than 2. They have very little of this "necrotech" so far... but they are the first other than the Deathlords to develop any at all. An Exalted magitech artisan of sufficient ingenuity might be able to help them build many more artifact weapons.

To represent mass combat units from Deheleshen, start with the heavy infantry, archer, ashigaru and ranger units from *The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. II—The Scavenger Lands*, pages 58-60. Add one to their Might for being ghosts, but subtract one from their Magnitude (to a minimum of 1).

## THE FOREST PEOPLE

From the Haltans in the North to the jungle tribes of the South, much of the East's population lives in forests rather than cities and farmland. These people also leave ghosts. The Underworld's forests are even less passable and more dangerous than those of Creation, so the forest ghosts seldom interact with each other or the settled ghosts of the river towns. Many ghostly tribes and villages conceal themselves for safety against spectral marauders and each other. Some communities of River People hunt the Forest People for victims to smelt into soulsteel. Forest People return the favor by attacking any intruders in their woodlands—perhaps using the eldritch Lethe serpents (see pp. 150-151 and 159).

The mortal cultures of the East follow many different funeral customs, but the most distinctive is exposure in trees. Some cultures hoist the dead into trees and bind them there for scavenger birds to consume. These funerary trees become the abodes of ghosts, or at least the places where they reappear if they are slain. Such Eastern ghosts guard their death trees with exceptional zeal. The trees often become the ritual centers for Eastern ghosts, as well as the ritual centers for Eastern ancestor cults. Easterners may also plant a tree or shrub on a grave, which likewise become part of a ghost's tomb. Some artifacts made by Eastern ghosts or ancestor cultists require wood from a tomb-tree.

## SHACKLEGRJIVE

For 100 years, seven jungle kingdoms made war on each other to sell their prisoners as slaves. The captives all passed through a single Southeastern town, where the Guild assembled its caravans. The town's true name is forgotten, but the prisoners called it the City of Grieving in Shackles. Almost a century ago, the Mask of Winters persuaded hundreds of slaves to commit mass suicide. Most of the slaves rose as hungry ghosts and took full revenge on their captors.

Soon after, the suicides' higher and lower souls separated and the hungry ghosts sank to the Labyrinth. The true ghosts remain. The town of Shacklegrieve was abandoned in Creation, but its ghosts built a town of their own. The ghosts of Shacklegrieve remain allied to the Mask of Winters. Those ghosts who didn't join his army now specialize in forging ghosts into soulsteel, an art the Deathlord taught them to complete their revenge on the Guildsmen. While the ghosts are not technically spectres, they worship the Mask of Winters as their god of liberation, war and vengeance.



### FOREST GHOST HUNTERS

**Description:** This fang of ghosts slips through the Underworld's Eastern forests, most likely unseen until it strikes. The ghosts most likely

begin their attack by shooting arrows or throwing javelins or boomerangs—possibly envenomed with strange Underworld toxins. Only once they have struck down a number of invaders do they close with tomahawks, clubs or other weapons. The weapons they use depend on their source culture. Easterners seldom bury their dead with armor, but Eastern ghosts make their own from the skin of Underworld beasts, bone and wood.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** Camouflage patterns; may include war paint

**Motto:** Varies; might include frightening ululations

**General Makeup:** Eight ghosts in buff jackets, armed with tomahawks, bows and broadhead arrows

**Overall Quality:** Good

**Magnitude:** 1

**Drill:** 2

**Close Combat Attack:** 2 **Close Combat Damage:** 2

**Ranged Attack:** 3 **Ranged Damage:** 2

**Endurance:** 5 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 2 (-1 mobility)

**Morale:** 3

**Formation:** These ghosts never operate in any formations except skirmishing or unordered. The group includes one ghost with extra skill and some unusual ranged attack, who functions as a sorcerer.

## SIJAN, THE FUNERAL CITY

The Sijan of the Underworld looks very much like the Sijan of Creation, and why not? Sijan's every building is an offering to the dead. Beyond the city proper and across the river stretch the Fields of the Dead, a sprawling suburb of tombs. Much of the outer city is subterranean, for as crypts sink into the marshy ground the living Sijanese build new tombs on top of them, with tunnels so the ancient graves can still be tended.

Next to Stygia, ghosts consider Sijan the best place in the East to dwell. The Morticians' Order ensures that every ghost receives a small stipend of prayer and offerings from the living—not much or often, perhaps, but delivered without fail. Sijan also offers special services, such as messages reliably delivered to the living. Any ghost who wants more than the minimal rights of residence in the necropolis, however, can find Sijan an expensive place in which to dwell.

### SOCIAL CLASSES

Ghosts quickly learn that mortals are not equal in death, and this is as true in Sijan as in the rest of Creation. The city has distinct social classes.

The Morticians' Order administers the city and claims the greatest privileges for itself. Members of the Morticians' Order spend their entire lives serving the dead and training for their postmortem careers. In return, they enter the Underworld ready to take up their jobs, with excellent accommodations and benefits. Ghostly morticians do not flaunt their wealth and status, but other ghosts have no doubt about who rules the city.

The Morticians' Order of the dead has the same three Observances as the order of the living. Funerists design rituals and arrange quarters for the dead. Ghostly kings throughout the Underworld hire them to design ceremonies and prayers for their cults. Lifespeakers (not Deadspeakers) carry messages between the living and the dead. Mortwrights alter the corpus of the dead, using Arcanoi rather than scalpels, sutures and embalming fluid.

The Black Watch forms a special auxiliary to the Morticians' Order. These ghosts—often vengeful victims of tomb-robbers—train as nemesaries to become the elite city guard in Creation and the Underworld alike. In both worlds, they wear heavy plate armor of First Age design and carry great swords, tetsubos and other heavy weapons. Few ghosts dare to challenge them.

Citizens of Sijan form the second class. They have living relatives to pray for them and offer sacrifices. Sijanese ghosts often continue in the same work they did in life, from elegists to greengrocers. Ghosts have little need for many mortal occupations, but they like to go through the motions to remember what life was like. Therefore, while ghosts do not need to eat, the Underworld's Sijan offers some excellent restaurants and teahouses.

The ghosts of people buried in Sijan form the third class, and even a ghost who was a queen among the living



discovers she has a lower status than a dead Sijanese scribe, if that scribe still has family. The queen receives as much prayer from the living as she (or her heirs) bought from the Morticians' Order. If she wants anything more, such as a message sent to her granddaughter, she must buy it herself using her grave goods or whatever else she has. The Morticians' Order serves the dead, but it does not serve for free.

Finally, ghosts who immigrate to Sijan form the lowest class. They have no entitlements at all. Anything they want, they must buy. Nevertheless, Sijan has a large immigrant population. The city has spare quarters, thanks to ghosts who accept Lethe or Oblivion. A ghost might need to share a tomb-apartment with other ghosts, though. The cheapest hotels consist of old catacombs where a ghost can lie in a vacated niche. Still, Sijan offers stability—a quality much prized by the dead—and a degree of opportunity. An immigrant with useful skills who's willing to work can secure a comfortably afterlife in Sijan and rise at least as high as the city's paying clients. Martially inclined ghosts can, of course, find rewarding careers in the Black Watch.

### ECONOMY

As the premier city-state of the Eastern Underworld, Sijan sees a great deal of business (though much of it amounts to play-acting so the ghosts can pretend they're alive). Elsewhere in the East, ghosts often pay for pretend food and comforts with pretend wooden coins. In Sijan, ghosts can buy real commodities such as communication with the liv-

ing, molation into a new form, effigy servants or even grave goods and tokens for the Essence of burnt offerings.

Ghostly Sijan's chief currency is the Stygian soulfire crystal. The city also accepts the silver dinars of the Scavenger Lands, brought to the city through shadowlands and rendered even more difficult to counterfeit because they are *real* silver from Creation, not the dull, ice-pale silver of the Underworld. The Morticians' Order sets standardized prices and rates of exchange for the goods and services that matter most for the dead: grave goods, offerings and prayer. If a ghost has no other way to earn an income, he can go to a Morticians' Order-licensed chantry and spend a week praying for some other ghost's benefit. By itself, this activity suffices to provide a ghost a Resources 1 income. A careless ghost, however, could enter Sijan bearing a fortune in grave goods and leave as a pauper.

### FOREIGN RELATIONS

As in the living world, the Underworld's Sijan professes neutrality. It exists to hallow the transition from life to death, nothing more. Sijan deals impartially with every other state and power bloc in the Underworld, including the nephwracks and Deathlords. And yet, Sijan also stays fully independent of the Deathlords in a time when everyone else in the East grants at least modest concessions to the Mask of Winters or Walker in Darkness. Deathlords must pay the same rates as everyone else for Sijan's services, and their envoys receive no immunity from Sijan's laws.

## SIJANESE SPECIAL SERVICES

Service	Resources Cost
Message to the living (Scavenger Lands)	•••
Message to the living (farther away)	••••
Temporary molation	••
Permanent molation	•••
Arcanos training	••
Goods from Creation	one dot more than the item in Creation
Effigy servant	•••
Tomb golem guardian	••••
Grave good item	one dot more than the item in Creation

The leaders of the Morticians' Order are not fools. They expect the Deathlords to try to conquer Sijan eventually. The necropolis controls too much wealth in Essence, grave goods and knowledge for it to remain free forever. The morticians also do not intend to let the Deathlords exterminate the living world or feed the entire Underworld to the Abyss, which would be bad for business. Behind the scenes, they seek allies, information and resources to use against Oblivion's servants.

For instance, the Order uses the periodic census of the dead to inventory the arsenals of grave-good artifacts left behind by Exalted ghosts who chose Lethe. They know that the Exaltations of former clients now claim new mortal hosts. When those new Exalted die, the morticians intend to have their "inheritance" ready for them to use against the Deathlords.

### GOHOST WRITER

One ghost in Sijan receives a special discount from the Morticians' Order. The late author Arnthi of Melevhil died before she could finish her final serialized novel of multi-generational family intrigue. Her many fans through the Scavenger Lands gave her sufficient Cult that she could hire the Morticians' Order to continue publication, albeit only once per year instead of once per month. After more than 120 years, the *Tale of Sethra's Daughters* is about the great-grandchildren of the original protagonists, and few new readers embark on the 29-and-counting fat volumes one must read to understand the current story. Arnthi's remaining readers still pay enough through their subscriptions and their prayers, however, to support continued publication. The Order reduced its fee to transfer Arnthi's work to Creation because she's an established customer and for the prestige of publishing Creation's most celebrated ghost writer.

Meanwhile, other enemies of the Deathlords chafe at Sijan's apparent inaction. They know that Sijan's wealth, population, military and connections in the living world make it a natural rallying point against the Deathlords—if only the Morticians' Order would take a side. The morticians know, however, that the two local Deathlords have spies everywhere, including the Order itself. (Even the dead can be bribed or blackmailed.) Everything they do to prepare for war against Oblivion must be either deniable or plausibly explained as routine activity.

### SIJAN AND THE WALKER IN DARKNESS

A few ghosts in the Morticians' Order treat secretly with envoys from the Walker in Darkness. They see this Deathlord as less of an immediate threat than the Mask of Winters, and they hope that allying with the Walker can stave off the more urgent threat. Maybe they can even encourage the Walker to attack the Mask and have one of them destroy the other but weaken himself enough to delay any attack on Sijan. A very few even think the Walker in Darkness seems like a reasonable fellow with whom they might find a compromise that doesn't involve destroying the Underworld. Unfortunately, being dead doesn't cure people of wishful thinking.

### MILITARY

In Creation, Sijan has a small city guard. It also has the Black Watch, an elite force of nemesaries. They are some of the most powerful un-Exalted warriors in Creation, but they are few in number. Therefore, most strategists count Sijan out of any military calculations.

Matters are different in the Underworld. Since before the advent of the Old Realm, Sijan has buried soldiers from throughout the East, and some of these dead warriors rose again as ghosts. If they wish, they can mope in their tombs

and receive their small stipend of worship from the living city... but the Morticians' Order offers them commissions in the Underworld city's military. Sijan's army includes units from every period and almost every country in the East, from barbaric Linowan woodsmen to Hundred Kingdoms fencing masters. (Use sample military units from **The Compass of Terrestrial Direction, Vol. I—The Scavenger Lands**, **The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. III—The East** and **Scroll of Kings**, suitably modified for units of ghosts.) The army has a naval auxiliary too. Some cultures (notably the Linowan) inter model riverboats with their dead, and these grave goods become real boats in the Underworld. What's more, the warriors buried in Sijan include a high proportion of heroes and generals, giving Sijan's military an exceptional officers' corps (all with high War ratings). None of the officers are ghosts of First Age Celestial Exalts, though. As far as anyone knows, the last hero from the Age of Splendor disappeared from the Underworld centuries ago.

These diverse warriors add up to a very large army for a supposedly neutral, peaceful city. The morticians assure visiting diplomats that Sijan's military is entirely ceremonial. The training exercises of the various units are merely funeral games for long-dead champions, kings and commanders—the dead honoring the dead. Few morticians would be so frank as to suggest that having a large military makes peaceful neutrality much easier to maintain.

Sijan's patchwork military is well trained. The various units often practice together and engage in war games against each other. Their commanding officers know each others' tactics and can cooperate in battle (giving the units high Drill). Almost every soldier has grave good weapons and armor, and some officers wield grave-good artifacts—especially those who were outcaste Dragon-Bloods in life.

The considered opinion of Sijan's top strategoi is that the city cannot possibly win a fight against the Mask of Winters. The army *might*, however, hold out long enough for external circumstances to force the Deathlord to abandon the assault. For instance, the Realm, Lookshy or a rival Deathlord might use the opportunity to attack Thorns. Even a broad alliance with other River People could not assure victory. Sijan must find other allies, of greater power, in the Underworld or Creation.

#### SIJANESE FIRST AGE SCALE: VARAN'S LEGION

**Description:** For centuries, the slain Solar Varan Pen led an army that battled the forces of Oblivion. Sometimes they even entered Creation. Varan said his own quest must continue until he could face the Unconquered Sun without shame. When he hunted a minion of the First and Forsaken Lion, however, he ordered his troops to stay behind in Sijan. The mission required stealth, not an army. When he returned, he would tell them where the next battle lay. His captains swore they would wait for him. Yet the mission was a trap, and the Lion captured the hero who so tormented him with the memory of what it meant to be a Lawgiver.

Of Varan's Legion, only these 24 captains remain. Each was a great warrior in life, and only honed his skills further after death. The captains' armor and weapons are grave-good artifacts set with Underworld hearthstones. Most of the time, they train and command other units in Sijan's military. *Varan*

Only during Calibration do they reunite to stand watch over Sijan, ready in case canny foes attack in this most uncanny time of the year. They know that Varan's tortured soul now forms the First and Forsaken Lion's daiklave, but they remain true to their oath. They will wait in Sijan until, somehow, Varan returns.

**Commanding Officer:** Preceptor of the Frozen Palm

**Armor Color:** Mon based on Varan's name in Old Realm script

**Motto:** "Until Varan Returns!"

**General Makeup:** 24 heavy infantry war ghosts with diverse artifact weapons and armor

**Overall Quality:** Super Elite

**Magnitude:** 2

**Drill:** 5

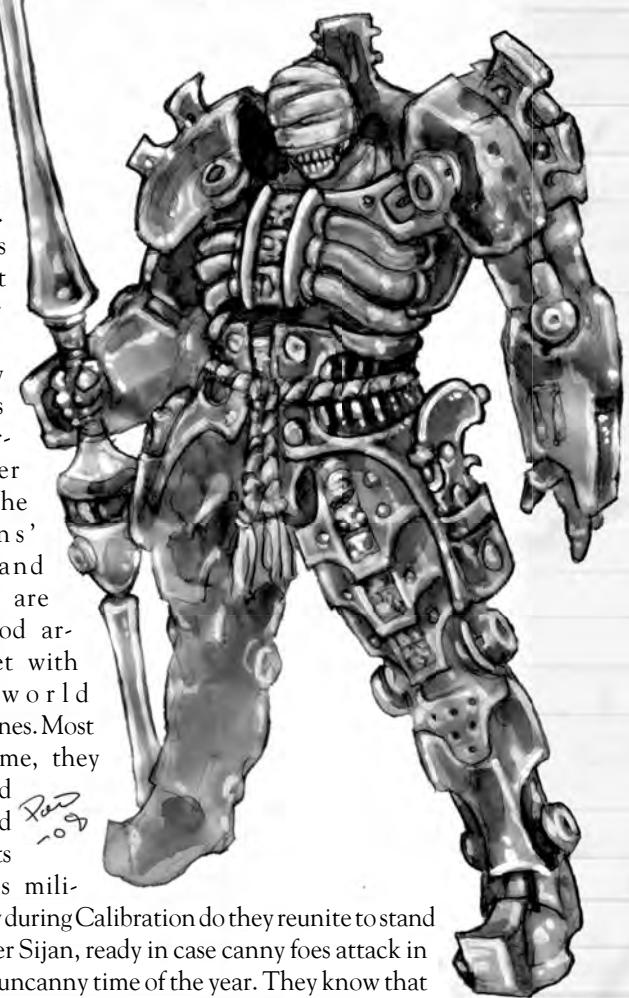
**Close Combat Attack:** 5 **Close Combat Damage:** 4

**Ranged Attack:** 5 **Ranged Damage:** 4

**Endurance:** 8 **Might:** 5 **Armor:** 4 (-1 mobility)

**Morale:** 5

**Formation:** Varan's Legion usually fights in close formation, but it can adopt any other formation that offers a strategic advantage. Any soldier in this legion could appear as the commander or hero of another unit, but when they fight together, two members function as heroes to take command if Preceptor of the Frozen Palm falls, and two of them are sorcerers with unusually powerful ranged attacks.



## SIJANESE CAVALRY

Cavalry is rare in the Underworld because animals become ghosts only if they become part of a person's funeral offerings. The Marukani form a notable exception. They send the bodies of their favorite horses for burial in Sijan, and these horses always leave ghosts. Maybe Marukan hippolatry is so intense that they get a collective deal on retaining their steeds in the afterlife. Maybe it's the divine blood of Hiparkes that flows through so much of the Marukan herds. Whatever the reason, if a Marukan is buried in Sijan and becomes a ghost, he eventually rides back to the Underworld plains on his own horse.

The Morticians' Order finds this interesting. It also finds that it has a steady supply of Marukan ghost-horses. Several decades ago, the morticians tried to crossbreed ghost and mortal horses in the Black Chase, and it worked. Sijan now has herds of Ghost-Blooded horses. These useful beasts do not panic in the presence of the dead or undead, and they thrive in the Underworld as much as in Creation. As a result, Underworld Sijan can equip units of cavalry soldiers even when the ghosts did not have horses sacrificed to them at their funerals.

A Ghost-Blooded horse costs Resources 3 and is only available in Sijan (Creation or Underworld).

## THE PYRRON OSSUARY

The large shadowland called the Pyrron Ossuary held a baleful reputation long before the Deathlord called the Walker in Darkness claimed it for his own. In the High First Age, this flatland held a city called Pyrron. Its total destruction in the Usurpation turned it into a shadowland of great persistence. The Shogunate reduced its size, but during the time of the Great Contagion, it became a dumping ground for bodies, before there were not enough people left living to dispose of the dead, and the shadowland mushroomed outward again. To this day, bones choke the soil of the shadowland, giving it its formal name. Soon thereafter, Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers built her palace, the House of Bitter Reflections, on the ruins of Pyrron. Her attempts to conquer their peoples led to her defeat by the gods of Great Forks. Before she fled, however, she levied an elaborate curse on the shadowland that kills any mortal who enters—a last gesture of spite, perhaps, or a stratagem to prevent another Deathlord from claiming her domain.

If she intended the latter, it didn't work. Three centuries ago, the Walker in Darkness moved to the Pyrron Ossuary and built his own fortress, the Ebon Spires of Pyrron, amid the shattered ruins of the House of Bitter Reflections. Since then, the Deathlord made himself sufficiently notorious in the Scavenger Lands and the Underworld that most folk simply call this shadowland Walker's Realm.

## SOCIETY

Naturally, the Pyrron Ossuary has no living inhabitants. Several thousand ghosts dwell in the Ebon Spires as the Walker's army, court and service staff. Unlike most ghostly

communities, the ghosts of Pyrron make not the slightest attempt to pretend they are alive. They don't farm phantom crops to sell for make-believe money. They don't build ersatz homes where they pretend to eat, sleep and perform domestic chores. These ghosts spend all their time training for war, crafting weapons and armor, copying scriptures of Oblivion and praying to their master and to the Neverborn. At Pyrron, nephwracks hold the highest rank, followed by the various bureaucrats, captains, savants, soulforgers and other skilled ghosts who carry out the Deathlord's plans. All other ghosts are slaves who can expect nothing better than to go another day without being smelte into soulsteel—the fate of any ghost who ceases to be useful, even for so long as a day.

## ECONOMY

Walker's Realm has no economy as such. Ghosts have few necessities, and the Walker in Darkness forbids all recreational illusions (unless one counts the worship services). Pyrron exports nothing but tracts extolling the worship of the Neverborn and Oblivion, which are given away... at sword-point, if necessary. The Walker in Darkness collects tribute from many countries in the Eastern Underworld—soulsteel, jade, soulfire crystals and the like—but these are all raw materials for the Deathlord's war machine and magical industries. Every year, Pyrron produces a number of soulsteel artifacts that the Walker distributes to his minions and dupes.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS

Before the Mask of Winters conquered Thorns, the Walker in Darkness was the most feared and notorious figure in the Scavenger Lands, although few people knew much about him. It's fairly common knowledge that a spectral sorcerer-tyrant of vast but ill-defined powers dwells in the lethal shadowland with a legion of ghosts, but most living folk know nothing more.

Several times in the last 300 years, kings or nobles of Creation allied with the Walker in Darkness to further their own ambitions or to escape some terrible defeat. In several cases, the Deathlord parlayed the alliance into behind-the-scenes rule of a province, a nation or, once, a small coalition. All met the same fate. First he looted the country of its wealth, then he massacred the population to produce new shadowlands, Abyssal demesnes, soulsteel or legions of the walking dead. Few people ever saw the Walker himself, though, and the Deathlord quickly retreated to Pyrron once other countries and their heroes marched against his doomed cat's-paws. The Walker's enslaved allies always took the fall for him. Few people ever realized just how powerful their necromantic "advisor" actually had been.

Ghosts, however, appreciate the Deathlord's power and danger all too well. After all, he killed enough of them. Pyrron is a major capital in the Eastern Underworld, which receives embassies from hundreds of frightened nations of the dead. They offer small tributes to the Walker in Darkness in hopes he will not demand anything more from them. Sometimes, the Deathlord takes offense at some failure of deference and



threatens war. A nation must offer a *large* tribute then, and open its country to the Walker's spectral missionaries, lest it suffer invasion.

On the other hand, the Walker in Darkness offers himself as a neutral arbiter and invites the leaders of disputing nations to resolve their differences at Pyrron. The ambassadors spend far more time negotiating with him than each other, hoping to gain his favor, which suits the Walker well. As in Creation, though, anyone who seeks alliance with the Deathlord tends to become his slave. An unknown number of monarchs in the Eastern Underworld secretly owe fealty to the Walker in Darkness. The Deathlord does, however, try to maintain a façade as a monarch who expects the deference due to one of his power, but who can see reason and act fairly.

The façade became more uneven than usual when the Mask of Winters conquered Thorns and its neighboring provinces of the Underworld. The Walker in Darkness tries to oppose the Mask of Winters every way he can, short of openly declaring war. Sometimes the Walker sends flurries of missives and envoys that rail against the Mask's vicious aggression and offer military aid and political alliance against him. When that tactic doesn't or won't work, the Deathlord threatens dire retribution on any fool who sides with the tyrant of Thorns. Either way, the Walker in Darkness makes himself a more visible figure in the politics of the Underworld.

The Deathlord rules several other small shadowlands throughout the East. Here, free from the curse on his own realm, he performs various experiments and projects that require living participants, such as breeding Ghost-Blooded servants and animals. In particular, he wants to duplicate the Ghost-Blooded horses of Sijan.

#### MILITARY

At the Ebon Spires of Pyrron alone, the Walker in Darkness has 5,000 ghosts under arms, organized in dragons of 500, wings of 250 or talons of 100, scales of 50 and fangs of 10. These forces are identical to the Pale Hosts used by the Mask of Winters. (See **The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. I—The Scavenger Lands**, pp. 110–111 for a write-up of these ghostly legionnaires). Since the Mask of Winters has already equaled the Walker's legion, the Walker in Darkness currently seeks ghosts to form a second legion and so outdo his rival.

The Walker in Darkness also has a variety of auxiliary and alternative troops stationed at Pyrron and his other domains. For instance, the crypts of the ruined city around the Ebon Spires hold dozens of necromantic war machines of various degrees of power. The Walker sometimes loans them to his vassals as a way to conquer more territory or keep their own populace in line. He has also recruited an army of mortwights and hungry ghosts. The plan is that, at

some point in an Underworld battle, the Walker or one of his deathknights will open a portal to the Labyrinth (using a necromantic spell or artifact) and the hungry ghosts will surge out to reinforce his troops. The Walker looks for a battle with which to test this tactic.

### HUNGRY GHOST TALON

**Description:** The Walker in Darkness has five units of 100 hungry ghosts ready to call into a battle. With a Magnitude reduced to 1, this could also represent a force of hungry ghosts summoned by the spell Hundred Shade Breath (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. 11—The Black Treatise*, p. 41).  
**Commanding Officer:** Varies; nephew or wrack or Abyssal Exalt

**Armor Color:** Spectral flesh

**Motto:** "Aaeeeeeeeeeeeeaaaaaaaarrrgh!"

**General Makeup:** 100 hungry ghosts

armed with nothing but their own claws

**Overall Quality:** Poor

**Magnitude:** 3

**Drill:** 0

**Close Combat Attack:** 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 2

**Ranged Attack:** — **Ranged Damage:** —

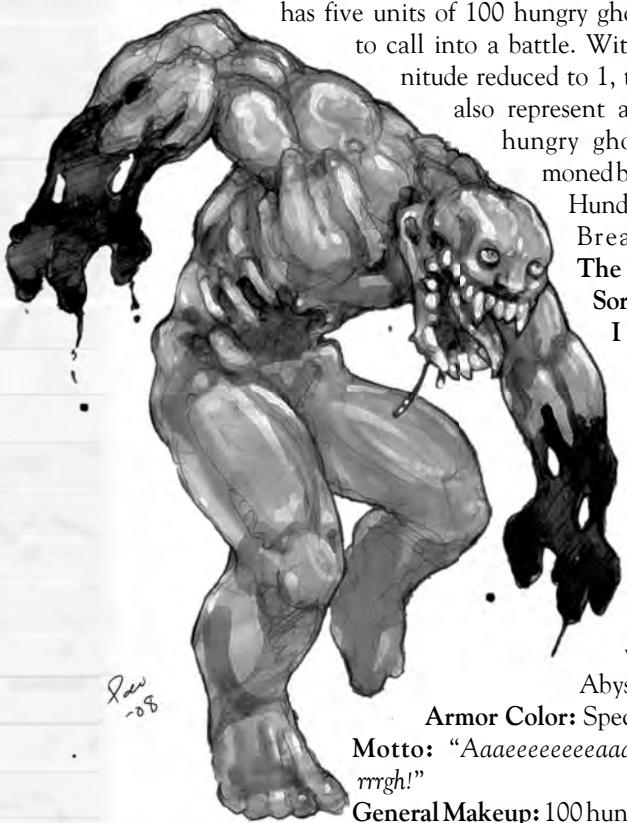
**Endurance:** 4 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 1

**Morale:** 3

**Formation:** Even trained by mortwights, the hungry ghosts fight only in unordered formation. Three mortwright heroes can lead separated fangs of hungry ghosts, and three more mortwright relays keep the horde moving in the right direction, but that is the limit of any commander's control.

### THORNS

Like most cities, Thorns had an associated community of ghosts. Over the centuries, the dead built homes, shops and other buildings to remind them of their lives. The Thorns necropolis was a bit smaller than usual for a mortal city of that size. The Immaculate faith discouraged people from becoming ghosts or, if they did, from lingering long in the Underworld.



### CULT CONTEST

Throughout the Scavenger Lands, some of the more established and organized ancestor cults receive ghosts—they *claim* they're ancestors—who say the Mask of Winters is a wise king and a true prophet who will guide the world to the consummation of death. Other cults receive ghosts who say, just as emphatically, that the Mask of Winters is a fraudulent upstart and a tyrant who must be fought at all costs. He's nothing like the Walker in Darkness, who knows what death is *really* all about, and whose wisdom may be trusted in all things. Agents of the two Deathlords now battle for control of these cults. Very few genuine ancestors get through anymore, unless one side of the other has necromantically enslaved them.

It's gone now. A behemoth stepped on it. Then the real Thorns took its place.

Cities have become shadowlands from the mass death of their populace. Less often, people have built cities in or near shadowlands, as the Silver Prince did in Skullstone. Never before, though, has an entire city merged with the Underworld *while still living*. People in both Creation and the Underworld have not yet learned the full implications of the Thorns shadowland. They are too busy coping with the Deathlord who made it.

The living folk of Thorns do not enjoy life under the Mask of Winters. The once-prosperous city goes hungry, now. People work harder and see no reward except to live and work another day. Ghosts and informers watch for any sign of rebellion, and any defiance is punished harshly. The Mask of Winters can parrot the words of a reasonable head of state, but his policies clearly show that Thorns' population is just as useful to him dead as alive—maybe more so.

As the people of Thorns look up at the alien stars in their night sky, they fail to think how the conquest of their city looked from the Underworld. It was, if anything, even more appalling. The undead behemoth called Juggernaut left a trail of destruction reaching thousands of miles into the East. The Mask of Winters crushed dozens of ghostly towns and kingdoms in his passage. The slow crawl of Juggernaut gave plenty of time for terror to spread throughout the Eastern Underworld. Before the first ghost or zombie stepped out of a shadowland to attack the living city of Thorns, the Deathlord had already flattened its necropolis and dispossessed its ghosts.

### SOCIETY

The largest number of ghosts in Thorns serve the Mask of Winters as his occupying army. At night, they patrol the city or roam at will. While they are not spectres, few of the Deathlord's minions care about Thorns. They view



its people as a captive source of Essence and the emotional interactions craved by the dead. The less terrible (but more obsessive) among them simply demand that mortals play out little melodramas with them, from the ghostly maiden who wishes she'd made love with a certain boy to the artisan who wants to tell off the shop foreman he hated. The real people are long gone, so the ghosts seek stand-ins among the people of Thorns. Some ghosts take things further, though, such as those who want to torture victims who look like old enemies. Quite a few of the ghosts bully any convenient person they find into praying to them, or to opening their veins for an impromptu blood offering. When dawn approaches, however, they return to the corpse-fortress of Juggernaut and leave Thorns to its misery.

The native dead abhor the invaders. They are, indeed, some of the most fervent members of the city's resistance movement. Pride in their city is one of the passions that sustains them against Lethe. Seeing their cultured, powerful city enslaved and brutalized outrages them. Still, they do find a few compensations. Every night, they get to mingle with their living descendants. Most of them hesitate to ask for worship and offerings as such. Even if they lack true Immaculate piety, they identify the ancestor cult with the lunatic demands of the invaders. But telling an appreciative group of Thornefolk about their lives in the good old days or breaking bread with co-conspirators and some of the bread goes in the fire... that isn't *worship*, is it? It's just friendly remembrance and hospitality. Most of the Immaculate monks who remain in hiding, however, draw the line at admitting ghosts to their covert worship services.

The smallest cohorts of ghosts visit Thorns for reasons of their own. Some of them are spies from other ghost-countries. Others seek the same interaction with the living as the invaders, they just don't want to sign up with a Deathlord to do it. Still others want things from the mortal world. A ghost can't really eat or drink, but one can appreciate the taste and odor. Enterprising ghosts sneak into Thorns to acquire casks of wine and beer, salt fish and fruit preserves—anything they can ship far from Thorns and sell to ghosts eager for a literal taste of the mortal world. All such ventures are dangerous. The Mask of Winters dislikes all unauthorized visitors to his city, whether living or dead. Captive ghosts can expect to be enslaved through necromancy and sent out as spies against their former allies—if they aren't simply smelted into soulsteel.

## ECONOMY

Thorns' economy is in ruins. The once-wealthy satrapy now produces little that it does not need for bare survival or for equipping the armies that march out in every direction. If the Mask of Winters notices that ghostly entrepreneurs see Thorns as a potential trading post between Creation and the Underworld, he does not seem to care.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS

In Creation, the Mask of Winters sends mortal, ghost and zombie armies against Thorns' neighbors while trading

diplomatic communiqués with the Confederation of Rivers. In the Underworld, he makes little pretense of diplomacy. Thorns already forms the capital of a growing empire. Every province and village of the dead within 200 miles now bows and prays to the Mask of Winters. The Deathlord's armies conquer new territory monthly.

Farther afield, dozens of petty states pay tribute to the Mask of Winters and submit to his envoys, in a macabre analogue to the Realm's satrapies. They send soulsteel, pyre flame, Essence-containing gems, jade, grave goods and any ghosts with the skills and Arcanoi to work with such materials. In this manner, their leaders hope to delay their outright conquest, or at least to obtain a favored position in the Deathlord's empire. So far, only the dead of Marukan seem able to resist conquest, and that only because they are so hard to find.

Some among the dead care enough to try to warn the living. The Morticians' Order of Sijan relays a trickle of letters from dead monarchs to their living descendants, telling them to fight the Mask of Winters as hard as they can.

## MILITARY

Thousands of ghosts, zombies and mortals make up the Mask of Winters' armies, but the Deathlord goes beyond such simple warriors. The Mask of Winters also flaunts his necromantic power by deploying necromantic war machines. Juggernaut, of course, is his ultimate achievement, but the undead behemoth requires great effort to animate and control. Most of the time, the Mask of Winters settles for spine chains and other modest horrors, which he finds relatively easy to produce and deploy in large numbers. He has enough zombies to perform the necessary scutwork in Thorns. Now the cadavers of slain soldiers or deceased citizens go to the necrosurgery labs. (For details on the Mask of Winters' zombie, ghost and mortal troops, see *The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. I—The Scavenger Lands*, pp. 109–112.)

The Mask of Winters needs Thorns as a way to bring his zombies and necromantic war machines into the Underworld. Since these creatures lack souls, they do not naturally pass into the Underworld, but the interpenetrating realities of a shadowland enable zombies and necrotech engines of war to enter the Underworld at night, just as anything else from Creation might.

## SPINE CHAIN SCALE

**Description:** A few dozen spine chains charging together make excellent shock troops. Apart from the damage they inflict as they run past enemy soldiers, they are just plain revolting—especially when a damaged section drops out and the head, slimed with rot and clotted gore, slides out of its “socket” in the preceding segment's ribcage. A unit of spine chains needs some intelligent supernatural creature, such as a nephwrack or an Abyssal Exalt, to direct them. On their own, they are dumb as rocks. Properly led, however, they can achieve moderately complex tasks such as scaling walls or bridging trenches.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** N/A  
**Motto:** None  
**General Makeup:** 50 spine chains  
**Overall Quality:** Average  
**Magnitude:** 2  
**Drill:** 1  
**Close Combat Attack:** 2 **Close Combat Damage:** 3  
**Ranged Attack:** — **Ranged Damage:** —  
**Endurance:** N/A **Might:** 3 **Armor:** 1  
**Morale:** N/A

**Formation:** The Mask of Winters has 20 scales of spine chains. Normally, he deploys only one scale at a time, as a terror-weapon (or at least a gross-out-weapon). He wants his enemies to think he has a limited supply of these necromantic weapons. Then, when they mass a sufficiently large army against him, he will unleash a full 10 scales, with the other 10 in reserve, and crush them! Or, that's the plan anyway.

Although they are mindless, spine chains can fight in skirmish or relaxed formation. The Deathlord's commanders prefer the latter, so the chains can reach the enemy quickly, even though it leaves the spine chains more vulnerable once they reach close combat. They simply hope they never face an enemy disciplined enough to stay in close formation while being charged by such a disgusting undead creature. The spine chain scales have no special characters.



## IVORY HOPLITES

The ivory hoplites are a grotesque experiment with a pretty name. The Mask of Winters regards the Seventh Legion of Lookshy as the only force nearby that can seriously hinder his plans, so he develops necromantic analogues to their magitech arsenal. His most successful experiment is the loathsome osseous shell, a bone and metal carapace that he believes can duplicate every feat of the Seventh Legion's mighty gunzisha armor.

Like that armor, a loathsome osseous shell needs a mortal wearer, who interfaces with the armor with the help of certain mystical and surgical alterations. The bone and soulsteel implants in the body of an ivory hoplite are more than slightly conspicuous. The warrior also has the runes of the Shade Prison Amulet spell (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The Black Treatise*, p. 32) surgically engraved on various important bones of his body, making him a living prison for the hungry ghost that powers the armor. The Mask of Winters expects the loathsome osseous shell to shorten its wearer's life span the same way gunzisha armor does too, but he doesn't consider this feature a drawback.

So far, the Mask of Winters has 200 loathsome osseous shells. The wearers are volunteers only in the sense that, as members of his elite Thornguard, they are already brainwashed to fanatical loyalty. He sends scales of 20 to 50 on testing missions in the Underworld. Only once the Deathlord feels sure the shells perform satisfactorily will he deploy them in Creation and in larger numbers.

For an ivory hoplite scale, use the Seventh Legion Gunzisha unit from *The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. I—The Scavenger Lands*, pp. 59–60, only reduce the Magnitude to 2. These test units are usually commanded by Abyssal Exalted.

## SHADOWLANDS OF THE EAST

Thorns and Walker's Realm are the most notorious shadowlands in the East, due to the Deathlords who rule them. They are hardly the only examples, though.

The high population of the East, especially the Scavenger Lands, works ambiguously. It offers more opportunities for mass death, but also more people to engage in public-works projects that reclaim shadowlands for Creation. The Shogunate mobilized millions of workers to reclaim the River Province's shadowlands after the massacres of the Usurpation, but then the Great Contagion wrought hundreds more, as entire cities died in a few short days of horror and despair. Over the centuries, Easterners have shrunk or even eliminated most of the Contagion-era

shadowlands as well, but they have also created a few of their own. The fructifying power of the Elemental Pole of Wood works to heal Creation's wounds, so the major shadowlands of the East are often the result of some exceptional catastrophe whose power resists the passage of time.

## THE NOSS FENS

Hardly anyone among the living or the dead knows about the Noss Fens, but it is arguably the most important and dangerous shadowland in Creation. Here, the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils pulled the Great Contagion from the terrible Well of Udr, and here she still dwells, meditating on this enigmatic mouth to the Void as she seeks another way to destroy the world.

This close to the Elemental Pole of Wood, even shadowlands become fecund. Stagnant, scum-covered streams and pools divide islands of peat. Curtains of black moss hang heavily from the branches of immense cypresses and bog oaks. Yet everything is dead and rotting even as it grows, and the stench of decay fills the air. Beaver, moose and lynx flourish in the bogs, but they are all dead, with putrid blood in their veins. Wholesome life cannot invade these fens, for the Well of Udr exhales the power of Oblivion itself and poisons anything that might live or grow.

In the center of the Noss Fens rises a large hill, the Mound of Forsaken Seeds. A small, strangely angled shrine at the top is merely the summit of a long-buried ziggurat riddled

with tunnels and chambers. The stonework of this fane is like nothing else in Creation, with never a right angle or parallel line or surface. The Deathlords cannot identify the builders, any more than the First Age Solars could before them.

Here do the children of villages slaughtered by the Dowager worship their terrible foster mother. Their furniture, their toys, the plates and cups and forks at their meals, are all soulsteel forged from the ghosts of their parents and the Dowager's other victims. The children know this, and they know that when they are grown, the Dowager will send them out of the Fens to form a village and bear children of their own. They know that someday, the Dowager will slaughter them in turn and take their children to begin the cycle anew.

The deepest chamber of the Mound of Forsaken Seeds holds the Well of Udr itself. Who opened this chasm to Oblivion, no one knows except perhaps the Neverborn themselves, and they have not revealed it in their death-dreams. The Dowager sits on her throne and stares into the Void for days at a time, trying to plumb its secrets. She believes it is a nexus of paradox, where the annihilating force of Oblivion meets and merges with the infinitely prolific, unshaped potential of the Wyld. She seeks the Anti-Creation, the perfect opposite of the Primordials' handiwork that cancels it out and leaves nothing behind. While she searches, however, she might settle for pulling out another plague or cataclysm like the Great Contagion.



## THE WELL OF UDR

Storytellers must decide for themselves whether the Dowager is correct in her belief about the Well of Udr, or whether she has merely deluded herself through too long a meditation on the Void. Certainly, anything that enters the Well of Udr bypasses the Underworld and the Labyrinth to enter Oblivion itself. Storytellers must also decide whether the Well actually predates the Primordial War. If so, it would seem the dying Primordials merely opened a pathway between Creation and Oblivion, rather than creating the Abyss themselves.

Even the chamber that holds the Well is deadly. Any living creature that enters the chamber feels the call of the Void. Every 10 ticks, a character loses (10 – character's Dodge MDV) dots of permanent Willpower. When her Willpower reaches 0, she leaps to her annihilation in the Well. Treat Exalts, gods and other supernatural creatures as having a Dodge MDV three higher than it really is. The only defense against the existential horror of proximity to the Well is to be dead, to have sworn an oath to Oblivion (as all Abyssals have) or to be a supernatural creature with a Dodge MDV of 7 or greater.

For more information about the Dowager and her activities in the Noss Fens, see *The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abyssals*.

## THE BAYOU OF ENDLESS REGRET

This immense shadowland falls in between the East and South. Geographers usually assign it to the East because of the massive mangroves that block the daylight from the stagnant waters. A small river spreads here into a broad band of sluggish streams and brackish lakes and bays. Patches of quicksand riddle the marshy ground. At night, the river's side channels merge with the labyrinthine Cocytus. The bayou is short on normal Southern swampland fauna. The few alligators and water moccasons are sickly, undernourished creatures, but all the more ferocious for their hunger. Mosquitoes, spiders and other biting, stinging creatures swarm in unnatural profusion, though.

This region was a swamp even in the High First Age, but a populous and prosperous land nevertheless. The scent of orchids filled the air as a million pirogues plied the waters between ten thousand little villages on stilts. The bayou gave a thousand different flowers and medicinal herbs, mosses and fungi. It declined somewhat in the Low First Age, as the Dragon-Blooded tried to turn the bayou into a wetland plantation for medicines, but the population remained high. Eventually, however, the great river silted up and shrank, while the disrupted ecology led to more mosquitoes, yellow fever and malaria. The Great Contagion found a province already weakened by disease. Not one person survived.

Now, only the ghosts remain, still paddling spectral craft through the stench and mist. Most of them are spectres by now. They all hate and fear outsiders, whether mortal or other ghosts. The Deathlord called Eye and Seven Despairs claims the Bayou of Endless Regret as his own, but none of the ghosts recognize his rule. The Mask of Winters sends expeditions to the Bayou in a deliberate challenge to his rival, but he cannot find a way to subjugate the native ghosts either.

The Bayou of Endless Regret could become a useful province for anyone who could hold it. The ivory-hued wood of its cypresses resists water and rot remarkably well. More importantly, perhaps, the Underworld swamp produces a thousand bizarre drugs and dire toxins, some of which can kill even Fair Folk, ghosts and demons.

## THE BLACK CHASE

The Black Chase extends from Sijan some 450 miles up the eastern bank of the Silver River. History no longer records how this long, narrow belt of forest became a shadowland. Travelers easily avoid the Black Chase during the day. The eldritch forest stays shadowed on the brightest day, the trees are nearly black or ghastly pale, and fungi and parasitic vines grow in profusion. Only the black ash trees look healthy.

A road runs the length of the Black Chase, near the riverbank, and it remains safe during the day. The dead use it, as well as the living. Other roads and paths appear and disappear, and wise travelers avoid them. The ghost of a long dead behemoth—a hekatonkhire—slumbers in the forest depths, but it awakens when intruders draw near. When it moves, the storm wind of its breath shakes the forest while Creation's skies remain calm. The few ghosts or mortals who escaped an encounter with the Dweller in the Chase speak only of skeletal legs that reached higher than the treetops, and a great darkness blotting out the sky.

## THE CRYPT OF THE WINDRIDER

A thousand miles northeast of Sijan, just visible from the Silver River, a vast edifice of storm-gray stone claws at the sky with its minarets. The wind moans strangely through the slits and niches in its sides. The living and the dead alike avoid it as a place accursed.

At the close of the Old Realm, few sorcerers matched the power or the homicidal madness of the Twilight Caste called the Windrider, who reared a mighty temple to himself in the center of the city he ruled. When the Dragon-Blooded slew him, the Windrider made sure the entire city shared his death. The Windrider's city is no more than grass and rubble now, and the Shogunate reclaimed most of the shadowland for Creation. The temple-tomb still stands, though, untouched by time. From the outside, the mightiest spells the Bronze Faction could cast prevent any creatures from entering or, more importantly, leaving.

None of the ghosts who dwelled in the murdered city remain. They accepted Lethe or Oblivion long ago, letting the ghost city fall to ruins. Other ghosts shun the Windrider's tomb and the small shadowland around it, for litanies of



praise to the Windrider still echo from the temple-tomb on certain nights, and strange lights shine through the windows. Whether the Windrider's ghost endures, no one can say. His fanatical servants still guard their dead master, however, with all the power an ancient Solar sorcerer could grant them.

### THE FIELDS OF WOE

More than a century ago, the Haltans and Linowan tribes gathered mighty armies to crush each other once and for all. Fifty thousand died in a month of fighting and gained nothing. Both sides remember it as a debacle. They cannot forget it, for the slaughter left a shadowland 10 miles wide. The center holds a circular patch of death-pale grass a mile wide. Around it spread forests that stay dark and cold even in high summer. On one side grow black-barked redwoods; on the other, black-barked oaks, birch and maple. A hard-packed earthen road runs between them to split the round meadow in half.

At night, the screams and groans of the dying still faintly echo across the Fields of Woe, and faded images of warriors kill and die, over and over again. These are mere haunts—harmless and powerless images out of time. In the forests around the field, however, a few hundred of the ghosts left by the battle still tend their weapons in their phantom camps up in the trees or on the ground. They still hate each other and battle once a month, but not to a second death. They need their hatred to resist the pull of Lethe. If one side destroyed the other, they would destroy themselves. They are truly fettered to this killing field, and to each other, in a war they dare not end.

### INARI'S STAND

Three days away from Rubylak lies a small shadowland of gentle hills and withered black oaks. In the center stands a pillar of unrusting iron. The sun, reflected in the gray metal, looks green. Loremasters call this shadowland Inari's Stand, but even the dead no longer remember who Inari was or what stand she made here. Every attempt by the Linowan to reduce this shadowland have failed. The shadowland and pillar have certainly stood since the First Age.

The only clue comes from the iron pillar. Savants identify it as the iron of Malfeas, cut and forged from the flesh of a Demon Prince. Few forces in the Age of Sorrows could damage this pillar, or even move it. (Doing so could even prove unwise.) In Creation and the Underworld alike, savants who know of Inari's Stand say to leave the pillar alone, for anything connected to the Yozis brings peril.

(For the story of Inari's Stand known in the Old Realm, see **Dreams of the First Age**. If Inari still exists in the Time of Tumult, this pillar is her only Fetter, but a mighty one.)

### KARROTH VLAN, THE CITY OF ASHES

Two centuries ago, King Veltarxes seized the throne from his older brother with the help of the Walker in Darkness. In return, he gave the Deathlord all three of the demesnes in his little kingdom. Walker in Darkness's necromantic backing enabled Veltarxes to rule as a tyrant and bully his neighbors in the Hundred Kingdoms. Veltarxes' people hated their usurper

king for his taxes, wars and demands for forced labor in fortifying the kingdom, almost as much as they feared the nemiessaries and charnel war machines that supported his rule.

Ultimately, Veltarxes went mad. As the armies of neighbor kingdoms closed around his capital, he locked the gates of Karroth Vlan so his people could not open them to the invaders. Then his nemiessary guards set fire to Karroth Vlan. As the city and his palace burned around him, Veltarxes took poison and declaimed his own funeral oration. The horrified besiegers rushed to break down the gates and lift scaling-ladders over the walls to rescue as many people as they could, but thousands burned, and Karroth Vlan became a shadowland as soon as the embers cooled.

In Creation, only the blackened walls and scorched, tumbled bricks of Karroth Vlan remain. At night, however, a whole ghost city appears—the grave goods of King Veltarxes, a funeral offering he burned to himself. Veltarxes remains loyal to the Walker in Darkness, though his madness makes him an erratic ally. Nevertheless, the City of Ashes gives the Deathlord a major base within the Hundred Kingdoms.

### MOURNING FIELDS

Less than a mile from the walls of Lookshy, a blasted and barren heath cuts across the cultivated fields like an unhealing wound. The weeds and brambles of this field are all dead, and have been for centuries, but they never decay. The Seventh Legion salted the ground, to no avail. Now cairns bearing wards ring the Mourning Fields.

When Lookshy fought the Realm centuries ago, the Seventh Legion detonated a terrible weapon to prevent their city's conquest. The soulbreaker orb slew everyone and everything in a five-mile radius, and the Mourning Fields became a shadowland at nightfall. The mad and tattered ghosts of two Realm legions still wander the Mourning Fields, keening, shrieking or muttering to themselves, their minds too shattered to seek either Lethe or Oblivion. Even Abyssals find the Mourning Fields too terrible to endure for long.

(See **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age**, p. 135, for a description of the soulbreaker orb and how to use one.)

### THE NEXUS BASEMENT

Once upon a time, a quiet man who didn't attract attention lived in a certain tenement in the Nighthammer District of Nexus. Every month, he took a young lady of inexpensive affections to a hidden room in the tenement basement. When he finished with them, he paneled the walls with their bones. This went on for years and years.

One night, the accumulation of terror, pain and death turned the room into a very small shadowland. The quiet man then made a great deal of noise, but no one heard, any more than they heard any of the young ladies. Weeks passed before anyone noticed he was gone.

The room lined with bones is still there, unknown to the people living above. The young ladies wait for another visitor. *Hungrily*.



FATHER?



FATHER!

WHERE  
ARE  
YOU?



DAMN IT ALL. THE  
OTHER GHOSTS  
SAID...



FATHER, PLEASE...  
I'VE COME ALL THIS  
WAY.



I'M HERE SON.



IT'S ALL RIGHT  
NOW. TELL ME  
WHAT HAPPENED.





## CHAPTER FOUR

# DUST AND ASHES

The Southern direction of the Underworld is a land of great wealth and terrible hardship, often existing side-by-side. Toward the East, the land is a patchwork of jungle, humid valleys and petty kingdoms at constant war. To the West, the great mountain range of the Thousand stretches south, the heart of the First and Forsaken Lion's kingdom and the seat of his terrible strength. No significant rivers run across the Southern lands, so transportation is dependent on hoof, claw, foot and magic. The great necropolis of Chiaroscuro sprawls in all its glittering, chaotic wonder on the northernmost coastline, the largest city in the region.

The South is dominated by the pale Underworld sun and the dry, gritty winds that blow year round from the deep desert. The landscape is one of harsh, black stone sculpted by the winds, bone-white sands stretching to dim horizons and prairie grasses that whisper curses in the wind. Because the South has long been inhabited, the ghosts of abandoned towns, ruined farmlands and hollow-eyed houses litter the inland territory. The bones of cattle watch travelers with empty eye sockets, and less pleasant attention hides in the

shadows beyond caravan campfires. Rutted tracks cross even deserted areas, but they seem to lead nowhere, and even the most traveled path might end abruptly, leaving travelers lost and at the mercy of the beasts and horrors that lurk in the empty lands of the South. The lands around Chiaroscuro are grassy plains that the ghosts of farmers and ranchers plant and herd, harvest and slaughter in an endless round seasons—all powered by prayer and sacrifice. Further inland, away from the sea, the land dries quickly, becoming hardpan plains and steppes to the west, while the forests to the Southeast die away, the skeletal remains of trees preserved like abandoned bones in the lifeless earth. Rare oases are held by the strongest and most ruthless ghosts, to whom many desperate cults are dedicated. These tyrannical ghosts control access to the sacred waters, charging exorbitant prices in Essence, favors, information or grave goods.

In the deep deserts, the nomads rule, though there are dozens of tribes, each recalling a long lost age of glory in the living world. The greatest of these ghostly nomads are the D'Hennish.

The Dual Monarchy has a small presence in the South, though all ghosts offer some worship to the Underworld rulers who control the very rising and setting of the sun. Yet the Deathlord known as the First and Forsaken Lion is the overlord of the direction. Only the D'Hennish nomads and the trade city of Chiaroscuro resist his influence. The Deathlord's power continues to grow, however, and the continued freedom of Chiaroscuro and the nomad tribes is very much in question.

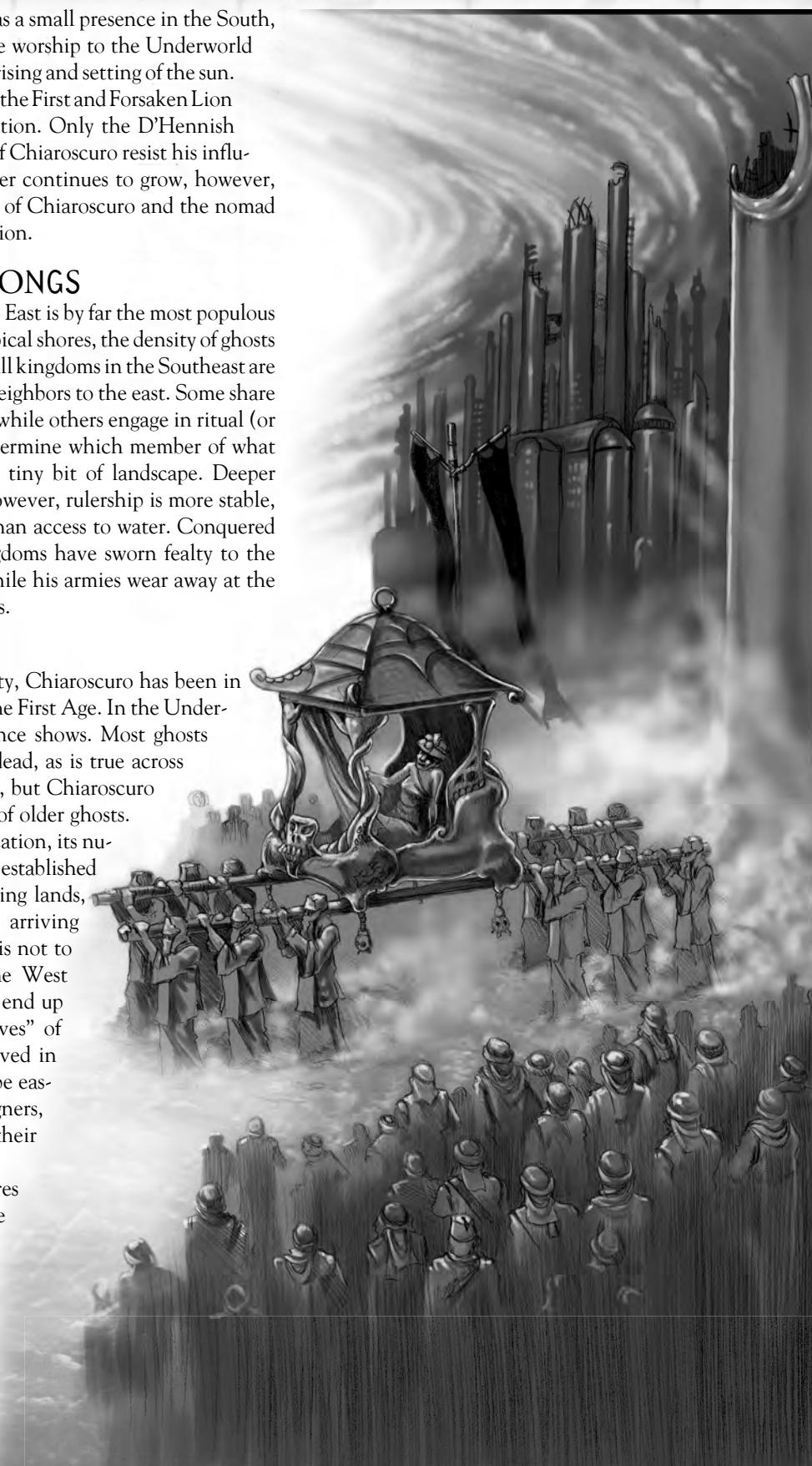
## GHOSTLY THRONGS

The Underworld of the East is by far the most populous direction, but along the tropical shores, the density of ghosts is greatest in the South. Small kingdoms in the Southeast are patterned much like their neighbors to the east. Some share rulership based on seasons, while others engage in ritual (or not so ritual) battles to determine which member of what royal family controls some tiny bit of landscape. Deeper inland, and farther west, however, rulership is more stable, and space is less valuable than access to water. Conquered long ago, most inland kingdoms have sworn fealty to the First and Forsaken Lion, while his armies wear away at the defenses of the coastal lands.

## CHIAROSCURO

A huge and ancient city, Chiaroscuro has been in constant habitation since the First Age. In the Underworld, that constant presence shows. Most ghosts of the city are Contagion dead, as is true across the Underworld as a whole, but Chiaroscuro also has a solid population of older ghosts. Because of its wealth, its location, its numerous shadowlands and the established ancestor worship in the living lands, newly dead are constantly arriving in the city. If Fallen Lotus is not to their taste, ghosts from the West follow the coast north and end up in Chiaroscuro. The "natives" of Chiaroscuro—those who lived in the city in Creation—can be easily distinguished from foreigners, as almost all bear signs of their funeral pyres.

In the South, such pyres are the doorway between the lands of the living and the dead. Funeral celebrations, often lasting days, begin when the body is burned and the ashes collected into a funerary urn. As the funeral rites continue in the land above, the ghost drifts





into the Underworld, guided by music, incense and prayers. For the ghosts of Chiaroscuro, their new existences in the Underworld begin—and remain centered—around their urns. It is typically their primary grave good, and it signals the value their living family placed on them. Urns are made of the finest materials available to the living family: gold and silver, rare jades and hand-carved ivory are among the materials used. For most ghosts in the city, their urns anchor them against the call of Lethe. For ghosts who travel to the living world, their urns are the fetters that allow them passage.

Chiaroscuro is a necropolis dense with sprawling columbaria where generations of ghosts stack their urns hip deep and the smoke of burning flesh drifts over the city like fog. The city's port is busy, night and day, acting as the main transit point for soulfire crystals from the Thousand, rare beasts and weaponry from the deep desert, and spices and herbs that are traded to the wealthy manses of Stygia. While those goods flow out from the city, it takes in grains, the restless dead seeking new adventures and envoys from Stygia and the Deathlords.

The high-walled homes of the wealthy dead line broad streets paved in black glass—always hot underfoot as if fresh from a funeral pyre. Processions are common, as newly arrived dead are welcomed home by their ancestors, while the necropolis's beggars hold out scorched palms, hoping for a crumb of Essence or a shared offering.

The original rulers of Chiaroscuro are long vanished, and the city maintains order through the guidance of a bureaucracy of ministries, each one made up of hundreds of members. In the halls of wisdom, as well as the gritty streets, power is strongly influence by how well a ghost is served by living descendants, so visible displays of ancestor cults and grave offerings are present in every office and home. Ministers also fund huge celebrations whenever a new family ghost arrives, making sure to spread favorable news from the living world far and wide. Less influential ghosts take one of the great families as patrons, offering up prayers and service in exchange for safety, access to the land of the living and any stray crumbs of Essence that might slip from the tables of the wealthy. The great families supposedly disdain open battles, but more than a few “feuds” among the rank-and-file dead can be traced back to the manipulations of Chiaroscuro's ruling elite.

The Ministry of Poetic Silence is one of the larger bureaus in the city, charged with (or having taken control of) maintaining order and defending the walls of the city. It has several wings of troops, including heavily armored cavalry for patrol beyond the city's walls, a huge manse in the center of the city and an entire branch of the ministry trained in the delicate task of killing and torturing ghosts. Over the last few years, its connection to the land of the living has been strengthened by alliance to a living prophet of the god Masque of Repose. It has, in fact, supported the growth of a cult in the Underworld to that god. Where those prayers go, no one outside the cult knows.

## THE CATHEDRAL OF ALABASTER

The greatest of Chiaroscuro's columbaria, the Cathedral of Alabaster is a walled compound in the southeastern quadrant of the city. Old and exclusive, its broad pathways are paved in milky glass, while red and gold lanterns gleam in the twilight as those ghosts lucky enough to earn a place in the prestigious columbarium pass messages to their living kin through smoke and mirrors. Urns here gleam with precious gems, blessed with durability and beauty, and they bear the signatures of master crafters. Jade and silver racks support generations of urns. Each family in the Cathedral has its own landscaped bit of property where its tombs are as ornate and sometimes nearly as large as a family estate.

Large enough to be a small town in its own right, the Cathedral is the major conduit of news between the living and the dead. The ghosts whose urns are stored in ornate, open-sided pavilions are all experienced at traveling between the living world and the Underworld. They are all from powerful, influential families, ones where their living relatives still offer proper respect to their ancestors. Even a small, stable shadowland is located in the columbarium, protected from destruction by living exorcists by a powerful ancestor shrine located on the living side of the shadowland.

The privilege of space in the Cathedral of Alabaster is reserved for the rulers of Chiaroscuro and their families. Courtesans and favored servants can earn a place for their grave goods along the outside walls of the columbarium if they earn sufficient favor. Those lesser urns are stacked on wooden shelves well within the protection of the Cathedral, which helps to thwart grave-robbers.

The diverse ministries cooperate well enough to maintain order in the ports, the city and the farmlands outside the walls that are under their protection. Chiaroscuro depends on trade—and lots of it—for its wealth, so it welcomes envoys and politicians from all the major powers in the Underworld. The Dual Monarchy's smoke-clad diplomats rub elbows with the eerie servants of several Deathlords in the lavish luxury of Chiaroscuro's ruling households, while alleyway assaults on grave goods or cult shrines are the less visible tools of politics.

Chiaroscuro is peppered with hundreds of tiny, unstable shadowlands, which allow ghosts who can bribe, defeat or slip by a guardian access to the living world. Most of these shadowlands are controlled by city ministries. Most are located within manses or columbaria, but some are no more than a few paces wide, tucked into some littered corner of a

back alley or the basement of a middle-class smuggler's home. Because of this network of shadowlands, the living city of Chiaroscuro is well known for its haunted streets, and the mortal souls who live there are better educated than most on how to banish and destroy ghosts. A ghost who comes to depend on a particular shadowland for her nightly trips to a living lover might return before dawn to find her passage home heavily salted and Immaculate exorcists lying in wait to return the ghost to her proper place in the cycle of reincarnation. Then she is left with a desperate dash to another shadowland, fleeing both banishing rituals and the dangerous rise of Creation's sun. On the other hand, some shadowlands are controlled by ancestor cults, allowing the living and dead controlled, moderately safe contact.

#### POETIC SILENCE PATROL

**Description:** These guardian ghosts watch over Chiaroscuro's shrines and columbaria. They also take shifts on a rotating basis with other ministries' soldiers at the port and the great gates that protect the main part of the city from insurrection and attack.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** Green

**Motto:** None

**General Makeup:** A talon of war ghosts in Chiaroscuro-glass lamellar armor, each armed with a spear and a slashing sword or a firewand



**Overall Quality:** Good

**Magnitude:** 3

**Drill:** 3

**Close Combat Attack:** 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** 2 **Ranged Damage:** 4

**Endurance:** 6 **Might:** 3 **Armor:** 3 (-2 mobility)

**Morale:** 3

**Formation:** This unit fights in close formation. Beneath the commanding officer are six junior officers, three acting as heroes and three as relays. A cleric of the Dual Monarchy acts as a sorcerer for the unit.

#### DARI OF THE MISTS

In the Underworld, Dari is a true ghost town. Few people dwell within its borders, and those ghosts who end up in the city usually flee within days. Even the First and Forsaken Lion doesn't waste his men or time here. The city is part of his army's regular patrol circuit, but its war ghosts rarely go into the city proper.

Dari's graceful towers seem to be constructed of mother of pearl. They rise high into the gray daylight of the Underworld, graceful, delicate and lovely. Even the less impressive buildings, built of the same pale, iridescent material, seem to be organic in nature. Their walls are gently curved, doorways more oval than square, windows round. The walls seem smooth from a distance, but close approach reveals a delicate etching on most buildings. They catch what light is present, either lanterns or daylight, and at night, they reveal themselves most clearly in a reverse pattern—twining shadows against the glowing walls of Dari's luminous buildings. They seem harmless enough, and for the most part, they are. Unless you are a newborn ghost and your first awakening is in the Underworld City of the Mists.

Dari of the Mists retains the look of the ancient First Age city whose name it bears. It is as peaceful as the once-thriving living Dari was, as well. The reasons, however, are very different.

Clinging mists hide the city most days, with only the upper levels of the slim towers rising from the fog. Despite the moisture, the land around Dari is far from fertile. Flat, gritty hardpan stretches for miles around the city proper. Ghosts that eke out a living on the borders of the city often disappear, their homes abandoned, their beasts left to roam free, their tools and possessions lying about as if the inhabitants had simply stepped away for a moment and planned to return. No one has determined what happens to these vanished spirits, or if they still exist. Recently, such disappearances have been on the rise, and the area of risk is slowly spreading outward from what were once stable borders.

Dari of the Mists is technically under the First and Forsaken Lion's control, but it receives little attention from him. Empty and useless as a military post due to its dangers, he does little more than send occasional patrols to make sure no bandits or rebels have taken refuge in it. Bandits and rebels do occasionally hide out in Dari's empty buildings on

## DYING INTO DARI

The First Age city of Dari was a strange one, and the peculiarities of that place continue in the Underworld. Very few citizens of Dari ever became ghosts in the first place. Most simply disappeared—into Lethe, most assume.

For those souls with the misfortune to die in the ruins of Dari—generally dying desert bandits, lost treasure-seekers and unfortunate nomads—their Underworld awakening carries its own dangers. Newborn ghosts who arrive in Dari of the Mists face an abandoned city with no help, no companions and no aid in the new existence they've begun. Such isolation is itself destructive to young ghosts, who might be completely ignorant of the existence of the Underworld.

Survival for such ghosts depends on fleeing Dari before nightfall. When the Underworld sun sets and the beautiful buildings in Dari glow in soft pastel shades, the tracings that trail over the walls darken, becoming a webwork of shadows. They wind across walls, over windows, past doorways like fine vines. Within the aimless-seeming patterns is locked a powerful and ancient sorcery.

Those who become ghosts in Dari are subject to its power when the sun sets. After nightfall, Dari ghosts find the sorcerous spell etched into the city walls drawing them to a plaza just off the center of the city. Surrounded by the tall, luminous towers, now nearly hidden under the thick scrawls of black webwork, ghosts are caught in a spell designed to tear apart their very Essence and are reshaped.

The corpus of any ghost who falls under Dari's spell is peeled off and sucked away into nothingness. He is thereafter forever intangible and invisible, even to other ghosts—even in the Underworld. He loses every Arcanos Charm he has except those from the Stringless Puppeteer Art. (The “touch” necessary for Mortal-Shadowing Technique—see Chapter Six of *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. V—The Roll of Glorious Divinity II*—requires only that a part of the ghost occupy the same space as a part of his intended host's body. The host cannot resist if he is unaware of the ghost's presence and position.) From that point forward, Charms from that Arcanos are the only ones the player can purchase for his character and the only ones the character can use. Ghosts so transformed cannot be returned to their original state. In order to have visible, physical bodies they must possess the living.

the theory that the unknown dangers are better than the well-known dangers of running into the Legion Sanguinary. Otherwise, the city is mostly used only by caravans who take on water and rest briefly before continuing on—never spending a night in the city.

## CORAL AND CROW

So it was until Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers hatched a scheme that she hopes will free her from her humiliating servitude to the First and Forsaken Lion. Weak and bound, Princess Magnificent cannot face down the First and Forsaken Lion openly, nor will any other Deathlord help her. Most have forgotten her existence, and those who remember her dismiss her as weak and foolish. So the lovely Deathlord has been quietly maneuvering to regain power and create new—loyal—allies.

Princess Magnificent has taken Dari as her own stronghold and stashed her stolen Monstrance of Celestial Portion within it. She cannot completely subdue the city, nor prevent it from creating nemissary ghosts—not without alerting the First and Forsaken Lion of her independence. Instead, she has slightly diverted some of the sorcery binding the city away from two towers and their attached buildings, and replaced them with Charms of her own devising.

Little seems different in her stronghold, for Princess Magnificent put great effort into disguising her work. The tracery on her buildings is nearly identical to that of the rest of the city, but at night it shines greenish-black instead of being true shadow. Yet only those very familiar with the city or skilled at identifying calligraphic forgeries—requiring a successful (Perception + Craft [Air]) check at difficulty 5—would be able to discern the difference.

The doors and windows of Princess Magnificent's buildings have also been ensorcelled. Anyone looking in from the outside sees deserted, empty rooms, the same as all the rest, everywhere else in the city. Noise is muffled as well, though not completely absent. Eerie whispers can be heard when passing her ensorcelled neighborhood. It is only when the threshold is crossed that furniture, possessions and so on can be seen.

The Deathlord's stronghold is located on the western side of the city, where a five rose-pink towers rise up beside a plaza paved in an abstract mosaic that is one of her lines of defense. The mosaic has been enchanted to create confusion and misdirection. Those who attempt to cross the plaza find it nearly impossible to reach their goal and end up instead walking into randomly determined alley or street in some other quadrant of the city entirely. A successful (Perception + Awareness) check at difficulty 4 is necessary to circumvent this effect.

Of the towers, only two are in use by Princess Magnificent. The rest are empty but prepared for expansion when she begins her next phase of rebellion. The number of ghosts in her stronghold fluctuates, usually no more than 50 and

no less than 10. Her single deathknight, Son of Crows, will almost always be found there, for his mistress has forbidden him passage beyond the borders of the city. She is well aware that secrecy is his—and her—only protection.

Most of the ghosts Princess Magnificent has brought to Dari are spies and scouts, envoys and skilled negotiators. All of them are unshakably loyal to her through Charms and Essence-fueled oaths. At this stage of her plans, the Deathlord is not interested in foot soldiers. She is still gathering resources and allies and needs stealth and intelligence, not might and blind courage. Most of her agents are out traveling the Underworld to build a network of spies, establish alliances with nomads of the deep desert and open negotiations with elder ghosts in Chiaroscuro. Princess Magnificent's strongest push however, is Fallen Lotus and the access it has to the Font of Mourning shadowland. Access to the living world is a treasure she's willing to gamble quite a bit on. She created Son of Crows with the expectation that he would bridge the land of the living and the dead for her benefit.

Some of Princess Magnificent's servants are older ghosts who fear what the First and Forsaken Lion would do should he conquer the Underworld, while others are very young, snatched up by their mistress before they could fully comprehend the politics they'd fallen into. All of them have some unique talent, whether it's a knack for blackmail or a centuries-long familiarity with the hidden paths of the Southern deserts. This small group is Princess Magnificent's vanguard, her first chosen in her battle for freedom and power. Among them all, necromancers and spies, assassins and forgers, one youngster stands out.

Son of Crows is her current crowning achievement. An Abyssal Exalt of potentially vast power, he was gifted with his Dark Exaltation at her delicately cruel hands. Since then, Princess Magnificent has kept him hidden away, isolated from contact. Son of Crows has not been presented in the Labyrinth, nor is his name known to the Neverborn. In fact, since Princess Magnificent is his only source of information, he is not even aware such courtesies are necessary.

For a long time, Son of Crows was completely alone, and this solitude nearly drove him mad. Princess Magnificent brought him to Dari, however, and placed him in command of her budding spy network. Occupied and able to receive training from the skilled ghosts around him, Son of Crows has grown in power.

A Moonshadow Caste Abyssal of great potential, Son of Crows is learning more than Princess Magnificent planned. The peculiar nature of Dari, combined with Son of Crows' innate abilities, has allowed him some unique opportunities. Not only is he learning the skills of social assassination from ghosts with centuries of experience, as well as the ability to call up creatures in both the Underworld and the living one, Son of Crows has also made some independent alliances. Using his caste powers, Son of Crows has bound more than a dozen nemesaries to his personal service. Since Princess Magnificent is rarely in Dari to oversee her young Abyssal,

she is yet unaware of his subtle resistance. Son of Crows, in turn, has no specific plans for rebellion but is simply following his nature and the precepts of double-dealing he is learning from the ghosts he is supposed to command in Princess Magnificent's service. Unbeknownst to the Deathlord, Son of Crows has duplicated her sorcerous adjustments on a building in Dari, where he practices some of his own treacheries and occasionally brings ghosts he hopes to bind to his personal service.

Son of Crows' explorations, and his growing collection of nemesaries, are invigorating Dari and is the reason why its area of effect is expanding. Sooner or later, his activities will bring the attention of either his mistress, or some less forgiving Deathlord. Whether he'll be strong enough to survive such attention is anybody's guess.

## THE DEEP DESERT

City walls and the softness of civilization have long fallen away, and the trackless wastes of the deep deserts of the Underworld South hide terrible peril. Even if travelers are able to avoid the bone-thieving nomads and the armies of the First and Forsaken Lion, the emptiness of the land can destroy those without courage and strength.

The deserts of the South stretch endlessly on, growing hotter and dryer until even the moving sand is stilled. The deepest reaches of the South are flat, featureless plains with burning gusts of ash-laden winds. The air stinks of dying fires, as if the burning elemental pole in Creation has been extinguished in the Underworld, leaving nothing but soot and silence behind.

## THE THOUSAND

Running from the dank, mist-covered beaches of the Sea of Shadows to the depths of the arid Southern desert, the tremendous mountain range called the Thousand has been transformed from a deserted territory of rocks and extinct volcanoes to a massive citadel. There were a few small cities and many towns located among the lowlands of the Thousand, especially on the wetter, western side. Most of those places are gone now or have fallen under the control of the First and Forsaken Lion. For some, this oversight has little effect. Yet any place of value or independence has felt the Deathlord's relentless will and vast power.

Most of the original value of the Thousand was in mining. Soulfire crystals from the southern part of the range are valued across the Underworld, as are certain rare ores used for forging soulsteel. Incense trees such as red cedar and rare herbs were goods of less importance. Unique animals haunt the slopes of the Thousand, including small herds of ebon-coated horses and the massive red-eared hyenas the D'Hennish tribes fear and worship. On the western side of the range, water is relatively abundant, and noisy rivers, small lakes and waterfalls dot the slopes. Most drain into the Font of Mourning, feeding the swamps of that humid jungle. On the eastern side of the Thousand, water is much scarcer.

The streams and small rivers do not flow far from the foothills. Most run dry in the heat of summer.

Bandit tribes find shelter in the foothills, assaulting caravans traveling to Fallen Lotus or—at great risk—those who serve the Deathlord. These bandits were larger and more organized in the past, but the First and Forsaken Lion has since taken to bleeding his troops by hunting the bandits of the mountains.

Unlike in the West, nemissaries are the most common ghosts haunting the Underworld mountains. Few can affect the dead, aside from attempting to mislead them into flashflood canyons or off cliffs in the dark. The number of nemissaries is slowly rising, however—or so travelers claim. Such eerie ghosts are even beginning to trouble the First and Forsaken Lion, and it will not be too much longer before he turns his attention to the odd phenomenon.

#### MERCILESS

The First and Forsaken Lion takes no pleasure in his fortress, buried beneath the jagged peaks of the Thousand, for he is not there willingly. His original goals concerned only his own glory, but his ambition angered his Neverborn master. His master's ire culminated in a grand punishment, of which the First and Forsaken Lion's exile to the South is only a small part. Since then, the First and Forsaken Lion's primary goal is the conquest of the Underworld, and his most secret desire is for the love of his servant, Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. The lovely

Deathlord spurns him, however, for being enslaved to him is her punishment for failure. Princess Magnificent has been placed in the humiliating position of serving another Deathlord like a slave, and she will forgive neither the Neverborn He Who Holds in Thrall who bound her so or the master she resentfully serves. (See **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abyssals**, pp. 75–76, for more information.)

The core of the First and Forsaken Lion's citadel is located in the southern end of the Thousand, and he has constantly extended his territory northward, toward Stygia and the very heart of the Underworld he means to conquer. Unlike many great manses of the Deathlords, there is little in the way of comfort or ostentatious wealth visible in the First and Forsaken Lion's citadel. His stronghold is too remote to be useful as a diplomatic center, so he has disposed of any unnecessary fripperies. He has not even bothered to officially name his fortress, which troubles the ritually minded ghosts in his service. They have given the dark citadel the unofficial name of Merciless.

Buried beneath the sharp peaks of the Thousand, the fortress Merciless, slowly eats away at the foundation of the Underworld. Great mining manufactories crawl beneath the earth, grinding away at the rock, sifting out anything of value and burning vast quantities of oilrock and Essence. Behind the creeping manufactories of iron, silver and soulsteel, miners and craftsmen transform the dross shed by the manufactories into weapons, tools and trade goods. Among them are masons who build garrisons for the Deathlord's constantly expanding

#### WATER RITES

Ghosts cannot die from lack of water, but they can certainly feel the parched desperation of thirst—made worse by the fact that it cannot kill one and can, therefore, go on and on forever. So, as in the living South, water and the right to take water from streams, wells and oases is a matter of critical importance. Feuds over water, between towns or nomadic tribes are serious matters in the Underworld, as are rituals to share and control water.

In the greater cities, where water is assured, the rites surrounding water have been worn away over the centuries. In places such as Chiaroscuro, a carafe of water stands just inside every dwelling and is offered freely to guests as a sign of welcome and courtesy. During grand celebrations, such as Midwinter, ritual fountains are activated, spraying water over processions. (For some, this is the only time water touches their bodies.) The waste of water during these celebrations signals wealth and prosperity. Visiting nomads and deep-desert dwellers find the waste offensive. Outsiders from other directions find the underlying importance of water bewildering unless they have been lost in the South and had to do without it.

In the Far South, water is not left out for passersby, and water rites bind families, tribes and civilizations together. In small isolated villages, it is offered first to the elders in a family, who must bless the water before it can be used for various daily tasks. In the nomadic tribes, water is offered to bind oaths. To be someone's water kin is to swear a solemn oath of friendship and loyalty. Among the nomads, water oaths supersede almost all other bonds. Even the Deathlords make use of water rites. The First and Forsaken Lion binds his allies to his service with water and uses his powers to control the water-flow in springs and wells in his territory.

The little gods and elementals of the living world have no dominion over the Underworld, so no gods of springs, streams, wells or oases are present in the land of the dead. Instead, old ghosts take on those roles in symbolic ways. Many of these powerful ghosts stake claims on water sources in the desert, demanding bribes and sacrifices from travelers who wish to partake of them. Ghosts who tie themselves to water thus cannot wander far from their sources of power, and their fortunes are bound to those bodies of water.



armies, living quarters for the civilians who support those armies and more permanent residences for advisors, ghost slaves and the occasional, intimidated visitor.

Each of the Deathlord's mining machines has a sort of intelligence, a dim Essence-fueled mind that registers the trace elements in the deep rock and guides it toward veins of silver or rubies or the strange crystals that can be transformed into soulfire crystals. Each manufactory has a crew of 27 ritually bound ghosts whose damaged minds control the massive effigies. The method of binding used by the First and Forsaken Lion ravages the spirits and minds of the ghosts in question, so many who staff his great machines are former enemies. The ghosts have been stripped by the First and Forsaken Lion's labs of everything except the drive to serve. The heart of each mining effigy is a webwork of soulsteel, powered by a single putrid-green hearthstone. It is impossible to sway the loyalties of the ghosts who control the machines. Many rebels have tried, only to find themselves cast into the Essence forges and made into fuel for the effigies they attempted to suborn.

The growls and roars of the mining effigies echo through the outer passages of Merciless. In the older central areas, that sound is reduced to a dull directionless rumble, but there is nowhere in the Deathlord's kingdom that escapes the sound of consumption and conquest. At times, it even rises up to echo in deep caverns in the living world. Miners in Gem have many stories to explain the eerie rumbles in the earth.

The oldest part of Merciless is also the closest to the surface. When the First and Forsaken Lion was banished to the Thousand, and shortly after he had been painfully and permanently bolted into his own armor, he roamed the lifeless peaks, roaring in rage and agony. It is said the sound of his voice split the earth in two and a great ravine opened. There, in the wounded earth, the Deathlord made his fortress.

Merciless splits the surface on the northeastern face of the tallest peak in the southern half of the Thousand. It rises like knives thrust outward through flesh, and the smooth faces of the three-sided towers are made of shining obsidian. Clusters of such narrow three-sided towers burst from the soil in various other locations along the Thousand. Any areas where the Deathlord needs easy access to the surface are betrayed by these buildings. The greatest concentration of them is where the fortress began; hundreds of towers bristle up from the ground there. Dust storms swirl around the sharp tips. The wind occasionally throws hapless flying beast against the razor edges of a tower's tip, leaving plasmic blood to trail down the walls before the arid wind dries it.

Except for one approach to the Screaming Gate, there are no roads anywhere on the surface. The towers cluster so tightly together it is often impossible to walk beside them. With their sharp sides and no doors or windows, the towers are their own defense. The only way to enter Merciless is by following a dry riverbed that twists deeper into the mountain.



When the canyon walls have risen hundreds of feet high and it seems the very sky itself has been slashed by the surrounding towers, only then is the black entrance to Merciless visible.

The grand gates to the fortress are made of three massive slabs of bloodstone. Fitted with soulsteel wards, they are nearly impermeable to force or guile. A hundred screaming ghosts—thieves and spies—are pinned to the doors by silver nails. The gleam of those nails, and the frantic sparks of ghostly agony are the only illumination offered at the entrance. Illusions and shifted shapes are stripped away when travelers cross the threshold of the Screaming Gate, leaving each visitor bare and—as the Deathlord claims—in their honest rags. No living soul has entered Merciless, so what should happen to any such visitor is unknown but assumed to be terrible.

Beyond the Screaming Gate lies the public face of Merciless and as much generosity as the First and Forsaken Lion is every likely to show. A triad of great chambers, each a dozen stories high, surrounds the First and Forsaken Lion's throne room. Each trapezoidal chamber is large enough to hold an entire dragon of troops. Various council chambers, guestrooms, studies, libraries and labs are carved into the sides of the main chambers. Entrance to the rest of Merciless is possible only through the throne room.

The throne room of the First and Forsaken Lion is the center of his cult, and the breath of Merciless. It hums with power, and the air is constantly astir with Essence. Huge, featureless shafts burrow through the flesh of the mountain, sinking down for endless miles into the earth and rising into the high peaks—though they do not breach the surface. They touch on the deepest heart of the Underworld, in areas so distant and dark that even the Neverborn have forgotten them. Disguised in plain sight, those mysterious shafts give the First and Forsaken Lion hope that he might eventually free himself from He Who Holds in Thrall. If his alliance with the Fair Folk bears fruit, he will discard the pretense of mechanical use in favor of their true, military purpose.

All who enter Merciless must offer ghostly blood as sacrifice to the First and Forsaken Lion here, at a cost of five motes of Essence. His priests, nephwracks all, are there to receive the offerings. For most visitors, this is as far into the Deathlord's fortress as they are permitted—or desire—to travel. The walls within the Deathlord's throne room are covered with broad sigils. Wide stonework eyes watch over the rituals that feed his growing empire, and the blood of hundreds of sacrifices paints the walls a dull red.

Broad, shallow stairways descend deeper into the earth. Here, the Deathlord's servants are able to enter the fortress proper and leave the showy public façade behind. All ornament falls away, and the walls are lit only with the glow of defensive and surveillance wards. The sounds of marching boots echo in many hallways, for soldiers make up the greatest proportion of the First and Forsaken Lion's subordinates.

## GEM AND THE UNDERWORLD

The grand mining city of Gem is a warren of narrow passages, squalid miners' towns and grand merchant halls in the land of the living, but it has no direct imitation in the Underworld. It is the First and Forsaken Lion's intention to change that. The Deathlord's territory, vast though it is, has no shadowland of significant size, which means he has no contact with the living world—a dangerous weakness that has kept the Deathlord vulnerable in comparison with his fellows. Without a shadowland, his death cult is limited to intimidated ghosts. He has no access to living Essence and has poor access to potential Abyssal Exalted.

Gem is one of the anchors of Creation against the tides of the Wyld, a far-flung outpost that is a thorn in the side of Fair Folk ambition. Since the First and Forsaken Lion has no ultimate use for the living world, he does not care if Creation is consumed by the Wyld. Between those two facts, a terrible alliance has been created. The Deathlords—the Underworld as a whole, in fact—fascinate the Fair Folk, who neither live nor die. When the First and Forsaken Lion's servant Meticulous Owl was swept up in a Middlemarch upsurge and found himself in the arms of the raksha, he was inspired to offer the chance for mutual advantage. Over several months, the Deathlord and the Fair Folk crafted a treaty with a single purpose: the destruction of Gem.

For the Fair Folk, Gem's destruction would destabilize Creation in the South, allowing them to expand the Wyld. For the First and Forsaken Lion, a properly managed slaughter would create a shadowland of considerable size. A Fair Folk army is massing in the Middlemarches nearest Gem, provided guidance and protection from some of the less pleasant aspects of Creation by the First and Forsaken Lion. He has also sent his favored advisor, Meticulous Owl, into Creation to create a network of spies and sappers in the city of Gem. With their help, it is hoped that the raksha will be able to overcome the city's powerful defenses and sweep into Gem's tunnels, slaughtering everyone they encounter. In the Underworld, the First and Forsaken Lion waits until the promised bloodshed washes Gem into the land of the dead to create a shadowland in the heart of his kingdom.

Should this alliance between death and chaos succeed, the balance of power will undergo vast upheaval both in the land of the dead and in Creation.

The entire fortress has an air of a military camp, and the hundreds of forges and manufacturing shops scattered through the dark tunnels churn out arms and weapons.

The passages of Merciless are confusing. They can rise and fall unexpectedly, twist about each other or dead end abruptly. They were all dug by the massive mining effigies the Deathlord created; their paths follow no comprehensible logic. All of them are a uniform diameter of 372 feet however, and oval in shape, echoing the form of the effigies that made them. Smaller chambers and the occasional tunnel are dug off from those main arteries. The Deathlord, however, discourages too much subsidiary tunneling—partly to control travel in his fortress and partly because the entire southern third of the mountain range is already riddled with tunnels.

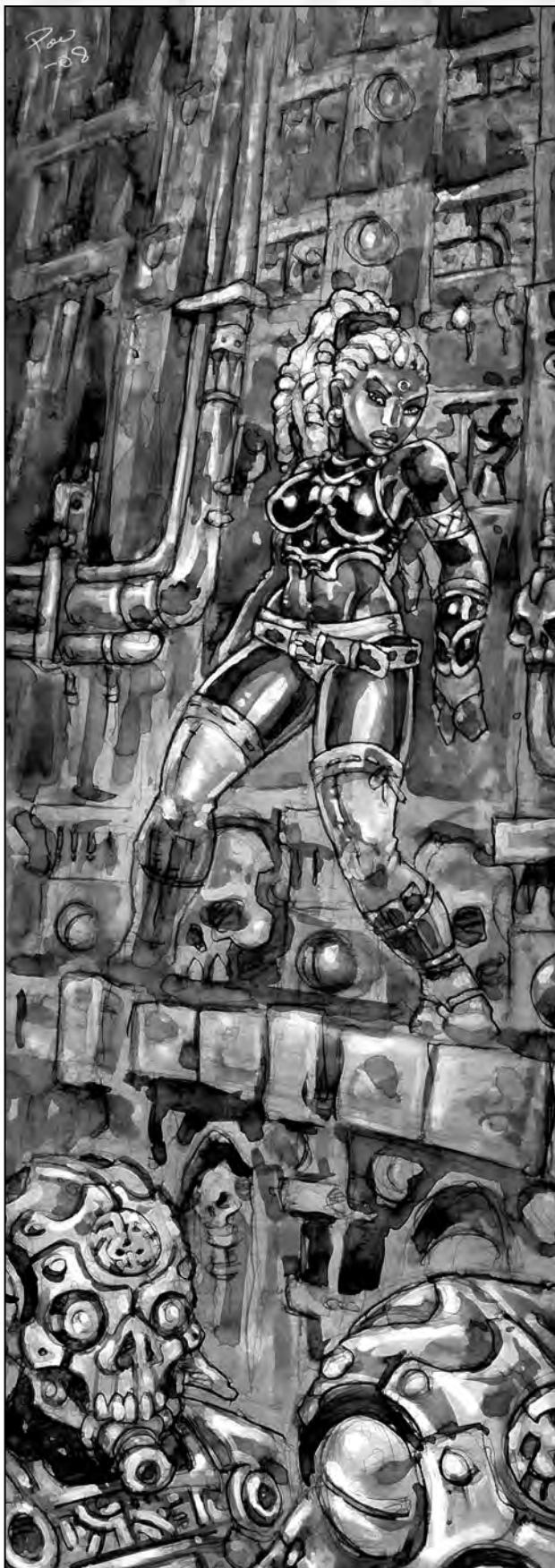
#### THE DECAYING SKY

When the First and Forsaken Lion still had hopes he could turn Princess Magnificent's heart to his, he created this grand chamber as a gift. Located not too far from his throne room, it is a huge vault, dimly lit so the distant walls fade to invisibility. The ceiling arches high above, sheathed in lapis lazuli imported at vast expense from the living world. The traces of living Essence, carefully manipulated by one of the First and Forsaken Lion's Daybreak Caste Abyssals, power a vast illusion. Crossing the threshold of Decaying Sky feels as if a visitor has left the Underworld behind and entered the living land. Beautiful stars gleam in the sky—even a crescent moon made of pearl and white jade casts faint light. The night-sky is a detailed replica of midsummer night as seen from the South, and even the air has been scented with the dry perfume of that land. The grand chamber and its illusions were never completed, however, for Princess Magnificent mocked the First and Forsaken Lion's gift as soon as she heard of it. Therefore, the false landscape below is only half finished. The silver trees that were to be clad in leaves of emerald and jade are skeletal, the birds of gold and carnelian are silent, and the grass mosaic is patchy underfoot. Few dare enter this chamber, for it still echoes with Princess Magnificent's scorn. Should the First and Forsaken overhear it, he will assuredly fly into a mad rage.

#### OUTLYING PASSAGES

Moving away from the older areas of the fortress, the tunnels become less frequent, the edges less worn by age and individual habitation less common. It's here, in these tunnels that any who hope to keep secrets from their Deathlord master gather.

Princess Magnificent has carved out her own tiny kingdom within her hated master's realm. A few scant miles from the Razors of Smoke gateway, she has built her own stronghold. Her chambers are an uneasy echo of the First and Forsaken Lion's, for she has also created a cult—a secret one—to gain Essence from worshipers. She hoards soulfire crystals, weapons, jade effigies and bits of soulsteel here as well, but her plans of open rebellion are still years away, so most of her goods are stored behind panels of polished silver for later use.



It is only her shrine that is active, and she has disguised it as her laboratory, where she torments and reshapes ghosts at the bidding of the First and Forsaken Lion. The flows of Essence used to make soulsteel and reshape ghosts to useful tools hides the traces of her worshipers. Besides, the First and Forsaken Lion has yet to visit her private workrooms, for she has refused to invite him.

Razors of Smoke is a gateway to the surface and the nearest entrance to Dari of the Mists. The First and Forsaken Lion pays little attention to this gate, for it does not bring him close enough to the coast for an attack. It is perfectly located for Princess Magnificent, however, and she has allowed herself to be "exiled" here.

#### LEGION SANGUINARY 1ST ARMY

**Description:** The First and Forsaken Lion uses military force, not subtlety, to control his sprawling southern territory, and the soldiers of the Legion Sanguinary are the tools of his diplomacy. The Legion is vast but spread widely over the First and Forsaken Lion's empty territory. He continues to expand as he plans an invasion of the living world when Gem falls—and further military campaigns should that stage succeed.

The Deathlord's troops are among the best equipped in the South, and the war ghosts who make up most of its numbers are extremely disciplined and blooded on bandit hunts and nomad exterminations. Should the troops move en masse to the living world, they will be accompanied by zombie hordes equal to half the numbers of the equivalent legion.

The Legion marches under the First and Forsaken Lion's gold-and-white banner, but talons that have shown particular bravery or skill are permitted color banners that mark them as particularly favored of their lord.

**Commanding Officer:** Walking on Laughter

**Armor Color:** Gold and white

**Motto:** "Meat for the Slaughter!"

**General Makeup:** A force of 10,000 war ghosts wielding axes and wearing chain hauberks, supported by warstriders, bonestriders and myriad necromantic war machines

**Overall Quality:** Excellent

**Magnitude:** 9

**Drill:** 4

**Close Combat Attack:** 3

**Close Combat Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** 2    **Ranged Damage:** 2

**Endurance:** 7    **Might:** 4

**Armor:** 3 (-2 mobility)

#### Morale: 5

**Formation:** The 1st Army operates in close formation in most circumstances. Fifteen ghosts surviving from the High First Age act as heroes in the army, 15 nephwrack necromancers act as sorcerers in the army, and 30 nemiessaries act as relays.

#### THE SOUTHERN NOMADS

The deserts of the Southern Underworld seem to be endless plains of ash or bone-white chalk hardpan, but ghosts of great power and antiquity haunt the empty lands. Sometimes, they leave their kingdoms to threaten the civilizations of Chiaroscuro or even the Deathlords.

Over the millennia, thousands of nomadic tribes have risen up and died out in the South. Many of those tribes cling to existence in the Underworld. For the most part, they squabble among themselves for rights to oases, or they participate in an endless cycle of raiding and tenuous treaties. The grandest of these nomad tribes, the largest and the most stable, is the D'Hennish.

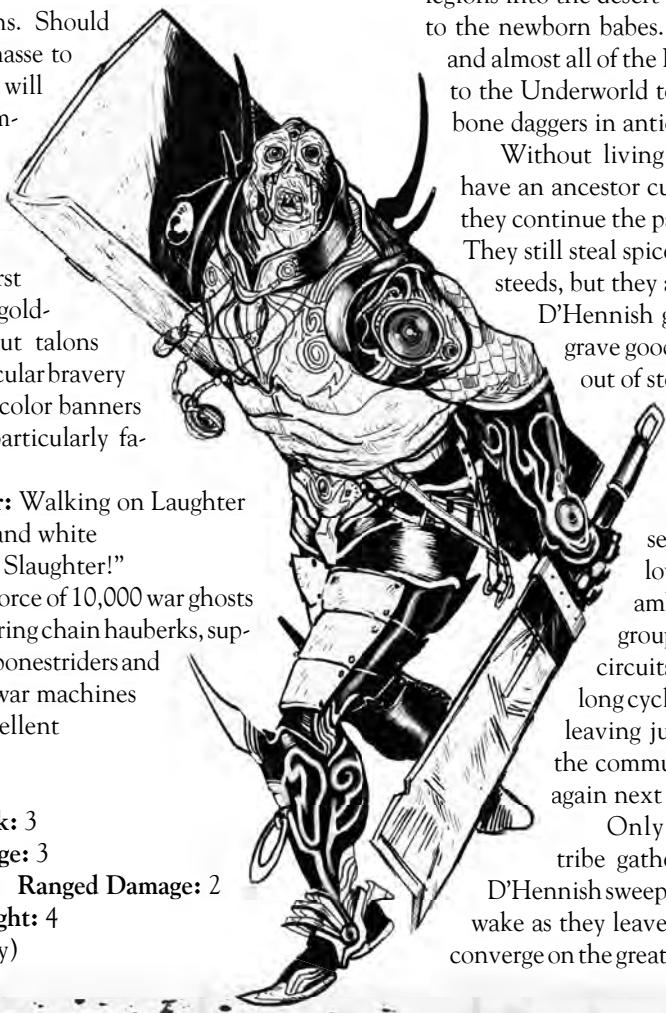
For all the power the D'Hennish hold, they have no organized living kindred. Once, the D'Hennish were a powerful desert tribe, taking tribute from any caravan who dared to cross its territory. As part of her alliance to the rulers of Chiaroscuro, however, the Scarlet Empress sent her legions into the desert and wiped out the D'Hennish down to the newborn babes. Hatred is a powerful tie for ghosts, and almost all of the D'Hennish tribesfolk made their way to the Underworld to nurse their rage and sharpen their bone daggers in anticipation of vengeance.

Without living decedents, the D'Hennish do not have an ancestor cult to provide them with Essence, so they continue the patterns they learned in life—raiding. They still steal spices, gold, jade, pretty faces and strong steeds, but they also thieve Essence and grave goods.

D'Hennish ghosts are expert at retooling stolen grave goods to their own use—creating jewelry out of stolen armor, horse tack out of funeral bindings and wards from other ghosts effigies.

Small raiding parties scour the deserts, ferreting out the shifting, secret trails the caravan masters follow through the sand and setting up ambushes around oases and wells. Larger groups of D'Hennish bandits have regular circuits. They raid town after town in a year-long cycle, stealing from helpless villagers and leaving just enough to ensure the survival of the community so they can return and harvest again next year.

Only once per year does the entire tribe gather together, thousands strong. The D'Hennish sweep up the smaller nomadic tribes in their wake as they leave their deep desert home behind and converge on the great coastal city of Chiaroscuro. The sight



of the massed tribesfolk, their black ghost horses throwing sparks from cloven hooves with their masters' indigo-veiled figures howling and wailing in such a way as to shake the very sky above, is enough to empty entire towns.

The tribe assembles just beyond the band of vulnerable ranchland surrounding Chiaroscuro and waits. For three days, the D'Hennish parade their champions in front of Chiaroscuro's forces, mocking the staid citizens of the ghost city and indulging in raucous celebrations of their own. At sunset of the third day, with the harsh incense of the D'Hennish staining the sky black, Chiaroscuro finally answers the challenge.

The great gates of the necropolis open, and a single champion appears. Behind the city's chosen champion, servants haul out a great display of wealth. Golden tabernacles overflow with sumptuous foods and piles of hell money. Incense fills the air. Beautiful ghost-courtesans, dressed in fine spidersilk are carried in ebony palanquins. Seeing this stake of tremendous wealth, the tribes send out their own champion.

The two ghosts meet, as they have for hundreds of years, in a barren circle just beyond Chiaroscuro's borders. The masked, nameless Champion of Chiaroscuro is dressed in the gold-and-red panoply in which she was buried, her banner disfigured and unreadable, but her weapons shining with great power. Her steed is the ghost of a simhata.

The D'Hennish champion is also a powerful ghost. Gold glitters on his black robes. His crimson eyes burn beneath his tattered violet veils. Blood from his own murder still drips down his enameled armor, staining it a muddy red. He rides a skeletal stallion and carries paired grave-good daiklavves stolen from the ghost of his Dragon-Blooded killer.

When the last glimmer of sunlight dies in the West, the two champions clash.

This battle has raged every year since Chiaroscuro rose from the ashes of the Contagion. Each year, blood falls like rain, the screams and wails

of the D'Hennish ghosts encouraging their champion echo in the sky, and the sounds of clashing steel sounds shatters the still air of the Underworld. Every year, the battle lasts until the sun rises in the East. Every year, the Champion of Chiaroscuro falls in defeat.

The ending is as preordained as the phases of the moon and as important. Even as the Champion of Chiaroscuro kneels in bitter submission to her opponent, who takes his due by dealing a final, ritual wound, the rest of the tribe sweeps forward to claim the spoils of their victory while the Champion kneels in the dust, until the next battle.

#### D'HENNISH NOMAD RAIDERS

**Description:** All of the D'Hennish nomads can fight if necessary, but the majority of their troops are the unmarried men and women of the tribe—the least useful members. Their eerie war cries stir fear in the hearts of those whose players fail a standard (Valor + Willpower) roll (difficulty 3 for the living). They are all mounted on swift chargers (double standard mounted speed).

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** Indigo

**Motto:** Wild ululations

**General Makeup:** A thousand nomadic tribesmen mounted on horseback and armed with slashing swords

**Overall Quality:** Excellent

**Magnitude:** 6

**Drill:** 3

**Close Combat Attack:** 3

**Close Combat Damage:** 2

**Ranged Attack:** —

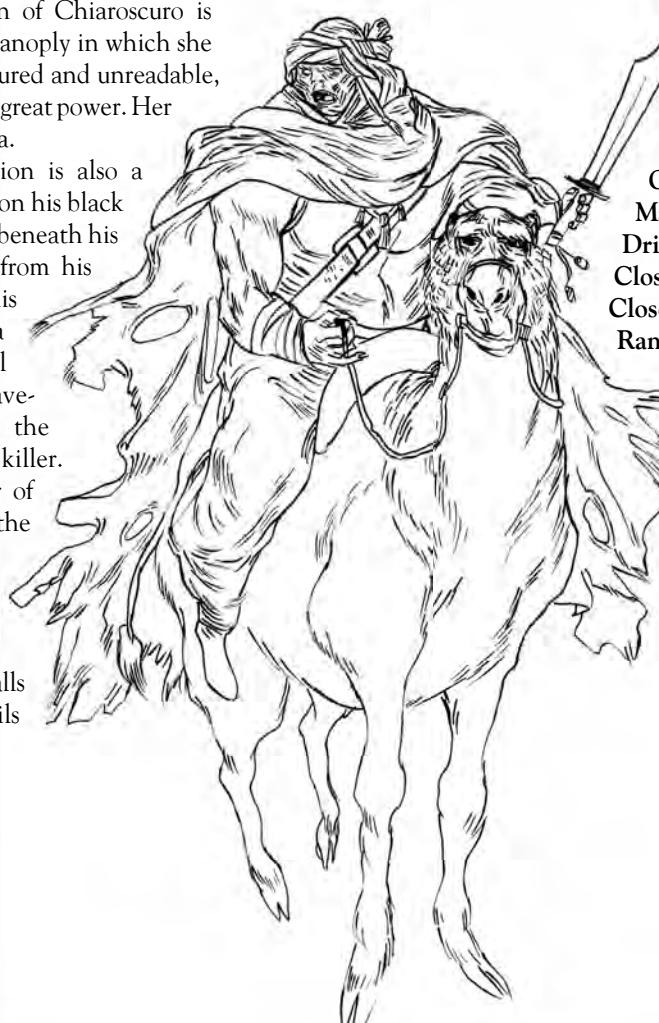
**Ranged Damage:** —

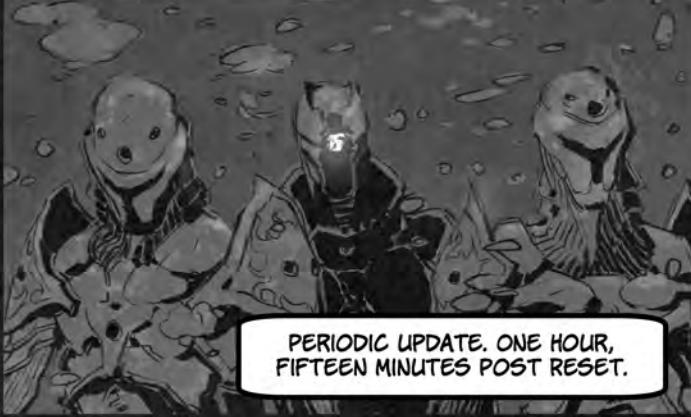
**Endurance:** 6

**Might:** 3 **Armor:** 1

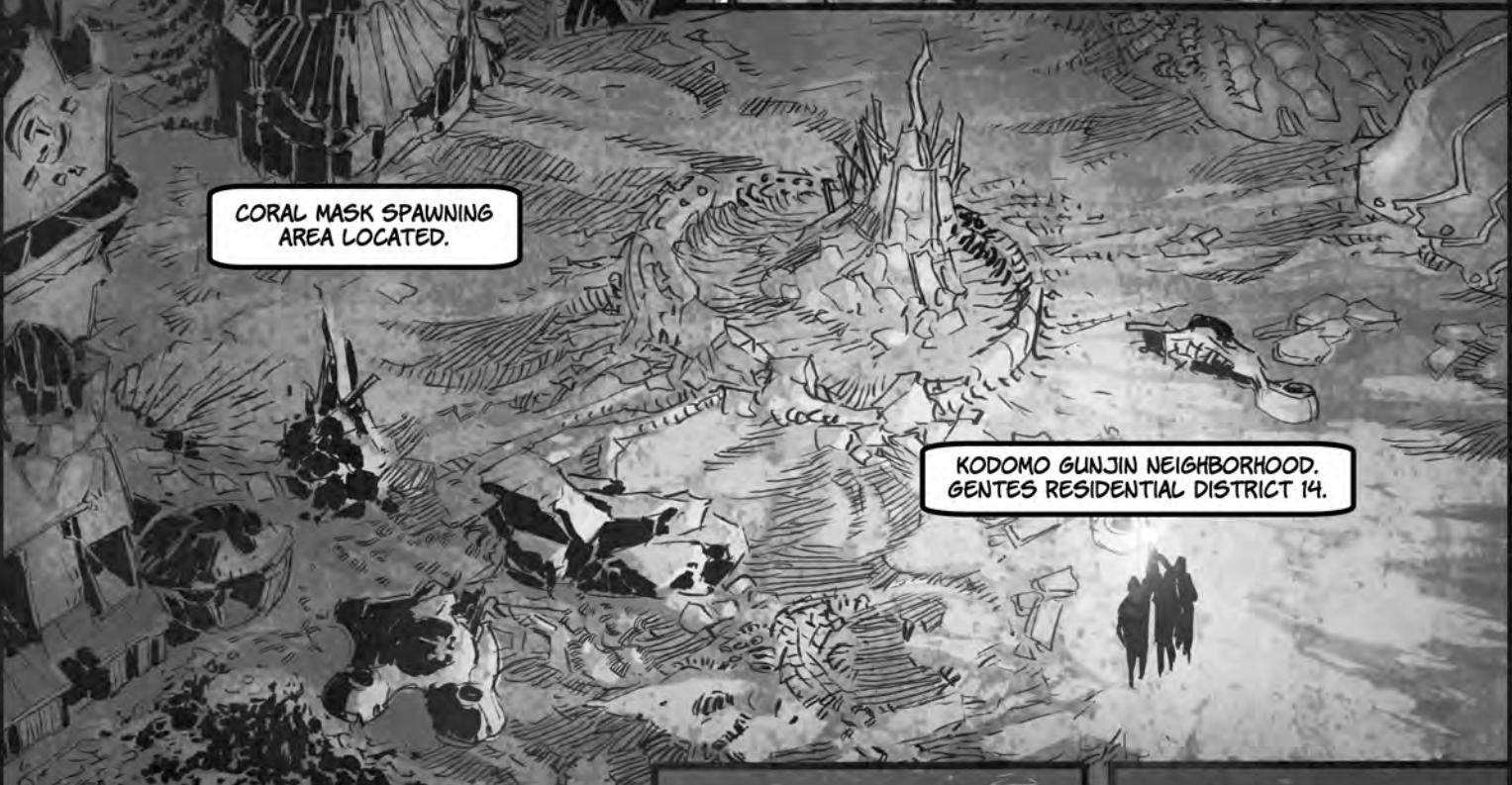
**Morale:** 5

**Formation:** The nomads attack in skirmish formation. In addition to the overall leader of the sept, the raiders have eight heroes, seven relays and five sorcerers.





PERIODIC UPDATE. ONE HOUR,  
FIFTEEN MINUTES POST RESET.



CORAL MASK SPAWNING  
AREA LOCATED.



KODOMO GUNJIN NEIGHBORHOOD.  
GENTES RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT 14.



EVIDENCE OF SHINMAIC  
ESSENCE IRRADIATION.



NEXT UPDATE AT ONE  
HOUR, THIRTY MINUTES  
POST RESET.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# NIGHT TIDES

The grand Western Ocean of the living world, like all other places in the world above, has its darker reflection in the Underworld. The great river Acheron winds through the Eastern Underworld and spills into the Inland Sea of Shadows, carrying the lamenting voices of dying ghosts with it. To the north, massive horned whales, pale and luminous, hunt the dark passages of the Black Sea amid deadly glaciers. In the South, the air becomes more humid and damp the closer to the coast one comes, until one reaches the Inland Sea of Shadows. Fanged flying fish swarm ships there, stealing Essence in a thousand tiny nips. And to the west, the water goes on, endlessly, without boundary as the sky grows dimmer and the sun becomes a distant memory. The oldest ghostly sailors (some older than the gods of the Second Age) claim that the Sea of Shadows never ends. Its endless water will someday wash in and drown the entire Underworld, they say, then rise up to the land of the living until all of Creation drowns. The Western lands and waters of the Underworld are not populous, for the constant call of the water reminds

the dead too much of the song of Lethe. Few ghosts of great age remain in the West.

The Sea of Shadows also carries the lost and desperate souls who died at sea in the living world and those who were buried under the merciless traditions of the Western lands but strong enough to resist reincarnation. These ghosts are poor and often mindless, denied grave goods or worship by their living relatives. Their spirits are washed thin by the constant whisper of the water. The strongest find their way ashore at Whale Bay or the Skullstone islands. Those ghosts who resist reincarnation and find no other shelter simply wash in with the night tide or wander the bone beaches, crying their despair until they become spectres.

Those towns and kingdoms that exist in the West are standoffish and insular, generally preoccupied with their own affairs. Most are of little influence, though many are ancient in origin. Only the Underworld reflection of the Skullstone Archipelago, with the Silver Prince at its head, is a major force in Underworld politics. With his strong ties to the



living world and his own powers, the Deathlord dominates all other lands in the direction.

Fearful of the dangers of the Shadowed Sea, most sailors keep their boats within sight of land. Only the ghostly fleets of the Lintha and the black-and-silver sails of the Skullstone fleets travel easily out of sight of the dark shores of the Underworld. Burial coracles drift like lamps on the tides, and there is a minor criminal enterprise of looting them for grave goods—usually destroying any ghosts found within in the process. No one, however, disturbs the burial barques of the Lintha. Even the Silver Prince takes care when dealing with that ancient order of pirates.

#### TYA IN THE UNDERWORLD

There are no storm mothers to forbid women on the seas and, while there are Tya ghosts, there are also non-Tya women on the Sea of Shadows. The dead Tya specialize in fast messenger ships, and their slim, swift boats can be found all over the West and even upriver into the other directions. They do not stray far from water, however, and prefer seafaring over freshwater sailing. Tya guildhouses can be found in Fallen Lotus and Skullstone, and there is a small one on Stygia itself. Guildhouses serve as shrines as well as shelter and are the center of the Tya prayers among themselves. The Tya dead still recognize the living elders as the leaders of their organization, and any elder who dies automatically relinquishes her position. They strive to avoid the politics of the Underworld and simply work for those who can pay the price. The Tya do not admit new members after death. One

can enter their fellowship only when alive. The tattoos of Tya ghosts constantly bleed red, like fresh blood, memorializing the scars of their first elder.

#### FALLEN LOTUS

Fallen Lotus is a grand, sprawling necropolis, the greatest inland civilization in the West. Located on the western side of the Thousand, it serves travelers from all directions. Access to the Font of Mourning, hidden deep in the fetid shadows of a cypress jungle even allow a certain amount of contact with the living world.

Before the Contagion, Fallen Lotus was little more than a collection of warped cypress shacks where dwelt the ghosts of river pirates who fought the ghosts of the Dual Monarchy. Like many places in the Underworld, the Contagion changed all that. The arrival of millions of Contagion-touched ghosts bloated the town, and it grew huge, sprawling across miles of swampy lowland in the Southwest.

Built where many of the currents of the Underworld collect, Fallen Lotus, is where many ghosts, ships, memories and promises of forgetfulness wash ashore. Seagoing vessels dock at the city's extensive port, and the presence of the Font of Mourning brings the treasures of the living world to the dead. The old road rambling alongside the mountain range—built in the style of First Age projects—also helps makes the necropolis an ideal trading nexus.

Fallen Lotus is a city of narrow, cobblestone streets ill lit by red swamp-gas lamps and a web of canals, water locks and

## THE SEA OF SHADOWS

The black ocean of the Underworld stretches from the Western edge of the Threshold all the way to the endless darkness, the nothingness that surrounds the Underworld. It is deceptively still, stretching out until even the stars fade away. Unlike the living sea, the Underworld Sea of Shadows is nearly lifeless. The Underworld's sun supports no minuscule life at the water's surface, none of the tiny fish that would normally feed on such life exist, and none of those animals' natural predators are in evidence. Just as everywhere else, the Shadowed Sea feeds on Essence, and that Essence comes only from the ghosts of those who enter in the land of the dead. Regardless, the darktide beasts that do exist grow to enormous size in the depths of the Shadowed Sea, until it seems the water itself has become a grasping, hungry maw.

The connection between the Underworld and the living one is relatively close on the Sea of Shadows. Western ghosts can find themselves crossing over to the living world unexpectedly during nights of the full moon, and the living can find themselves in similarly desperate straits during the dark of the moon and eclipses.

The Shadowed Sea is hungry, drawing Essence from those who sail upon its waters. For every 12 hours spent at sea, players must roll a successful (Willpower + Survival) check for their characters or have them lose one mote of Essence. This Essence disperses into the water, to be consumed by the hungry creatures that swim and float within it. Because of this Essence drain, sea creatures cluster around ships and the shipwrecked, luminous in the darkness, feeding off the Essence of the helpless ghosts or living folk who dare to trespass on the Shadowed Sea.

bridges. During the rainy season, the city floods, and residents use flat-bottomed skiffs to travel the streets. In Fallen Lotus, the song of the river is heard in every household and fills the dead dreams of the city's ghosts.

The city's buildings are mostly built of silver-gray cypress wood, resistant to water and rot. Iron railings and hardware is painted white in an attempt to protect it against the damp, but rust is inevitable and streaks the whitewash like blood. Buildings are generally one or two stories, with their windows open wide to the blood-warm breezes of the lowland swamps. The scent of magnolias, funeral oils and rot cling to fabric and skin, and strangers claim they can recognize a citizen of Fallen Lotus by smell alone.

The ghosts of Fallen Lotus are dominated by the Contagion dead, green tinged, numerous and eager for a stability in the afterlife they lost in the chaos of the Contagion.

Like most dead, they wear the clothes in which they were interred—usually whatever clothes they wore when disease killed them and they were left to rot. They have little interest in politics as long as it doesn't interfere in trade, the city's lifeblood.

The influential ghosts in the city are more likely to be older, flush with grave goods and long established in the Underworld. Their garb is proper funeral robes, white and ash gray, trimmed in red runes of blessing and respect shining like fresh blood. Younger dead, from the Contagion and afterward, find the rulers of Fallen Lotus condescending and languidly cruel. The elders might not have any direct descendants still living, but many of Fallen Lotus's ghosts have managed to establish small spirit cults where living folk trade worship for information only the dead can provide. They maintain ranks of servants, some slaves or effigies that were buried in their own tombs, others hired from the desperate pauper ghosts of the West. Effigies and funeral sacrifices bear the mark of their masters, while ghosts hired to service in the Underworld do not, which makes anonymous servants useful when a dead noble deals in ignoble acts.

The "peacekeepers" of the city, led by their unpopular mistress, Awha, bear the signs of their pirate origins. Their garments are heavy with seawater, tattered and slashed from the battles that took their lives and gaudy with stolen grave goods. Hollow cheeked and with a cruel glitter in their sunken eyes, they look (and often act) little different from the smugglers and raiders they battle. For Awha, their loyalty—one that values neither the Deathlords nor the Monarchy—is more important than their table manners or their absent sense of justice.

Fallen Lotus's long riverside border is a ramshackle collection of warehouses, trading offices, labor halls and piers reaching into the Sea of Shadows like skeletal fingers. The docks are crowded, night and day, with laborers, off-duty sailors, beggars, soldiers on leave (from a dozen different nations and bearing the banners of a dozen different historical eras) and wandering ghosts, most from the Contagion era. The well-to-do ghosts of Fallen Lotus dwell inland, in a strip of tightly packed neighborhoods where they engage in endless social negotiations and feuds, all under a veil of smothering hospitality.

Beyond the homes of the wealthy, the city spreads deeper into the swamp. The air grows thick and heavy with swamp gas, and tempting will-o'-wisps, and the roads are crooked and uneven. Homes and mausoleums are pressed haphazardly together, some both at the same time. The public shrines to the Dual Monarchy are ill maintained in this part of town, and the desperate huddle by them, hoping for charity. There are few ghosts here with properly worshipful descendants, so they must find other ways to gain wealth and Essence. Many work for the crumbs their betters offer, as courtesans, chatelaines, sailors or house servants. Others prostitute themselves to sailors. Still others steal and smuggle to ensure their survival. Beyond the homes of the poor, the city trails

off into shacks and shantytowns, with a few well-kept canals leading inland where smaller communities trade with Fallen Lotus. A few of these canals leads deep into the surrounding forest and to the Font of Mourning.

Smuggling is the city's major criminal activity, one that Awha remembers fondly from centuries gone by (which is likely why her forces do not pursue smugglers as determinedly as they should). Fallen Lotus is one of the major pipelines for smuggled salt, that precious, illegal substance that acts as a barrier against the dead. Order is kept by Awha's peacekeepers, mixed groups of ghosts—often former crewmates from her old pirate days—and bound zombies. Awha employs living necromancers to keep her zombies intact and powerful, trading Underworld goods for the privilege of living necromancy.

Fallen Lotus smugglers use long, flat-bottomed boats to transfer goods from deeply hidden safe houses in the swamps, through the city, and to ships waiting at the riverside piers. Many of them are deep-bayou residents, with their own suspicious culture and a long history of conflict with city law—whether it's Awha's ravagers or the Whale Bay guardsmen. They are frequently accompanied by barghests (see pp. 147 and 158), which they use to guard their boats and to find their way through the trackless shadows of the Font of Mourning.

Awha, a clever ghost who's led the necropolis's militia since it was a pirate town, controls travel inland from Fallen Lotus and fights to retain hold of the shadowland against the insistence of the Deathlords. She plays for time, trading favors and information, promises and betrayals while she struggles to make a good alliance with the Deathlords. She has no doubt that the Deathlords will eventually wrest control of the Underworld from the Dual Monarchy, and she intends to survive. At the same time, she plays her cards carefully, in case the Monarchy achieves an unlikely victory. In that case, she hopes to retain plausible deniability, or at least enough power to keep from being ousted.

She grudgingly shares her power with half a dozen first citizens; ghosts of similar age and power who have some hold on trade, whom she dares not disregard. Her stranglehold on the city's troops allows her to remain the most powerful of Fallen Lotus's inhabitants.

#### FALLEN LOTUS RAVAGER SCALE

**Description:** Mostly the ghosts of pirates and seafaring criminals, the ravagers' main advantage is their loyalty to Awha. They aren't easily intimidated, but they can be bribed. Fifty percent of the time, they are accompanied by a talon of zombies (see the *Exalted Storyteller's Companion*, p. 117). In this case, double the number of sorcerers.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** Varies

**Motto:** "Liberty, not Monarchy!"

**General Makeup:** A crew of 50 freebooters armed with slashing swords, supported by a couple of hired necromancers

**Overall Quality:** Fair

**Magnitude:** 2



**Drill:** 2

**Close Combat Attack:** 2 **Close Combat Damage:** 4

**Ranged Attack:** 2 **Ranged Damage:** 2

**Endurance:** 4 **Might:** 3 **Armor:** 1

**Morale:** 2

**Formation:** Invariably unordered. The first mate can operate as a hero if necessary, while the proreus and his man work as relays. Two hired Ghosts-Blooded necromancers act as sorcerers.

#### THE FONT OF MOURNING

To the west of the Thousand and south of Fallen Lotus lies the ghost of a deep, semi-tropical forest. Cypress trees, twisted baobab, twilight magnolias and the valuable black teak grow in a dense mass several hundred miles long and wide. The forest floods frequently and unpredictably, stranding travelers and washing old secrets out of the muddy undergrowth where they have been buried for uncounted years.

Even experienced travelers, such as Fallen Lotus smugglers, find the swampy woodland, with its hidden sinkholes and shifting sandbars, difficult to navigate. The thick canopy above hides the sun, and the faint glow of the twilight magnolias can deceive travelers into thinking they are navigating by stars, instead of swaying blossoms. The Dual Monarchy's Western patrols have attempted to bring order and direction to the forest with stone plinths etched with protective runes. These plinths are often sabotaged by Fallen Lotus smugglers,

however, or possibly by whatever unfriendly ghosts inhabit the forest itself.

Though dangerous, the Font of Mourning is nearly irresistible to the greedy, the restless and the ambitious. Rare plants and animals make their home in the shadows of the forest—even the trees are valuable, though taking them can incur the wrath of their undead guardians. Black teak, a dense, hardwood is valued all over the Underworld, especially for shipbuilders, for its wood is nearly flame proof, as well as resistant to rot and the Essence drain of the Sea of Shadows. Skullstone merchants and the Dual Monarchy's shipyards buy up every twig of black teak on which they can lay hands. Spirit-influencing herbs, rare poisons and exotic creatures are hunted or gathered out of the forest by those foolish enough or brave enough to risk its murky depths.

The forest has taken on the name of the shadowland hidden within it, any gentler history from before the deaths of Gorol and Tomun is long lost. Calan and Tomun's battle with Thrice-Damned Gorol, Tomun's lingering, lonely death, and Calan's despair over it has twisted the fabric of Creation, creating a shadowland that is deeply influenced by the remaining shreds of their Essence and spirits.

Mates, as well as brothers-in-arms, Calan and Tomun battled Thrice-Damned Gorol, abandoned by their own troops, betrayed by their spirit allies, the very land around them rent by powerful Essence Charms and vile sorcery. They made their last stand at the foot of the mountains, wresting the elements of water, fire and wood to battle on their behalf. At last, Calan struck the deathblow, but she was laid low by the venom Gorol expelled in his death throes. Tomun rushed to his mate's side, but the No Moon could not heal Calan of the toxin. Desperate, Tomun begged the akuma for the antivenin. Gorol explained that only the life's blood of one's true love could heal the poison's victim, and he laughed his last in spite as the Lunar slashed open his wrists and died sprawled across his Solar wife's body. Calan rose sometime later, healed by the power of her own Charms, to find the results of Gorol's final act of betrayal.

There are reasons the smugglers of Fallen Lotus keep their backs turned to the shadows beneath the trees. No one wants to draw the attention of those whispers that haunt the darkness. Those foolish enough to listen can always hear faint whispers in the shadowland, and the more attention they pay, the more persistent the voices become. Lone travelers are particularly vulnerable. After the first night in the forest, players must successfully roll (Willpower + Survival) for their characters or have them attract the attention of a swamp wisp. For groups smaller than three, the roll has a difficulty of 2. Swamp wisps are mindless bits of faintly luminescent plasmic energy. Drawn to a traveler, a wisp attacks its target with a chaotic shriek, inflicting damage as the Abyssal Charm Withering Phantasmagoria (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abyssals**, pp. 141–142) fueled by four motes. The wisp attacks once in the night then disappears. For the

rest of that night, the victim effectively possesses three dots (or a bonus three dots) in Whispers.

## WHALE BAY

Offshore and north from Fallen Lotus, the settlement of Whale Bay is as old as that Fallen Lotus but has had much different luck. The island on which Whale Bay is built, is harsh and bitter. Surrounded by a collection of smaller coral islands, it is the largest of the group and the only one with consistent fresh water. Its pale, rocky cliffs rise like half-buried bones from the swell of the sea. Twisted, half-dead trees, many strewn with the hungry ghosts of drowned children, cling to the cliff tops. Scrubby grass, red-beaked spirit gulls and luminous ghost foxes make their homes in holes on the cliffs. The island's beaches are rocky, narrow and unwelcoming.

Whale Bay controls the safest deep-water bay, but a dozen or so smaller ones scattered over the surrounding islands support fishing villages and towns and serve more than adequately for smugglers and pirates. Storms and wave swells torment the coast of these islands, as well as large numbers of hungry ghosts washed ashore with the tide. Dank mists veil the sun most days and hide the guiding stars at night. Many of the inhabitants of the coast divide their time between fishing the black waters of the Shadowed Seas and pilfering salvage from unfortunate vessels that run afoul of the shallow coral beds around the islands. (Sail rolls when either navigating or traversing these waters start at difficulty 3.)

Small communities struggle to prosper on Whale Bay's neighboring islands. Made up of independent ghosts, these settlements are unwilling to accept either the Monarchy or the Deathlords as masters. Most are stubborn, poor survivors of Western death rituals, with little grave goods to call their own and no living relatives willing to offer them worship. They are so poor and so stubborn that it doesn't seem worthwhile for the great powers of the Underworld to waste their time attempting to subdue them. It helps that these fishing communities are more familiar with the Western coast and the tricky tides beyond than any visitor could ever hope to be. Any army that attempted to conquer the area would be faced with night strikes from hidden fjords, sullen "passive" resistance and the generally unpleasant environment of the coast itself.

Located between Stygia and the Skullstone Archipelago, Whale Bay has always been a Monarchy stronghold, though the only permanent and large-scale Monarchy presence is located in Haggard's Keep. Set high atop the chalky cliffs, it overlooks the islands and the Sea of Shadows beyond. While Fallen Lotus is a free city, choosing allies based on convenience of the moment, Whale Bay has remained unceasingly loyal to the Monarchy since its founding. The soldiers here patrol the shores on horseback and the shorelines in swift boats. They engage in endless battles against the Lintha, the hungry ghosts that plague the coast and "unofficial" incursions by the Silver Prince's forces.

The folk of Whale Bay make their living from the sea, fishing or diving for coral masks and black pearls, and trading up and down the coast. The proximity of the Dual Monarchy's troops creates a small, secondary income as the military men come down to the town for rest, distraction and tenderness in the arms of ghostly fishwives while the fishermen are out battling wave and water.

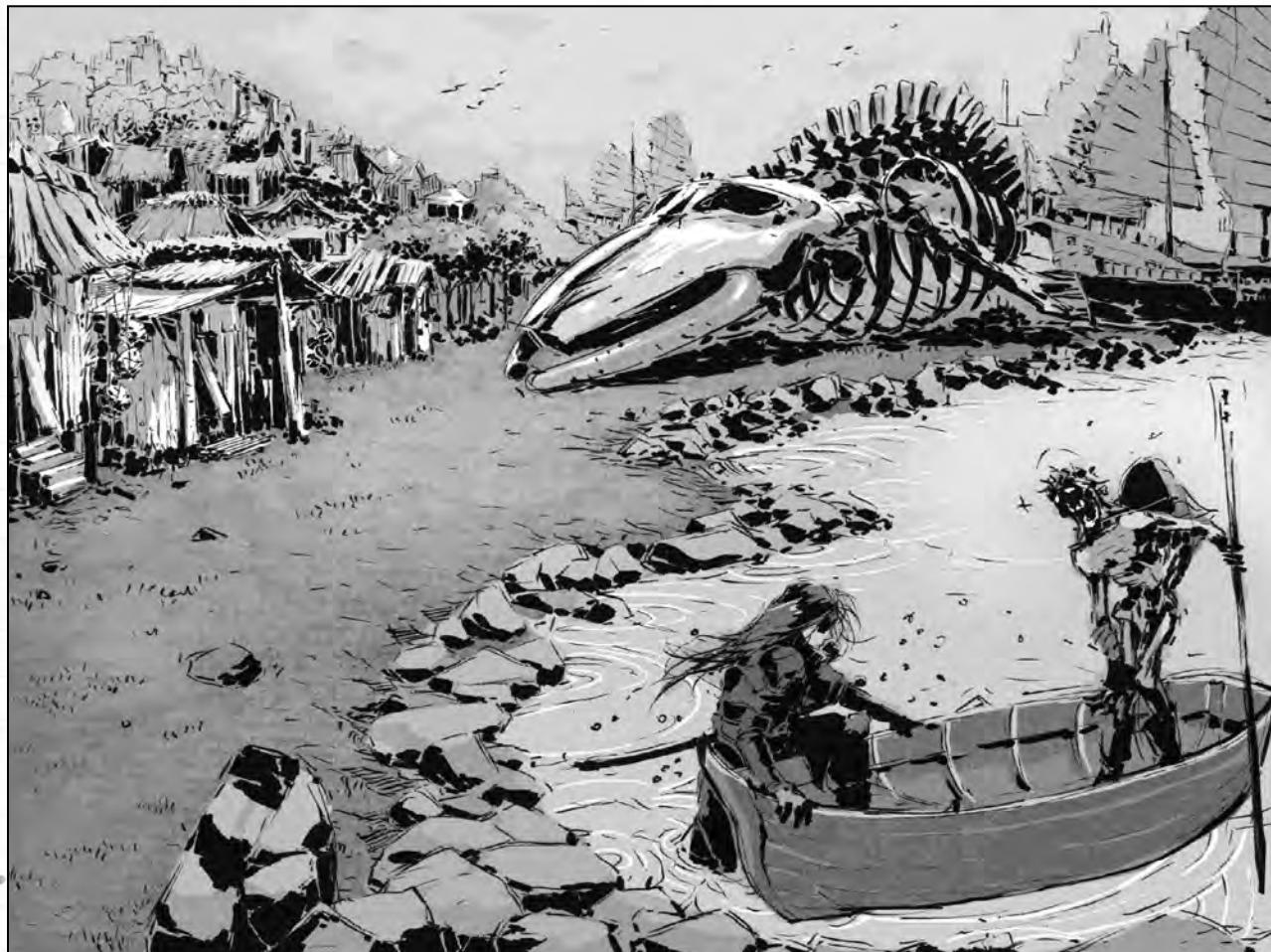
Whale Bay's narrow-mouthed port is large enough and deep enough for seagoing vessels, and it allows the Monarchy's patrol ships safe harbor—for a price. Miyo One-Hand, who rules Whale Bay, is strongly allied with the Monarchy, but she knows the value of her bay. Anyone who docks at the stubby piers pays a fine price for the privilege. Labor is costly, as are supplies, and the town takes its due from all through tariffs and taxes. In turn, it is a safe transit point between the civilized directions and the mystery of the Sea of Shadows. Along one side of the bay, a massive cachalot skeleton lies stretched along the shell beach. Its huge skull watches over the town, and the ghosts claim that it will sound the alarm should any hostile force attempt to breach the chains that guard the entrance to the bay.

Aside from the piers and the breakwater where the hungry dead are anchored until they dissolve, a broad shell beach, sharp as knives, rises up-slope until the first, weathered houses

of the town can be seen. Most buildings are functional first and decorated not at all. Glass floats hang from the eaves of most houses, with sea sprites captured within, glowing a faint blue or green or gold. These eerie lights, flickering and fading as the creatures within die, are the only illumination in the town after dark, for the fisher folk of Whale Bay are the sort to take to their bed at sunset and rise with the wan Underworld dawn.

Nets are staked out to dry amid the houses, casting sinister shadows and creaking softly in the constant wind. Iron harpoons hang beside unlocked doors. Every adult in Whale Bay will take up arms to defend their homes. No one, hungry ghosts or Lintha raiders or the Silver Prince's armies, will find the town easy pickings. Upended boats, under repair or rotting away because their owners never returned from a trip to the sea, are nestled next to doorways and under eaves, for boats are treasured as much as family by the fisher folk of Whale Bay. They know that, without the sea, which they both love and hate, they would have nothing at all.

The largest building in town is the sprawling Sailor's Rest, a blend of public house, trading hall and prayer shrine. Those ghosts too weak to sail any longer take shelter at the Sailor's Rest and depend on the mercy of their fellows for survival. That charity is bitter in the mouths of the inde-



pendent Western ghosts, and few linger long once they are too weak to sail.

The Sailor's Rest grew over the centuries from a widow's small home to a confusing collection of buildings connected to each other by covered walkways, oddly angled extensions and smoky public rooms. Many of the walls are made of salvaged ship timbers, which still groan late at night with the voices of their long lost crews. Whalebone plaques etched with protective wards guard each door and window, as hungry ghosts occasionally evade the nightly patrols and are drawn to the warmth and activity of the public house. Should Whale Bay ever be overrun, Sailor's Rest is where the citizens will make their last stand.

There are always a few merchants in the Sailor's Rest. Many are middle men from Chiaroscuro, buying pearls to sell for a great price farther inland, while trading specialty goods such as fruits, vegetables and illegal salt. Courageous merchants from the East sometimes find their way to Whale Bay as well, and even the ornate ships of Stygia dock at Whale Bay first as a step to longer journey at sea.

Locals take to their own tables, backs turned to the strangers, for the inhabitants of Whale Bay are no friendlier than any other Western folk. They reek of salt and fish and hard work, not the luxury and decadence of the soft inland ghosts. For the most part, the inhabitants of Whale Bay leave foreigners well enough alone unless money is involved. Miyo One-Hand's militia keeps the peace in town, preventing burglary, riots and public unrest, but she cares not at all for private crimes. Criminals brought to her attention are dealt with summarily. Miyo One-Hand is judge and jury. The guilty are often chained under the tide with the hungry ghosts. Everyone in Whale Bay strives to keep their problems private, rather than risk Miyo's swift and merciless justice.

Deep in Sailor's Rest, where few strangers are allowed, is the town's shrine and the center of the local cult. There, they pray to each other, to Miyo One-Hand and to the Dual Monarchy. Lamps of shell and whale oil flicker like stars. Sweet grass incense, preferred by most seafaring folk, scents the air, and the taste of centuries of prayer is heavy in the stillness. The entire room is sheathed in cachalot bone, yellow and very old. It was taken from a single beast—the skull of which still watches over the bay. The bone walls are etched with Essence-focusing runes and images of the town's long history.

#### WHALE BAY MILITIA

**Description:** Its soldiers' armor and weapons vary, many salvaged from shipwrecks, but the militia of Whale Bay is well trained and disciplined. The militia patrols the island that's home to Whale Bay and several nearby populated



islands for the hungry ghosts that plague all islands in the Sea of Shadows. The militia's men are famous for their sheer stubbornness.

**Commanding Officer:** Miyo One-Hand

**Armor Color:** Varies

**Motto:** None

**General Makeup:** 150 ghosts armed with harpoons and patchwork armor of canvas and steel equal to a reinforced buff jacket

**Overall Quality:** Good

**Magnitude:** 3

**Drill:** 3

**Close Combat Attack:** 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** 3 **Ranged Damage:** 2

**Endurance:** 6 **Might:** 3 **Armor:** 3 (-2 mobility)

**Morale:** 4

**Formation:** The militia typically operates in skirmish formation. Two retirees of the Haggard's Keep marine garrison act as subordinates to Miyo and heroes when necessary, while two more act as relays. The cleric of the Sailor's Rest operates as the militia's sorcerer.

#### HAGGARD'S KEEP

Haggard's Keep holds only a few hundred troops at most, many of them on regular patrols and manning a dozen Monarchy ships docked in the rocky bay. It's not the numbers of men or ships that make Haggard's Keep such an important post, but the great 150-foot-high tower that rises like a black

needle from the northwest corner of the keep.

The keep itself is utilitarian; the shrines all dedicated to the Cult of the Dual Monarchy. The marines' worship fuels the Monarchy itself, and that collected power is filtered back to the ghosts as supplies and Essence-bearing prayers dedicated to the Monarchy's troops.

With no real need to sleep, the marines reenact the habits of their living years. Off-duty, they gamble or repair their gear—the efficacy of which depends more on will and Essence than a rust-free edge. On duty, they practice drills and maintain the cold gray walls of the keep. The keep's marines patrol regularly, both on land and sea, to remind the West that the will of the Monarchy extends in this direction too.

#### HAGGARD'S KEEP PATROL

**Description:** The marines stationed at Haggard's Keep are exemplary of the Stygian marines all throughout the Underworld. They are well trained and highly disciplined, usually the first to tangle with the pirates and worse horrors that terrorize the shores of the Sea of Shadows.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** White and black

**Motto:** "For the Monarchy!"

**General Makeup:** A patrol is made up of 50 White Fleet marines armed with spears, carrying target shields and wearing chain hauberks.

**Overall Quality:** Excellent

**Magnitude:** 2

**Drill:** 4

**Close Combat Attack:** 6

**Close Combat Damage:** 4

**Ranged Attack:** —

**Ranged Damage:** —

**Endurance:** 7    **Might:** 4

**Armor:** 3 (-3 mobility)

**Morale:** 5

**Formation:** On land, the marines

of Haggard's Keep operate in close formation. On deck, they

operate in skirmish formation.

Beneath the commanding

chuzei are two gunchei, who

may operate as heroes, and

three gochei operating as relays.

In addition, two cleric chaplains operate as

sorcerers in the unit.

#### HAGGARD'S EYE

The Haggard's Eye lighthouse is one of the great treasures of the Dual Monarchy, though it might have existed before the Monarchy's rule. The lighthouse is built of smooth, black onyx that sticks up from solid bedrock like a needle punched through cloth. It is not hollow like true lighthouses. Instead, narrow steps wind around the outside of the tower, carved into the rock. There are no handrails or barriers, so climbing the tower is

a challenge, especially in the unpredictable coastal weather. The stone is bitter cold, so the already-treacherous stairs are often covered in a rime of black ice.

The top of the tower ends abruptly in a flat, slick platform, again without shelter of any kind. Here the unblinking Eye stares endlessly out over the Shadowed Sea.

The Eye, some 30 feet in diameter, floats a few feet off the platform, suspended by no known magic or recognizable power. Its optic fibers and blood vessels trail off into nothingness, and the air around it thrums with the cool, chancy Essence of the Underworld. The Eye casts a pale blue light, illuminating the platform around it. Its direct gaze, however, is much more than a gentle luminescence.

The direct gaze of the Eye is blinding, a brilliant white-blue light that reaches hundreds of miles off shore, acting as a guide and warning to ships at sea as it scans wave and wind in a steady pattern from south to north and back again. The player of anyone unfortunate enough to get caught in its gaze while standing on the platform has to make a successful Willpower roll at difficulty 5 or have 10 Essence an action ripped from his character.

Haggard's Eye has been used as a brilliant beacon since the inception of the Dual Monarchy. It guides ships past the dangerous Broken Bone Coast and acts as a navigation beacon more reliable than the Underworld stars. Control of the Eye allows the Monarchy to hold and stabilize its Western border.

Guidance is not the only safety the Eye provides, however. The Warden of Haggard's Keep carries the key to the Eye. That key is a small, translucent red hearthstone threaded with dark veins, which can be used to transform the Eye from a lighthouse into a weapon. In order to activate the Eye, the Warden must bring the key up to the platform and thrust it deep into the Eye itself and hold it there, with his bare hand and arm buried deep in the gelid sphere.

When matched to the key, the Eye blazes. The oblong pupil dilates, consuming the green iris, and the orb itself seems to swell, veins throbbing where they float in the air. The pulse of a huge heartbeat echoes in the air around the Eye, carrying for miles, deafening as battle drums. The white beam of light that banishes the offshore darkness transforms



## HAGGARD'S EYE

Speed 6, Accuracy 3, Damage 30A, Rate 1, Range 3 miles, Minimums Occult •••••

into a terrible weapon. Darkening to ruby red, the light ravages anything it touches, boiling the very waters of the Shadowed Sea, blasting ships to splinters, shattering the spirits of the dead and driving them screaming into Oblivion. Whoever has activated the Eye is able to direct its terrible gaze, for he sees as the Eye sees, for hundreds of miles.

The Eye can remain active for only eight long ticks at a time, before the key must be pulled from it. If attempts are made to keep it active longer, it draws more and more Essence from the user. Initial activation costs 25 motes and one unsoakable lethal health level. On the eighth tick, the Eye begins to draw Essence, starting at five motes but increasing by five for every tick it remains active. After being used, it must rest one hour before it can be activated again. Those who have seen through the Eye rarely speak of what they saw, beyond the edge of the horizon. It is said that the half-blind owner of the Eye yet exists somewhere out beyond the edge of the Shadowed Sea. Haggard's Eye calls to something as it gazes over the water. When the Eye is activated by the key, anyone standing on the tower who has the Whispers Background can hear that call. Left active long enough, who knows what would come to fetch the Eye back?

When the Eye is used as a weapon, the Essence it draws from the holder of the key does not power it. Rather, that Essence is the cost to waken it from its more peaceful state. The key is a level-5 hearthstone and unique. Without it, the Eye serves only as a beacon.

Torn Whisper has been the warden of Haggard's Keep since her predecessor was convicted of treason and sacrificed on the troop's punishment altar. Whisper's masked lover, Unspoken, is a Western ghost of some power, with allies of his own and close ties to Awha and the local criminals along the Broken Bone Coast. Between them, the jade effigies (see pp. 147-148 and 158) that line the approach to Haggard's Keep and the support of the Dual Monarchy, the island has remained free of the Deathlord's influence and acted as a deterrent to the Silver Prince's ambition in the West.

## THE LINTHA

The Lintha pirates comprise a force to be reckoned with in the living world, and so it is in the land of the dead. The living Lintha retain close ties with their dead relatives, which gives the ghosts of the Lintha a huge advantage in grave goods, worship and access to Creation.

In addition, the Lintha pirates are a people with unbroken ties that reach back to the First Age. Among the Lintha dead are some of the most powerful ghosts of the Underworld—and they have no particular friendship with the Deathlords. For those who wish to battle the growing influence of the Deathlords on the Underworld, the Lintha

are a powerful potential ally.

Yet the Lintha have fallen far since their proud origins, and they are painfully aware of that fact. The ghosts of the Lintha more so than the living, for they remember the power the Lintha once had, the favor their great mother once showed them and the companionship of their sister Lintha Ng Oroo.

The hidden fortress of the dead Lintha is far to sea, similar to the living Lintha's stronghold. Unlike the living, however, it is not a collection of boats and seaweed. The Lintha ghosts live upon the rotting, ghostly corpse of their island sister, Lintha Ng Oroo. As she once provided shelter and succor to the living, she now offers the same to the dead. Lintha Ng Oroo's rolling hills are no longer covered with sweet blue grass but by fields of bones, half submerged in fleshy, ivory-colored mud. She feeds her kindred with Essence, harvested in turn from victims of Lintha attacks that are brought back to her and imprisoned while she leaches their sprits away. Sacrifice and prayer from the living Lintha also add to the island's strength and that of the ghosts who live upon it. Those with any Lintha ancestry at all who walk on Lintha Ng Oroo's rotting shores regain Essence twice as fast as normal.

With Lintha Ng Oroo at their backs, the Lintha ghosts sail freely across the Shadowed Sea. They attack any isolated or weak Skullstone ship they come across, but they avoid a full commitment of forces and have not openly allied with any land-based ruler. Servants of the Silver Prince are promised a miserable torment, bound to Lintha Ng Oroo while she sucks away their Essence. Sailing in packs of three or five, the sight of the Lintha's sails on the horizon makes experienced captains quail and pray that the raiders are in a merciful mood.

Lintha ships are distinctive, their sails red as fresh blood, the guardian eyes painted on the bows luminous with intelligence and power. The camphor smoke of ancestor-worship drifts around them, a haunting, enticing aroma of comfort and strength. Their ships' weaponry, both physical and mystical, is always in good repair, but the Lintha disdain soulsteel because they do not want any ties to the Abyssal lords who control the making of it.

Lintha ships are powerfully protected by sorcery and Charms against the sibilant call of the water and the eerie creatures that swim within it. The ghostly Lintha use the presence of their living descendants as navigation aids, allowing them access to the deeper treasures in the Shadowed Sea and to find escape routes that no others dare follow. They hunt the creatures of the Sea of Shadows, catching the golden-eyed salmon of prophecy, diving for death mask corals, skimming the screams of the dying from the surface of the night tide or pillaging isolated ships that stray too far

from the safety of the shore.

The ghosts of the Lintha are somewhat more civilized than their living counterparts are, engaging in both trade and piracy. Their ships can be found docked at many cities along the Western shores, and Lintha sailors swagger down the shadowed docks, bright and wealthy and powerful. They are bedecked with grave goods, both their own and that which they have looted from defeated opponents. Their eyes flash with awareness and power. Few Lintha ghosts show signs of fading, and the tight bonds between the living and the dead ensure the ghosts do not enter Lethe until they wish.

The ghosts of the Lintha are part of the great family. Grandmothers and grandfathers, cousins and siblings act much the same way in the Underworld as they did when they were alive. The difference is the existence of a top-heavy number of elder grandparents and matriarchs who stubbornly cling to existence while those Lintha of lesser status often chose Lethe and hope for a more influential reincarnation. For the ghosts of Lintha, status depends heavily on the memories and favors of their living relatives. Extensive grave goods ensure an impressive first arrival to the Underworld while proper worship and sacrifice guarantees supplies of Essence. The Lintha dead pay close attention to their living descendants, offering advice in prophecy while demanding proper rituals and respect.

As a result, competition is fierce among the ghosts to make sure their children prosper while the descendants of their enemies do not. Because there is no longer a concern regarding the preservation of the bloodlines, ghostly battles between Lintha captains at sea turn deadly, and victors simply claim ignorance when a rival's ship mysteriously never returns. Other struggles are subtler. They might involve downplaying the strength of a tempting target so a rival attacks someone too strong to defeat. They usually employ shady political alliances between families that shift as quickly as the tides of the Shadowed Sea. Thefts or destruction of grave goods are part of the internal struggles of the Lintha ghosts as well. Should anyone be caught providing information to the minions of the Silver Prince, however, the entire family would turn against the traitor, casting his spirit into Oblivion and destroying the very ship he sailed.

#### LINTHA GHOST PIRATES

**Description:** Well armed and armored, their ships protected by kraken scales and powerful spells, the Lintha pirates are a threat to the peace and safety of the Western direction. They are also unilaterally opposed to the Silver Prince—one of the few checks on his power.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** Varies

**Motto:** None

**General Makeup:** These traits represent a full crew of ghostly Lintha armed with auhzians.

**Overall Quality:** Good

**Magnitude:** 3



**Drill:** 3

**Close Combat Attack:** 4

**Close Combat Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** — **Ranged Damage:** —

**Endurance:** 6 **Might:** 3 **Armor:** 1

**Morale:** 4

**Formation:** Seeking personal glory, the Lintha often fight in unordered formation. A Lintha crew is invariably led by a father. Beneath the father are two sword brotherhood members acting as heroes, while three brothers and/or sisters being groomed for commands of their own act as relays. A Lintha bearing grave good Essence weaponry dating back to the Primordial War often acts as a sorcerer.

### THE SKULLSTONE ARCHIPELAGO

Nestled within the oldest of the Western shadowlands, the Skullstone Archipelago is the most powerful nation in the Underworld's West. The archipelago runs north to south with the Silver Prince's capital, Onyx, on the largest, northernmost island, Darkmist Isle, and Cormorant at the southern end of the collection of islands. Most of the islands are remnants from a long-sunken continent, though others rose from the dark waters like strange dreams. Because the Skullstone shadowland is so well integrated, it's difficult to

tell precisely how many islands there are under the Silver Prince's control. Some islands drift like mirages between the living world and the Underworld, making their origin difficult to discern. For those who wonder what the future will look like, should the Deathlords achieve their victory, the half-life, half-death found in the Silver Prince's realm is a good reflection of that future.

The larger islands of the archipelago are heavily populated, with not only ghosts but a significant population of living residents as well. Skullstone citizens live in relative luxury in the Underworld. An enormous death cult provides Essence to the Silver Prince, and he keeps his people content enough to continue to obey him. Ghosts can communicate with their living descendants with relative ease, though the Silver Prince's monks and priests monitor all such contact.

In the Underworld, as in Creation, the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water expands his influence through proselytizing and trade rather than warfare. It gives the impression that the Silver Prince is somehow a lesser evil than his fellow Deathlords. Nonetheless, his ambitions are at least as grand as those of his more violent associates.

The Silver Prince has built several major trade cities, the largest invitingly close to Stygia, and his very favorable trading practices, combined with the nearly irresistible presence of living mortals in his realm, draws thousands of merchants from all over the Underworld. His ships patrol the waters of the

Shadowed Sea, driving away the horned whales of the North, destroying the hungry ghosts that arrive from the living world on their tattered funeral coracles and hunting the savage Lintha pirates. For many of the small towns and seaside villages, the sight of the Skullstone mon is a welcome one.

All of Skullstone's cities are populous and orderly. Smaller towns and villages, most absorbed as the Silver Prince's influence grew, retain more of their pre-Deathlord lifestyles, but the larger cities are firmly in the Deathlord's control. Most of them are fishing towns with a sideline of smuggling or salvage. For the most part, no one minds. Most are glad to live a peaceful, plentiful and quiet life or unlifethingsomething that is rare in the West.

The menial jobs done by zombies in the land of the living are handled instead by various sorts of effigies in the Underworld. They are all property of, and empowered by, the Dark Judges, and low-status Judges assign them tasks and oversee their actions. While most of these effigies are weak, they are numerous and have been used in the past to recover from disasters such as flooding or tidal waves and also to help quell riots. The Skullstone effigies are produced in manufactories by specialist necrotechnicians. Effigies are shaped from twisted driftwood and spun obsidian fibers. Their awkward-looking bodies are held together by strands of soulsteel, and their faces are always stylized skulls carved from mother of pearl.

Skullstone's greatest city is on Darkmist Isle. It is the head



of the Silver Prince's government, as well as his residence and the location of the main shrine for his cult. Onyx is the Prince's showpiece for visitors and where most trade with outsiders takes place. Diplomats from Stygia, Chiaroscuro and the other major powers of the Underworld have residences in the city, and the ports swarm with incoming cargo, outgoing missionaries, monks with their teams of work effigies and even a few well-guarded living visitors.

Looming high above the city is the great Ebon Skull manse, where the Silver Prince rules his growing empire. Here, all the prayers of the Deathlord's cult are funneled into empowering the Silver Prince and his projects, and the very air around the manse hums with Essence. Ebon Skull also acts as a protective ward over the city, preventing hungry ghosts from entering city proper. The manse is an intimate part of the Silver Prince's power. He can channel terrifying Abyssal Charms through it, allowing him the power to watch over his subjects or even strike dead (or drive into Oblivion) anyone who is walking upon the streets of his capital city. While inside his fortress-cathedral, the Silver Prince is able to cast any Abyssal Charm or necromantic spell anywhere on the Underworld islands of the archipelago that have a shrine to his cult on it.

Because of the Silver Prince's expansionist agenda, his cities are crowded with ghosts from all over the Underworld. Staid, antiquated ghosts rub shoulders with rowdy newly dead spirits of the Second Age. Banners of such age that their symbols are forgotten fly alongside the modern mons of the Scarlet Empire or the outlying kingdoms of the East. In Skullstone, age is not a promise of high station. Some newborn ghosts sit in the Silver Prince's court, overseeing aged spirits that have clung to existence since the First Age. This flexible society is but one of Skullstone's many attractions.

The Silver Prince's attentions are currently directed to the living world, not the dead, and he spends only as much energy as needed to keep his kingdom in the land of the dead stable. He covets Haggard's Eye but has not had luck suborning the Monarchy's people so far. Open warfare against Haggard's Keep or Whale Bay would reveal the sham of the Dual Monarchy's rule, something that none of the Deathlords want—yet. Instead, Skullstone missionaries dock at Whale Bay, bringing the Bodhisattva's promises of a more fulfilling existence under his sway.

While Skullstone trades easily with outsiders and is eager to build shrines and trading houses in foreign cities, it is rather more careful who it allows within the principality's borders. The Silver Prince tightly controls information, for it does not suit his plans for some truths about the Underworld to reach the ears of his living subjects. Information that contradicts his New Order dogma is not permitted in the bounds of Skullstone.

All travelers, citizens or not, must record their itinerary with the nearest court of Dark Judges. This information is passed along the bureaucracy, and questionable travel plans or suspicious newcomers are investigated by the Silver

Prince's network of spies. All Skullstone off-island traders are directly employed by the government and must gain approval for their journeys through the Underworld. Merchants are well aware of the secrets they must keep and are completely loyal to the Silver Prince's goals—or are able to maintain a convincing façade of loyalty, even in the face of his nephwrack servants.

External trade is encouraged. Fallen Lotus is useful, accepting Skullstone currency as it does everyone else's—with false smiles and open palms. The Silver Prince finds the dance with Awha entertaining, for he enjoys the thrill of pursuit. He has no urge to rush their negotiations to an abrupt climax.

The Lintha, dead or alive, are as reprehensible as ever, and Skullstone battleships earn their first blood by hunting down the cannibalistic pirate lords. The Silver Prince has assigned a task force to attempt to ferret out the location of the Lintha's floating isle. Control of Lintha Ng Ooro would control the Lintha; destruction of it would shatter the family of savages.

#### SKULLSTONE REGULARS

**Description:** Skullstone troops wear skull masks and identical uniforms, except for heroes and specialty troops. Most sorcerers accompanying the units are either nephwracks or Ghost-Blooded necromancers.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

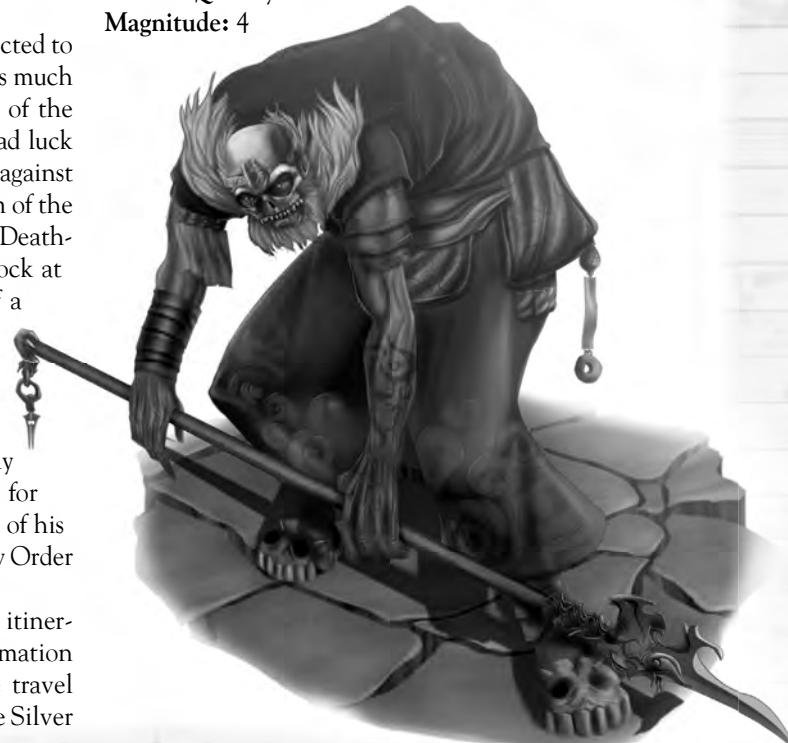
**Armor Color:** Black

**Motto:** "Hail the New Order!"

**General Makeup:** A unit made up of 250 living and ghost troops armed with spears or composite bows and wearing buff jackets

**Overall Quality:** Good

**Magnitude:** 4



**Drill:** 3

**Close Combat Attack:** 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** 2 **Ranged Damage:** 2

**Endurance:** 6 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 2 (-1 mobility)

**Morale:** 4

**Formation:** These Skullstone troops typically operate in either close or skirmish formation. Beneath the unit's commanding officer, three heroic ghosts act as heroes, four nemesaries act as relays, and three nephwrack or Ghost-Blooded necromancers act as sorcerers.

### THE CULT OF THE SILVER PRINCE

Ritual takes up the larger part of most ghosts' existence in the Skullstone dominion. Worship of the Deathlord is required of the living and the dead. The Silver Prince also moves his ghostly populace from island to island in great processions to help maintain and expand the shadowland in the living world. These rituals are woven into the web of daily existence. Monthly pilgrimages are simply part of the proper worship of their Deathlord ruler. Prayers and sacrifices to the Silver Prince keep him strong and ensure his continued protection of both the living and the dead.

In the Western Underworld, the Silver Prince's cult rivals that of the Dual Monarchy in size and power. It supplies him with Essence, loyal servants and an effective method of control. Its structure and precepts, taught to every citizen during life, are designed to appeal to the dead as well. Promises of a comfortable continued existence, of a glorious future when all barriers between the living and the dead are shattered, create a deep loyalty among his followers. Six powerful nephwracks head the Silver Prince's cult in the Underworld, scheduling rites and rituals and hunting down heretics. Local groups, run by lay brethren and supervised by the nearest monastery, help maintain the Bodhisattva's hold by patrolling the streets of their towns and neighborhoods, enforcing acceptable behavior via public humiliation or physical threat.

The core precepts of the Silver Prince's cult are similar to those taught to the living. They have to be, for most of the ghosts who reside in his Underworld dominion recall very well the promises made while they were alive. The Silver Prince works hard to make sure his ghostly minions continue to believe what he wishes. Those who learn better are destroyed before they can spread their tales to the living dupes in Creation.

There are seven major shrines in Skullstone, the greatest of which is the one on Darkmist Isle, where a reflection of the Silver Prince's fortress came into being when the one in the living world was completed. Each of the other six shrines is overseen by one of the Deathlord's nephwrack servants, and each is identical: a stepped ziggurat with an unblemished altar of adamant at the peak. Ghostly pilgrims, wearing their distinctive maroon wraps and carrying nothing but copper sacrificial bowls, travel to each shrine in turn. For the dead of Skullstone, this grand procession is an act of devotion performed by those ghosts who seek to prove their devotion

to the Silver Prince. They sacrifice Essence at each shrine, shedding plasmic blood on the steps. The blood of so many ghosts, constantly renewed, leaves a luminous sheen on the shrines, and the sense of Essence is heavy and intoxicating in the air around them. Ash gulls circle above the shrines, crying in their despairing voices, as they swoop low in hopes of stealing away a scrap or two of Essence. Ghosts who perform the grand procession swear they will not seek renewal from their own family cults until they have completed the procession, and they hope this sacrifice will prove their worthiness or earn forgiveness for some sin against the ruler of Skullstone. Not all ghosts complete the procession. Some abandon it, while others grow too weak to complete it and end up falling into Oblivion or Lethe. The living are forbidden the grand procession. It is privilege they can achieve only in death.

A whole industry has grown up around the shrines and the grand procession. Souvenirs, tiny ziggurats carved of bone or bloodstone, are sold to pilgrims as "remembrances." Pilgrim houses and monasteries cater to the horde of ghosts circulating through the archipelago. For those cities with a shrine, the procession represents a significant part of their economy.

This movement—ghosts of all eras and types traveling thousands of miles to complete the grand circuit of the Silver Prince's empire—is unusual in the Underworld. It attracts those ghosts who are less bound in place, which allows the Silver Prince's empire to expand as more and more ghosts are bound to his service through their worship and sacrifice.

### SAIGOTH THAT WAS

The lords of the First Age created great wonders after they defeated the Primordials and turned their ambition, their power and their arrogance toward fulfilling their whims. Their arrogance proved to be their downfall, though, and the Solar Exalted were destroyed by their own allies and servants.

In the Underworld, a few puissant, stubborn ghosts remember those days, when glory was extinguished by blood and treachery. But hidden within the crushing black depths of the Underworld Sea lies something much more than simple memory. The lost continent of Saigoth endures.

Saigoth was a great island continent of the First Age, raised from unformed chaos by the decree of the Exalted lords. Spanning thousands of miles, filled with treasures untold, it was home and host to many of the greatest Solar Exalted. When the Usurpation came, it was a primary target for those who sought the destruction of the Sun God's Chosen.

Never a true part of Creation, Saigoth depended on an interlocked system of geomagnetic arrays, powerful Celestial Charms, bound spirits and reality engines for its stability and existence. When this system was sabotaged by a cleverly designed sorcerous spell, the Great Western Ocean rose up in rebellion. Saigoth sank beneath the waves in less than a day. Entire armies and cities—millions of mortals, thousands of Terrestrial Exalted and a handful of the Solars who had survived the betrayal at Meru—were taken by surprise and dragged under the destructive currents as the island sank.

Saigoth didn't simply sink under the living water of the West. So much power, death and destruction concentrated in one place wrought a terrible miracle—a tear between the lands of the living and the dead. The island of Saigoth passed out of the living world entirely and sank into the Underworld's Sea of Shadows. That might have been the end—thousands of deaths just another footnote to the history of the Usurpation—but it was not.

As the water tore away shorelines and earthquakes shattered the glorious palaces of Clepsys, the greatest tactical minds of Creation abandoned their suddenly petty warfare and banded together to defeat the death rushing in on them all. Some attempted to flee on the great aerial battle barges, while others retreated to the ships that had originally brought the conquering armies. Yet the ocean raged wild, and even the currents of the air rebelled in a paroxysm of chaos as Saigoth died. Most of those attempting to flee the island died as well. The remaining Dragon-Blooded rebels and Exalted oppressors worked together to stabilize the collapsing geomantic arrays. Powerful Charms that had been used to leash elementals for entertainment were restructured to buffer the hungry ocean. Gigantic war machines were field stripped and reforged by Twilight Exalted into oxygen-generating machines or pumps or barriers. In that drowning day, the Exalted—Terrestrial and Celestial—proved again that, working together, they could bend Creation itself to their will.

But they could not break it. Saigoth still sank into the waters and into the Underworld itself. Death did not take everyone on the island, however, even as the entire island passed into the land of the dead. With the unimaginable powers of unified reality generators, the desperation and skills of hundreds of sorcerers, Exalted and minor godlings, a tiny pocket of life and air was preserved like a luminous jewel in the unrelenting darkness of the Shadowed Sea.

Few survived Saigoth's transition, a bare thousand or so survivors huddled under the fragile, shining barrier created out of the ruins of Saigoth's glory. Thousands more died, most entering Lethe. Others became ghosts to haunt the dark, shattered land lying on the bottom of the Underworld Sea, many having sacrificed themselves to create the bubble of life hidden in the black depths.

A tiny corner of the great city of ancient Clepsys lies under a dense magical barrier. Shining like burnished gold, the barrier protects the descendants of the original survivors. Most of them are Dragon-Blooded—almost all mortals died in Saigoth's destruction—and most are Water-aspected as fits their trapped state beneath the ghostly water of the Underworld. They are not ghosts, but truly living people, buried so far beneath water and so deep in the Underworld that they have no hope of escaping back to surface, let alone the land of the living.



The survivors of Saigoth eke out a precarious living, using magic and ingenuity to survive in their small world. Fungi, mutated grasses, ghost-white apple and featherless chickens are their only food, for they gain no nourishment consuming the ghostly creatures of the Sea of Shadows. Their homes are the glorious, half-ruined buildings of Clepsys. They live with rubies as playthings, gold platters to eat their meager meals from and spidersilk to sleep on, but they have not seen the sun for thousands of years.

There is no energy or magic to spare for luxuries or chancy expeditions. All their energy and power is directed to maintaining the ancient enchantments that support the golden dome above them. The Sunken Ones have been totally isolated since the island's destruction, unaware of the fate of the Celestial Exalted, the march of history, the growth of the Underworld, the birth of the Abyssal Exalted, the rise of the Scarlet Empire or any other aspect of history. Teams of Dragon-Blooded warriors, armed with spells (or anima powers) to breathe water and protect their Essence make expeditions outside their bubble to salvage abandoned artifacts and hearthstones from the shattered manses littering the landscape around their home. Those who die become ghosts and are mercilessly driven out of the city by the fearful, ignorant survivors to be swept away by the currents of the Sea of Shadows.

Surrounding the bubble is the drowned city of Clepsys, its glory half-buried in silt, its tall towers rising up like desperate reaching hands, and the eerie beasts of the Underworld Sea now making their homes where the Exalted of old once lived. There was no time for evacuation or rescue, so the entire city is littered with bones—some with confused and angry hungry ghosts still clinging stubbornly to them. Powerful artifacts are buried in the city, attracting and warping the creatures of the deep, the Dragon-Blooded of Sunken Clepsys and those who search for the puissant treasures of the First Age. Coral masks grow thickly in drowned Clepsys. Influenced by ancient spells and Essence pools, they often grow strange and twisted—unnaturally distorted and asymmetrical—as well as to incredible size. Those who swim in drowned Clepsys do under the eerie, empty but disturbingly aware gaze of the masks.

Despite their best efforts, the survivors know their time is limited. The Charms and machines holding the water and the death Essence of the Underworld at bay are old, and they will fail. Yet their home is far from any surface, any hope of rescue, and the survivors have not found a way to cross back into the living world or escape the crushing weight of the dark sea around them. The death of Saigoth has been delayed for thousands of years, but it will arrive one day.



#### SAIGOOTH EXPEDITIONARY TROOPS

**Description:** Equipped with mother-of-pearl and coral armor and armed with weapons scavenged from the sunken city around them, these troops are never seen outside the boundaries of the sunken city and cannot travel safely to the surface of the Underworld. They have powers that allow them to live and move underwater as if it were a normal environment. They take no movement penalties and cannot be injured by drowning or suffocation-based attacks. Saigoth explorers all have access to Dragon-Blooded Charms.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** Varies

**Motto:** None

**General Makeup:** A gang of five experienced Dragon-Blooded armed with ad hoc armament and talismans

**Overall Quality:** Good

**Magnitude:** 2

**Drill:** 3

**Close Combat Attack:** 5 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** 4 **Ranged Damage:** 2

**Endurance:** 6 **Might:** 4 **Armor:** 2 (-1 mobility)

**Morale:** 4

**Formation:** The Saigoth Dragon-Bloods fight in skirmish formation, the closest effective formation to take when fighting underwater. A subordinate Dragon-Blood of the unit's commander acts as a hero, while another of lower rank operates as a relay. An actual sorcerer operates in the unit under that designation.





## CHAPTER SIX

# STONE HOUSES

It is a strange irony that winter, a time of suffering and want for so many in Creation, is a time of bounty for the ghosts of the North. As bitter cold sweeps across the snow-covered lands, the living in those territories redouble their prayers to their honored ancestors in hopes of receiving some blessing in return, and the ghosts of the North batten themselves on Essence drawn from desperate descendants. The religious rites of many of the North's barbarian tribes establish winter as the burial season. People, naturally, die throughout the year and their remains are tended to as custom dictates, but the traditional ceremonies to recognize the passing of the honored dead are always held in winter months.

Funeral customs among Northern barbarians principally involve sewing up the deceased's body in a felt shroud, along with his most valued possessions—his furs and weapons, his hunting dogs and his hawks. Among the icewalker tribes, the passing of an important figure is typically accompanied with the ritual sacrifice of totem animals such as elk and caribou or with the ritual bleeding of mammoths. The body is not

buried, though. The ground is too hard for digging graves most of the year, so the Northerners place their dead in pits along with their grave goods and cover them with cairns. Many barbarian tribes attribute their nomadic natures to taboos against living in buildings made of stone for this very reason. "Stone houses are for the dead," they say. Of course, that is hardly a universal sentiment, and the North is home to many cities. Even in such urban centers, however, the dead are still either buried in cairns or interred in catacombs beneath the cities.

### DOMAINS OF THE DEAD

Savants among the dead divide the North into four distinct geographic regions. The Northwestern Islands includes the great sub-continent of Rajtul and the islands that surround it. The North-Central region begins on the western shore of the inner Threshold and is bounded on the east by the River Phlegethon, although the nations of Hanau and Tyoka are generally not considered part of the North.



The Northeast includes the lands bounded by the Phlegethon and its tributary the River Aornis. Finally, the Far North encompasses the part of the Underworld that corresponds to the Great Ice of Creation.

## THE NORTHWESTERN ISLANDS

The Northwestern Underworld is dominated by Rajtul, an island of more than 200,000 square miles. Three smaller islands lie to Rajtul's southwest: Lakshadi, Ravanna and Shriranga, each of which is several thousand square miles. There are also innumerable tiny islands in the northwestern Sea of Shadows, most of which are too small to show up on maps.

### LAKSHADI

The middle of the three smaller islands in the northwest, Lakshadi is also home to one of the Underworld's most extensive collections of First Age lore outside the citadels of the Deathlords. This treasure trove of lost knowledge was preserved by a most unusual group of saviors: the Lakshadi Academy, a small colony of First Age Dragon King ghosts. They elected to forgo reincarnation in the aftermath of the Great Contagion in order to preserve as much of their society's lore as possible until Dragon King society could rise anew.

The Academy consists of exactly 57 Dragon King ghosts. About half are Pterok, with the other three Dragon King sub-species comprising the rest. All are highly educated and intelligent, with an extensive understanding of First Age science and medicine. During the First Age, the Academy was a place of healing, one of Creation's foremost centers for

medical research and education. Exalted physicians almost invariably interned at the Academy at some point during their careers, and it was one of Creation's most prominent research centers in the field of infectious diseases. After the Usurpation, the Dragon Kings of Lakshadi (like those across most of Creation) became extremely reclusive, and they refused to allow the Dragon-Blooded access to either their medical knowledge or their island, both of which had powerful First Age defenses. Eventually, the Shogunate reached an agreement with the Dragon Kings, who would be left to their own devices if they provided the Dragon-Blooded with anagathics and other drugs.

When the Contagion came, the Academy's elaborate quarantine procedures kept it free of the disease for longer than most of Creation, but the Dragon King staff-members realized that even if their race avoided total extinction, there would not be enough enlightened Dragon Kings left to properly educate their young. The Dragon King reincarnation cycle functions differently than that of mortals. Deceased Dragon Kings typically reincarnate almost instantly into newly hatched Dragon King "stalkers," nearly feral creatures little more than animals. Over time, these stalkers evolve into true Dragon Kings, regaining all of their memories of past lives in the process... provided they are subjected to special educational techniques specifically designed to ensure their eventual enlightenment. If there were not enough Dragon Kings to educate the stalker young, the entire race would remain trapped in barbarism and savagery.

The surviving Dragon Kings at the Academy concluded that the only way to preserve the accumulated wisdom and history of their species would be for them to willingly die and resist the urge to reincarnate. Thus would they make sure that the requisite knowledge would survive until the reeducation of the stalkers was feasible. And so, the Dragon Kings of the Lakshadi Academy deliberately deactivated their protective wards, exposed themselves to the Great Contagion and died en masse, hoping that enough of them would endure as ghosts to some day offer their collected wisdom to their descendants.

In the earliest years after the Contagion, the Dragon King ghosts remained aloof from the rest of the Underworld. Over time, however, they realized that they could not educate the hundreds of living stalkers who had been reborn on Lakshadi alone. The island was protected by powerful First Age wards that prevented any shadowlands from forming there, and while much of Lakshadi's infrastructure had collapsed over the centuries, those wards remained as strong as ever. Also, the leaders of the Academy had learned of the depredations of the Wyld-tainted Varajtul cannibals who now threatened the whole of Rajtul and of the rise of the Deathlords. About 200 years ago, the Dragon Kings of Lakshadi finally broke their self-imposed exile and made contact with the ghost tribes of Rajtul to offer them aid against the Varajtul. Since then, the reputation of the Academy has grown, and the Dragon King ghosts are poised to become a major regional power.

Although they no longer access the Paths of Prehuman Mastery they wielded in life, the Lakshadi Dragon Kings are all very old ghosts and have extensive knowledge of Arcanoi. They also have a substantial knowledge of sorcery and necrotechnology, the latter of which the Academy's scientists have discovered independently. Dragon King necrotech is inferior to that of the Deathlords, but it is better than that produced by almost anyone else in the Underworld save Deheleshen. The most important benefit they have provided to their newfound allies on Rajtul is the network of wards that prevent the Varajtul from crossing into the lands of the other tribes. The Dragon King ghosts are ideologically opposed to the Deathlords, but they would consider an alliance with anyone else who could help with the reeducation of the thousands of stalkers who roam Lakshadi. Such help would likely involve opening a shadowland somewhere on the island or capturing stalkers and conveying them to the Academy's Underworld facilities.

## RAJTUL

Rajtul is the second largest island in Creation or the Underworld, but it is also one of the least understood by the Realm or by civilized society, mainly because of the reputation of the fearsome Varajtul cannibals and the powerful Fair Folk tribe known as the Seven Stormwinds. Rajtul's Underworld counterpart is far better understood but no less fearsome. The eastern and northern portions of the island are home to the Empire of Hunger, a powerful undead nation

whose expansionist aims are fueled by millions of ghost-slaves magically bound to the Varajtul dead through cannibalistic rituals. The Empire of Hunger is currently separated from the rest of Rajtul by a network of wards stretching more than 1,000 miles that divides the island into northeastern and southwestern parts. Dragon King ghosts from Lakshadi installed this network over the course of the last two centuries in exchange for trade concessions from the other Rajtul tribes, most notably in the form of soulsteel shipments. The Empire of Hunger occupies just under half of the island, and for all the Dragon Kings' work, the wards are not perfect. There remain narrow passages where Varajtul ghosts can cross over on hunting expeditions.

The living Varajtul venerate the Wyld and have evolved into a species distinct from their human origins after centuries of Wyld-questing. The typical Varajtul stands nearly eight feet tall and, while living, is covered with a rich, blue fur. Varajtul are also notable for their fangs and claws. The Varajtul dead look the same except for coloration. For Varajtul ghosts who dwell in the Empire of Hunger, the characteristic blue fur turns white, a sign of spiritual enlightenment in their religion. Varajtul spectres and mortwights, on the other hand, develop jet-black fur upon arrival in the Underworld. White Varajtul reside in the Underworld and form the citizenry of their Empire of Hunger. Black Varajtul, as the spectres are called, invariably descend to the Labyrinthine Kingdom of Cadaverous, usually via a curving spiral pathway that leads from the Empire's capital directly to the Labyrinth.

Cannibalism is universal among the living Varajtul. Centuries of interaction with the Wyld and its bizarre denizens have instilled in the Varajtul a strong belief that cannibalism allows the devourer to ritually acquire the power of the devoured. Among the Varajtul dead, the benefits are more tangible. Every victim of Varajtul ritual cannibalism manifests in the Underworld (or the Labyrinth, as the case may be) as a servant in the cannibal's Underworld panoply. Because of the strange rites incorporated into Varajtul cannibalism, rites that also invoke the Varajtul's Wyld-tainted natures, no victims even have the option of choosing Lethe upon emerging in the Underworld. Even worse, the victims of Varajtul cannibalism are mystically bound into slavery. Varajtul slaves are incapable of using their Dodge MDV to resist commands from their masters, or indeed the commands of any Varajtul ghosts.

Since most Varajtul engage in ritual cannibalism dozens of times over their lives, each Varajtul ghost emerges in the Underworld with a panoply of preternaturally loyal slaves. Among both the White and Black Varajtul, status is accorded based on how many slaves a ghost has at her disposal, though the Varajtul ghosts make no effort to inform their living relatives of this detail. In fact, there is a strong taboo among the Varajtul ghosts against revealing anything about the Underworld or the Empire of Hunger to the living. Presumably, this is because the dead wish the living to engage in cannibalism out of religious obligation rather than the selfish

desire to gain more status post mortem. Alternatively, the taboo might exist to prevent the Varajtul's many enemies from learning how to acquire ghost-slaves of their own.

The capital of the Empire of Hunger is the city of Ravenous, forged by thousands of ghost-slaves from the corpuses of hundreds of thousands of ghosts. Designed to emulate the golden city of paradise described in ancient Varajtul religious texts, most of the city's infrastructure was fashioned from the remains of an ancient and massive plasmic of unknown species, possibly even a hekatonkhire permanently destroyed by the Solars of legend. This massive corpse was crafted into a beautiful and shining city so long ago that no Varajtul claim to remember its construction. The corpse was only used to form the city's walls and buildings, however. The innumerable trees, fountains and statues were formed from ghosts captured from the eastern Rajtul tribes and permanently molted into decorations to make Ravenous more beautiful and fitting for the White Varajtul. Acquiring such materials has become increasingly difficult, as the Rajtul tribes and their Dragon King patrons have worked ceaselessly to contain the White Varajtul in their current territories. The Emperor of Hunger, an ancient White Varajtul who claims to have been the first cannibal among his people, currently negotiates with the Black Varajtul who rule Cadaverous to stage some sort of counterattack against Lakshadi.

#### WHITE VARAJTUL HUNTING PARTY

**Description:** These traits represent a Varajtul war band out to sneak past the wards into Rajtul's west in order to prey on other tribes.

**Commanding Officer:** Varies

**Armor Color:** N/A

**Motto:** "Flesh! Flesh to feed the hunger!"

**General Makeup:** A hunting party of Varajtul consists of a motley assortment of around 100 of the cannibals armed with spears and their own savage claws and teeth.

**Overall Quality:** Fair

**Magnitude:** 3

**Drill:** 0

**Close Combat Attack:** 3

**Close Combat Damage:** 2

**Ranged Attack:** —

**Ranged Damage:** —

**Endurance:** 3      **Might:** 2

**Armor:** 1

**Morale:** 3

**Formation:** Such a band typically operates in unordered formation under the command of a charismatic leader. Occasionally, a Varajtul shaman accompanies such a band, in which case the shaman would count as a sorcerer.

The other ghost-tribes of Rajtul are principally nomadic tribes who wander the western half of the island just as they did in life for centuries. Although their alliance with the

Dragon Kings has given them a measure of protection from the Varajtul dead, the tribes are still losing a war of attrition on two fronts. First, the living Varajtul grow ever bolder in hunting the living descendants of the tribal ghosts. The wards installed by the Dragon Kings have no effect in Creation, and fewer tribesmen every year make it to the Underworld without being devoured and enslaved by the Varajtul. Second, the alliance with the Dragon Kings is not without cost. The Dragon Kings require soulsteel in order to solidify their position in the Underworld, and they don't really care about its origins. The price the ghost-tribes pay for keeping out the Varajtul is that a percentage of their numbers must go to the forges every year to be melted down into spiritual scrap. There are five major tribes in western Rajtul—the Otter Tribe, the Wolf Tribe, the Seal Tribe, the Bear Tribe and the Owl Tribe—and while these tribes are much smaller than the various icewalker tribes, they are similar to their Eastern cousins in social and religious structure.

#### RAVANNA AND SHRIRANGA

The other two major islands in the Northwest are Shriranga and Ravanna, both of which have negligible impacts on the Underworld. Shriranga lies to the east of Lakshadi. In Creation, Shriranga is a minor Realm satrapy, albeit one with little strategic value to the Realm. In the Underworld, the island is the center of constant warfare between the Realm-era ghosts and the indigenous barbarian

ghosts who date back centuries to before the island's conquest by the Realm.

Ravanna, on the other

hand, is largely uninhabited

by ghosts. In Creation,

Ravanna was the site of

a major battle during the

Fair Folk Invasion. When

the Scarlet Empress as-

sumed control of the

Realm Defense Grid, Ra-

vanna was one of the areas

she directly targeted due to the

presence of a powerful, unshaped

raksha lord who had penetrated

far into Creation's borders. Her

attack on Ravanna simultaneously

vaporized the fae, his hobgoblin

forces and the Shogunate

forces who were fighting against

them. In Creation, Ravanna is

considered uninhabitable due to

the presence of Wyld-fog, strange

Wyld anomalies that resemble small,

ambulatory Wyld zones that float

about like rolling fog banks. Pos-

sibly intelligent, Wyld-fog banks

seem to home in on living targets,



engulfing them and subjecting them to Wyld mutation or worse. While the Wyld energies of these fog banks do not directly affect Ravanna in the Underworld, they can do so indirectly. Whenever Wyld-fog kills a living being, the slain creature often manifests immediately in the Underworld as a crazed spectral Wyld mutant (in the case of mortals) or as a bizarre and bloodthirsty plasmic (in the case of animals and even trees and other plants). Consequently, Ravanna's Underworld environment changes almost daily, with the constant introduction of new and deadly creatures that are almost always hostile to ghosts who intrude on their territories. Despite these dangers, Ravanna does offer rewards for those willing to risk a journey there. The island is home to dozens of uncapped Abyssal demesnes, and there are believed to be several Dragon-Blooded weapon depots scattered about the island, some of which fell into shadowlands during the war.

## THE NORTH-CENTRAL TERRITORIES

Stretching from the western coast of the Kunlun Desert all the way to the River Phlegethon, the North-Central Territories represent the largest and most populated expanse of the North. The region is home to the citadel of the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible, as well as Marama's Fell, one of Creation's largest and most notorious shadowlands.

## THE KUNLUN DESERT

The Kunlun region is a vast rain-shadow desert consisting of over 500,000 square miles of barren, lifeless steppes. Like most Northerners, the peoples of the Kunlun Underworld are divided among city dwellers and nomadic tribes. There are a handful of city-states there at least nominally loyal to the Bishop but continually embroiled in religious wars. Meanwhile, the various nomadic tribes perpetually wander the steppes from watering hole to watering hole, knowing that death anywhere outside their sacred burial grounds could result in the abiding ghost being devoured by the hekatonkhire who haunts the Kunlun Underworld.

What these barbarians do not realize is that the hekatonkhire, known to legend as the Floating Head Scavenger, protects the nomad-ghosts from the threat of the Varajtul. The cannibal-ghosts view the hekatonkhire with a mixture of religious awe and utter terror, and they almost never enter the Kunlun territories for fear of encountering the great beast. The Floating Head Scavenger appears to be a gargantuan wolverine or badger standing more than 30 feet at the shoulder and stretching twice as long. The hekatonkhire is headless, with an open bloody stump where its neck should be. It is capable of eating, however, as it can shoot ectoplasmic tentacles from its neck-stump to ensnare ghosts (and others) and drag them into its gullet. After it does so, it extrudes a long ethereal cilia from its back with the doomed ghost's head mounted onto the end. Ghosts consumed and mounted onto the Scavenger's back apparently retain their self-awareness.

The routes taken by the living Kunlun nomads across the desert weaves through small Wyld zones, and their burial customs require them to bury their deceased in such Wyld zones where possible. They do so in the belief that a sufficiently strong-willed tribesman who is buried in a Wyld zone can merge with it, gaining control over it and achieving a form of godhood. These beliefs are wrong. Ghosts generally cannot enter Wyld zones, which do not exist in the Underworld or even in proximity to shadowlands. Accordingly, in their misguided quest for godhood, the Kunlun nomads only serve to separate their dead from their bodies—their most important fetters. Those dead who survive the Floating Head Scavenger must endure a long trek to one of the city-states and try to eke out a living in their associated necropoli, assuming they do not surrender to Lethe or Oblivion first.

## THE KUNLUN CITY-STATES

There are four major city-states in the Kunlun region, all of which date back to the First Age, although none was ever a major First Age metropolis. In fact, it is a testament to the grandeur of the First Age that what would have been considered tiny, inconsequential villages in the past are now considered significant cities in Creation's Northern territories. The four principal city-states are Kunlun Shan, Thar, Naruu and Ikh Bayan, although there are several smaller villages, each with a population of only a few hundred at most. A fifth city-state, Cholistan, was destroyed 300 years ago with the detonation of a long abandoned manse. Cholistan is now the site of the Silent Meadow of Dust shadowland.

Each of the four city-states has its own necropolis of comparable size. Each also has at least one shadowland within it, although none is particularly large. The city-states, both living and unliving, are strongly under the sway of the Bishop of Chalcedony Thurible. The Deathlord does not actually rule these cities, as he exhibits little interest in temporal power. Rather, he controls them indirectly through his religious writings. Infused with the Bishop's powerful mind-altering Charms, the scriptures collectively known as the *Tome of Endless Night* have swept through the Kunlun city-states, each of which is a strong proponent of ancestor worship. Unfortunately for the local citizens, the various city governments did not receive identical copies of the *Tome*. As a result, doctrinal schisms between the various ancestor cults fomented by these minor differences have resulted in several centuries of religious conflict between the various city-states and their associated necropoli. Many Kunlun ghosts suspect that this was probably deliberate, that the Bishop intentionally passed out conflicting scriptures in order to fuel religious conflict. That realization, however, is rarely enough to make a ghost doubt the validity of *her own* interpretation of the scriptures, so this insight does nothing to quell the simmering religious bigotry that fuels the conflicts between the cities or the necropoli that mirror them.

## THE PRIDE OF THAR

**Description:** The Pride of Thar is representative of the many Kunlun military units engaged in sporadic conflicts with those of neighboring city-states over matters of religious doctrine. The same sorts of soldiers make up the majority of the armed forces of the region.

**Commanding Officer:** Gunchei Takla Makan

**Armor Color:** Blue and red lamellar

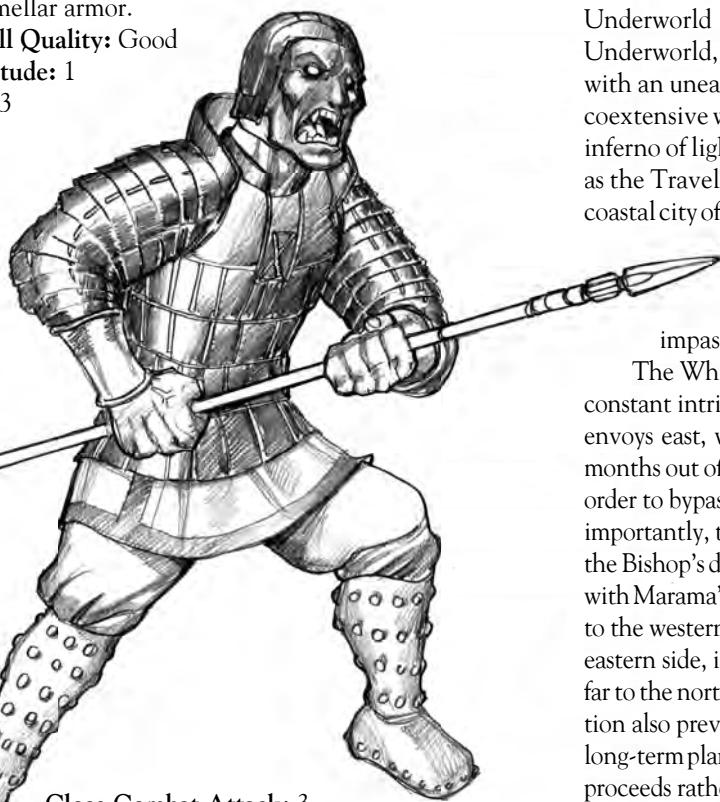
**Motto:** "The Shining Path illumines the world!"

**General Makeup:** This is a small unit of medium infantry made up of seven ghost soldiers armed with spears and wearing lamellar armor.

**Overall Quality:** Good

**Magnitude:** 1

**Drill:** 3



**Close Combat Attack:** 3

**Close Combat Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** —

**Ranged Damage:** —

**Endurance:** 6 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 3 (-2 mobility)

**Morale:** 3

**Formation:** The Pride of Thar typically operates in close formation. In addition to Makan, the unit has a gochei who operates as a hero.

## THE HOLLOW MOUNTAIN

Noghosts dwell in the Hollow Mountain beneath Gethamane. They don't last long enough. In the bowels of the city, where the Darkbrood and the forbidden gods dwell, there is no boundary between Creation and the Underworld. It's not that the Undercity is a shadowland—rather, at Gethamane's lowest levels, there's just no difference between the two. And so, even as Gethamane in Creation toils ceaselessly to keep the dark races of the Undercity where they belong, Gethamane of the Underworld teems with foul creatures

who consume any ghost unfortunate enough to resist Lethe or Oblivion for more than a few moments.

## WHITEWALL

There are no ghosts in Whitewall either, but for a kinder reason. One of the Syndics who rule the city is also one of Creation's preeminent gods of peace. As a result of his presence, a powerful feeling of spiritual contentment permeates the Underworld in the vicinity of Whitewall, one which all but compels ghosts who find themselves within the city walls to enter Lethe. Indeed, such is the spiritual resonance of Whitewall that the city has no spiritual reflection in the Underworld at all. Where Whitewall would stand in the Underworld, there is naught but a massive bonfire that glows with an unearthly white flame and takes up an area roughly coextensive with the city's walls. Stretching south out of this inferno of light is the White Scar, better known in Creation as the Traveler's Road that stretches from Whitewall to the coastal city of Wallport. In Creation, this road is enchanted to prevent the dead from crossing it. The road's power extends even into the Underworld, where the 500-mile long road represents an impassible barrier for ghosts and spectres alike.

The White Scar is also part of the reason for the Bishop's constant intrigues against Whitewall. When the Bishop sends envoys east, whether Abyssal or ghostly, he must send them months out of their way through the treacherous mountains in order to bypass the barrier presented by the White Scar. More importantly, the White Scar represents the biggest obstacle to the Bishop's dream of consolidating the Silent Meadow of Dust with Marama's Fell. While a small part of Marama's Fell extends to the western side of the Scar, the vast majority of it is on the eastern side, inaccessible to the Bishop's agents unless they go far to the north around Whitewall. Even worse, the Scar's location also prevents the Bishop from responding to the Syndics' long-term plans to shrink Marama's Fell. While that project still proceeds rather slowly, the Deathlord knows that he is now in a race against time to remove Whitewall as an obstacle before the Syndics locate Solars who can access powerful sorcery spells capable of destroying Marama's Fell outright.

## THE ICEWALKER LANDS

For the icewalker tribes, the Underworld is not so different from Creation. The lands of the dead are cold and uninviting, but then, so are the lands of the living. When an icewalker dies, her corpse is typically sown into a fur shroud along with her most important possessions and buried under a cairn along with sacrificial totem animals. She then emerges from the cairn into the Underworld, usually to joyous greetings from her forebears who welcome her back into the tribe and then set her to whatever duties she held previously. The icewalker dead are as nomadic as their living counterparts, following ghostly caribou, elk and mammoths across the frozen taiga of the North-Central plains.

Things are a bit harder for sick or elderly icewalkers. Tribal customs dictate that those icewalkers who cannot

provide for themselves walk out onto the taiga to their deaths rather than burden the tribes. Those who do so find their ghosts emerging near where their bodies fell rather than where their family members set up their memorial cairn. When feasible, the icewalker ghosts send guides out to shadow those who walk away from the tribes and lead their ghosts home, but the lands here are treacherous, and many ghosts never make it back.

Despite their humble origins in Creation, the icewalker dead are among the Underworld's wealthiest societies. Living icewalkers venerate their ancestors more than nearly any other culture in Creation not under the direct sway of a Deathlord does, and Deathlords are not prone to leaving valuable grave goods in the hands of young ghosts. And so, the icewalker dead feast on ritual food offerings left by their descendants while warding off the cold with decorative clothing burned in their honor at ritual celebrations. Most importantly, the icewalker dead have great herds of caribou, elk, mammoths and other animals bequeathed to them through their ancestor cults.

But the most important advantage of the icewalkers is their numbers. The Northern taiga is an inhospitable land. Many icewalkers die every year, and their traditional ancestor worship renders them somewhat more likely to linger as ghosts than those folk who follow the Immaculate faith. As a result, the icewalker dead are many, and their barbarian upbringing makes them well-suited to raiding and pillaging. The Northern necropoli know this, and they regularly bribe the icewalkers with tributes of grave goods and even soulsteel to avoid conflict with them.

The result of this largesse has made the icewalker dead arrogant and bellicose. The icewalkers are a strong, martially inclined people, and the realities of unlife in the Underworld erase much of the tribal divisions that prevented the living icewalkers from unifying before the coming of the Bull of the North. Some tales even say that, before the Bull began trying to unify the icewalkers, he first sent his Zenith Caste advisor, Samea, into the Underworld to consult with the leaders of the icewalker dead. In turn, they spoke in favor of the Bull to their living descendants.

Despite its barbarian character, politics among the icewalkers is actually somewhat egalitarian. Among the living, each extended icewalker clan is ruled by a single leader, typically the oldest and wisest family member who is still fit enough to fight and hunt, with the most respected clan leader serving as the tribal chieftain. While respect for elders makes sure that there is only one leader among each living population, no such preference is applied to the dead. Anyone who ever attains the position of clan or tribal leader is usually accorded similar respect post mortem. The icewalker dead are, therefore, ruled by clan councils, with the most powerful councils directing the activities of the tribes as a whole (to the extent that the tribes ever function as monolithic entities).

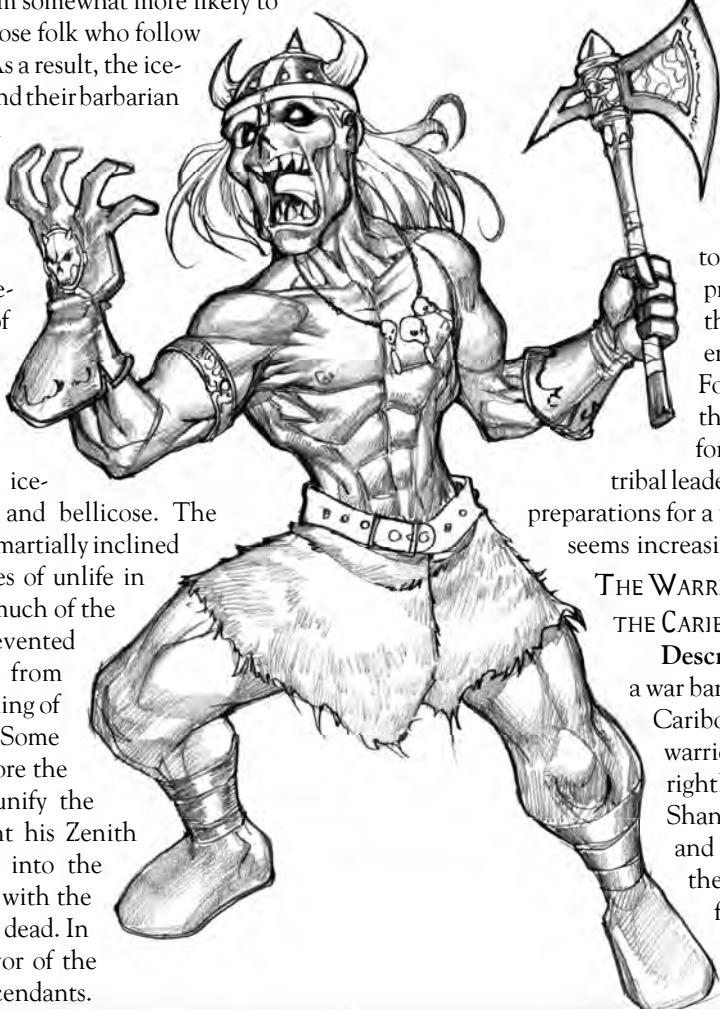
The Mammoth Tribe is thought to be the oldest of the icewalker tribes, and it is definitely the most respected. Its founder, a woman known only as the Mother of the Tribes, is the closest thing the icewalkers have to a queen. The oldest ghost known to walk among the icewalker tribes, she remembers the First Age and constantly warns her people to resist the temptations of the Deathlords. For reasons she keeps to herself, the Mother of the Tribes is particularly cool toward the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears. Perhaps it is her concerns about the Deathlords that lead her to

encourage the icewalker dead to assume a more martial structure. While the living tribes constantly fight one another over limited resources in Creation, their Underworld counterparts stage grand tournaments to demonstrate their fighting prowess, including mock battles that more sophisticated observers might even dub "war games." For most of the icewalker dead, these tournaments are merely for bragging rights. Only the

tribal leaders know that they are actually preparations for a war with the Deathlords that seems increasingly inevitable.

### THE WARRIOR OF THE CARIBOU TRIBE

**Description:** These traits represent a war band of icewalker dead from the Caribou Tribe. Products of a proud warrior tradition, these ghosts are rightly feared by the denizens of Shanarinara's Underworld cities and often receive tribute from the city dwellers to avoid conflict. Ranging the Northern tundra, these warriors may be encountered anywhere



in the area between the necropolis of Inara and the Hollow Mountain.

**Commanding Officer:** Bazyli Kosmatka

**Armor Color:** Caribou-derived buckskins

**Motto:** "Raaa-he!"

**General Makeup:** This war band consists of around 400 icewalker warriors, all armed with axes and composite bows, wearing hides equivalent to buff jackets.

**Overall Quality:** Good

**Magnitude:** 5

**Drill:** 1

**Close Combat Attack:** 3    **Close Combat Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** 2    **Ranged Damage:** 2

**Endurance:** 4    **Might:** 2    **Armor:** 2 (-1 mobility)

**Morale:** 3

**Formation:** They might fight in skirmish formation if they are committed to an actual battle rather than a raid, but they typically fight unordered. A band this size typically features five to 10 heroes and a couple of sorcerers, each of whom might be an actual shaman or a highly skilled archer. It also typically contains a skald, who acts as a relay.

## THE NORTHEAST

The Northeast is a rough triangle bounded by the Phlegethon and Aornis rivers and by the boundary of the Great Ice, an area of more than 20 million square miles. In Creation, this territory consists of a half-dozen sizeable nations, almost 100 small kingdoms and innumerable city-states, all of which suffer increasing depredations at the hands of the Tear Eaters, death-obsessed barbarians under the sway of the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears. The Deathlord herself resides in a shadowland at the heart of the Kingdom of Gradales, although its king rules at the Lover's sufferance. The Lover maintains an illusion of inconsequentiality in Creation, and while she has spies within every government in the Northeast, few have any idea just how deep her tendrils reach. That said, governments that display open hostility to the Lover are far more likely to be raided by the Tear Eaters than those who acquiesce to her "suggestions"—a fact lost on absolutely no one in these lands.

In the Underworld, the Lover is far more direct in her manipulations, in part because her vast necromantic powers afford her the option of being blunt. Tear Eater ghosts roam these lands utterly unmolested, and most of the Underworld kings, despots and potentates who purport to rule the Northeastern Underworld are besotted with the Deathlord. They constantly vie for her affections even as her agents covertly snatch away whole communities of ghosts whenever her soulsteel stockpiles run low.

## DEAD GRADAFES

In Creation, the Kingdom of Gradales is a small nation of farmers and shepherds known principally for the production of cashmere wool. Gradales maintains no standing army, but it pays an annual tribute to the Tear Eaters (through a

treaty brokered by Abyssal diplomats in the employ of the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears) in exchange for the barbarians' promise to defend the nation against invasion. The king of Gradales has never needed to call on the Tear Eaters, as none of the kingdom's regional rivals dare to attack a nation that plays host to a Deathlord. The tribute is generally understood to be a bribe to the Tear Eaters to keep them loyal to the Lover.

The capital of Gradales is Graf-Vindak, a city of approximately 8,000 mortals located less than five days from the edge of the Vale of Dust and Shadows. Within that shadowland, the true ruler of Gradales, the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears, resides in her palace, the Fortress of Crimson Ice. The current king of Gradales, Aolan Graf-Chani is generally thought of as a fatuous old fool who is besotted with the Lover's charms, just like the previous 17 kings. The kingdom's laws of succession changed centuries ago around the time of the Lover's arrival to make sure that only male heirs could ascend to the Redwood Throne as kings of this land. (The Lover either prefers seducing men, or she just finds them easier to subjugate.) The seat of power for the Gradalesi monarchy is the Palace of the White Ram.

The boundaries of Dead Gradales, as the living nation's Underworld equivalent is called, are coextensive with those of Gradales. The dead here continue on much like their living counterparts, relying on ghostly sheep to provide most of their income. The capital is the necropolis of Unt-Vindak, which stands in roughly the same place as Graf-Vindak. Politically, the Gradalesi dead are ruled by a king just as the living are, but most of the citizenry are astute enough to realize that this is a fiction. The current king is Aolan Graf-Ducat, the grandfather of Aolan Graf-Chani. More than 70 years ago, Graf-Ducat choked to death on a chicken bone two weeks after his 38th birthday. Pursuant to the customs of Dead Gradales, Graf-Ducat and the then king, Graf-Ducat's own great-great-grandfather, journeyed to the Fortress of Crimson Ice to ask the Lover to adjudicate who was more fit to sit on the Ashen Throne in the Palace of the Black Ram. For whatever reasons appealed to her, the Lover ruled in favor of Graf-Ducat, who returned to Unt-Vindak bearing a soulsteel crown that some say whimpers softly whenever the prior king's name is mentioned. The dead king's fealty to the Lover is not the only sign of the nation's true rulership. Tear Eater barbarian dead who enter the Kingdom of Gradales hold diplomatic immunity for all but the most egregious violations of Gradalesi law. It is also well known that King Graf-Ducat seeks the advice and approval of the Great Dead, the lich-like rulers of the Tear Eaters, for any policy decisions that might conceivably affect the barbarians' interests.

Surprisingly, however, neither the seemingly vacuous Aolan Graf-Chani nor his ancestor, Aolan Graf-Ducat are quite so wrapped around the Lover's finger as even she believes. The Lover thinks that she has seduced both men into utter loyalty, but both men already served another master. The Palace of the White Ram, the ancestral seat of the Aolan

family since before the Contagion, was not named, as so many think, for the cashmere goats that form the backbone of Gradales's economy. Rather, it is literally named for the original White Ram—an ancient Third Circle demon whose assassination marked the beginning of the Primordial War. The White Ram's destruction caused the transformation of the Primordial known as the Lidless Eye That Sees into his new incarnation, Sacheverell, He Who Sees the Shape of Things To Come.

The truth that lies hidden from even the Lover by the power of enchantments that were old long before her birth is this: Aolan Graf-Chani and Aolan Graf-Ducat, like nearly every member of their family line going back to its First Age founder, are secretly worshipers of Sacheverell. Indeed, every child in the Aolan line is literally born a Yozi worshiper, inculcated in the womb with a subtly ingrained loyalty to the goal of freeing Sacheverell and his kin from their prison. For it is Sacheverell's nature to know the shape and contours of the future, and while he has not communicated his beliefs to his fellow Yozi, he no longer believes the Neverborn are allies in the struggle to retake Creation from their mutual betrayers.

The loyalty of the Aolan kings to the Yozi is a subtle thing. They have never engaged in grand rituals or even sought to summon demons into Creation. Instead, their duties have been threefold: to love Sacheverell, to conceal that love from all who knew them and to wait for the Day of Reckoning. On that day, two sons of Aolan—one living and one dead—are fated to open the door between Creation and the Underworld together and find a path to "the Third Place." None of the Aolan kings have ever had any clue when the Day of Reckoning might be or what the Third Place actually is, nor have they ever cared. It is the will of Sacheverell that they wait until the answers to those questions present themselves, and then, the living and dead kings will know what to do and will do what they must. And if by doing so they send the Lover, along with the rest of Gradales, to Oblivion or Hell, then either option is perfectly acceptable.

### THE LANDS OF THE TEAR EATERS

The Tear Eaters have no permanent home, either in Creation or the Underworld. Nomadic raiders, the Tear Eaters wander the Northeast, taking what they need from the land or from the people who tend it. Nearly all the nations of the Northeast suffer depredations at the barbarians' hands, despite the Tear Eaters' relatively small numbers. If those nations united against their common enemy, they could easily wipe the Tear Eaters out. In fact, a few of the larger kingdoms might be able to do so single-handedly. None would ever dare attempt it, however, for the Tear Eaters have a powerful ally in the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears. Many of the Northeastern rulers have been utterly enthralled by the Lover's potent mind-control Charms, but even those lands not under her subtle sway still fear angering her by even defending themselves against her pet barbarians.



And so the Tear Eaters wander the Northeast in both Creation and the Underworld, preying as they will and growing fat and arrogant.

Long ago, Tear Eater culture was very similar to that of the icewalkers. Yet the Lover seduced the Tear Eaters en masse away from their totem spirits and to the cult of ancestor worship, and the barbarians were never the same. Today, the Tear Eaters venerate their ancestors more than almost any other group in Creation does. The Sijanese honor their ancestors, but they don't all take their names from their ancestors. Tear Eaters each take the name of a favored ancestor with an added suffix denoting the descendant's generation.

More importantly, the Tear Eaters don't just worship their ancestors in the abstract—they actually meet with them, if only once. Upon coming of age, each Tear Eater must journey into a shadowland to find the roaming caravans of the Great Dead and present an ancestor with a gift. If the ancestor approves of the gift, he favors the Tear Eater with his name and she returns to Creation a full member of the tribe. Approximately one in four fails to please her ancestor. If such an unfortunate ever sees her tribe again, it is as a rotting zombie slave, one of the Nameless Dead who serve the living Tear Eaters.

Tear Eater society is an informal hierarchy. At the top are the Great Dead, ancient ghosts bound into their rotting shells by necromancy. The Great Dead direct the living Tear Eaters according to the Lover's wishes, if only through insane rambling and gibbering that must be interpreted by Tear Eater shamans. These shamans serve as intermediaries between the living and the dead, and as such, they are the de facto rulers of Tear Eater society. The Great Dead are such terrifying masters, however, that few shamans would ever dare to deliberately misinterpret a lich's commandments. That said, most liches are incomprehensible even to their shaman servants. Many shamans have to make their best guesses as to a lich's intent. The shamans generally delegate everyday decisions to the chieftains of each sept. Shamans also oversee the Nameless Dead and keep them serviceable. A significant number of Tear Eater shamans understand the basic principles of necromancy.

At the bottom of Tear Eater society are the Nameless Dead—zombie slaves, fashioned from the corpses of slaves captured on raids, and occasionally from young Tear Eaters slain by the Great Dead during their coming of age rituals. The strongest taboo among the Tear Eaters is acknowledging in any way the former identity of one of the Nameless Dead, even if a cruel fate places a zombie slave into the possession of its own living family members.

Among all Creation's barbarian tribes, the Tear Eaters are unique for raiding both in Creation and the Underworld. Most barbarians are terrified of shadowlands, but Tear Eaters thrive in them. Tear Eater warriors, especially the younger ones, divide their time between raiding the Northeast in Creation and fighting alongside their own ghostly ancestors in the Underworld. The Great Dead rule Tear Eater ghosts

just as they do the living, but ghost shamans are far more proficient at understanding their commandments. (The elder Great Dead are far more intelligent than those who typically interact with living Tear Eaters anyway.) Below the ghost shamans are the sept chiefs and then the ghost barbarians. Living Tear Eaters who travel with the dead are considered lesser members of the tribe but are still valued above Nameless Dead, who are even more common in the Underworld than in Creation. Living Tear Eaters who travel in the Underworld are given special talismans that identify each barbarian as a "guest" of the Lover. Only the most insane spectres would dare to challenge a Tear Eater so marked, but enough spectres are just insane enough to make wandering alone in the Underworld a dangerous proposition. Naturally, such talismans are only recognized in those territories where the Lover holds sway.

The Tear Eater dead are even more arrogant and overconfident than their living kin. In the Underworld, all ghosts in the Northeast know the Tear Eaters serve the Lover except, ironically, for the majority of Tear Eaters, most of whom delude themselves into believing that they are allies of the Lover instead of her attack dogs. Tear Eaters have de facto immunity in most Northeastern lands and can do as they please without challenge. In Dead Gradales, this immunity is *de jure*. Gradales law stipulates that all Tear Eaters have diplomatic immunity as part of the treaty signed by the Great Dead and the Gradales king at the Lover's behest.

The Great Dead wander the Northeast, typically in groups of three to five and accompanied by several hundred Tear Eaters (living and dead). There are scores of Great Dead, and their processions are spread out across the Northeast according to some incomprehensible plan. While Tear Eaters who accompany these processions usually take the opportunity to raid nearby towns and villages, the Great Dead never do so. They ride in palanquins covered in rotting cloth and rest in tents that stink of decay, where they wait for the living and the dead to come to them. By the start of the new moon, the processions of the Great Dead invariably set camp in some small shadowland located near one of the two dozen septs of living Tear Eaters that roam these lands. The living Tear Eaters come to meet their dead ancestors, who hear their confessions and learn of recent events in Creation. The liches report all that they hear to their mistress, the Lover.

Only the Lover knows the necromantic process by which the Great Dead are fashioned. They are a strange form of undead. Most zombies inevitably wither and decompose until they lose all effectiveness. Liches begin their undead existence essentially indistinguishable from common zombies save that they are (slightly) more communicative. As liches age, they do not degrade, however, but actually become tougher and stronger, not to mention more intelligent. The eldest of the Great Dead are cunning and brilliant, with terrifying strength, armor-like skin and a mastery of several Arcanoi. Most Great Dead also see their loyalty to the Lover grow ever stronger, but a few begin to hear the Whispers of the Neverborn and

turn from their mindless adoration of her. Over the centuries, two or three have even gone rogue, abandoning their tribes to seek their fate in the Labyrinth.

In addition to contributing to their fearsome reputation, the Tear Eaters' alliance with the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears also grants them material advantages. The Lover has provided the Tear Eaters, both living and dead, with information regarding the lost First Age cities that dot the Northeast. As a result, virtually all Tear Eaters have access to minor artifacts, and the Great Dead, who are capable of attuning their Essence, frequently possess hearthstones and powerful artifacts.

### THE BLOODY AXES OF OUR FATHERS

**Description:** The Bloody Axes of Our Fathers is a sept of barbarian warriors all descended from the same Great Dead ancestor. It often fights alongside the larger tribe but occasionally is drawn into conflict at the behest of its founder, the lich Foma.

**Commanding Officer:** Foma

**Armor Color:** Ad hoc mix of furs over a chain shirt

**Motto:** "Blood for our fathers!"

**General Makeup:** A mob of barbarian war ghosts, zombies and mortal warriors, with the war ghosts and mortals wielding chopping swords or axes, wearing chain shirts and carrying target shields

**Overall Quality:** Fair

**Magnitude:** 5

**Drill:** 0

**Close Combat Attack:** 3 **Close Combat**

**Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** —

**Ranged Damage:** —

**Endurance:** 3 **Might:** 4

**Armor:** 2

**Morale:** 3

**Formation:** Always unorderd. There are 20 war ghost heroes in the sept, and an equal number of mortal and ghostly shamans acting as sorcerers and/or relays.

### THE FAR NORTH

Beyond the Black Sea lies the Underworld's answer to the Great Ice. There are massive never-ending glaciers here, just as in Creation, but the Underworld's Great Ice does not gleam white in the reflected sun. The ice in the Underworld's utter North is as black as the darkest night. In daylight, the black ice absorbs sunlight yet never melts. Instead, it drains away what little heat is in the

air, making the Underworld's Far North even colder than its analog in Creation.

### THE FROZEN CITY-STATES

In Creation, the Haslanti League is an emerging empire, and its people have the confidence that comes with belonging to such a powerful nation. The Underworld quickly disabuses the Haslanti dead of such notions. Over the last few centuries, the living Haslanti have pulled themselves out of barbarism to establish a great nation of nine allied city-states. In the Underworld, none of those city-states are old enough and have experienced enough death to have a spiritual resonance in the Underworld. A Haslanti ghost emerges in the Underworld to find, not a great city-state, but a small village of lassis at best or even a snowfield empty save for other ghosts.

If a new Haslanti ghost is to survive, she must find shelter in one of the frozen city-states of Ydrossos. In the late First Age, Ydrossos was the name of a Solar-ruled administrative district whose territory abutted the White Valley. After the Usurpation, Ydrossos became a small nation that swore loyalty to the Shogunate. The four major cities within it—

Enlil, Kathad, Rhoan and Urdash—maintained much of their First Age infrastructure until the

Great Contagion. All four cities were razed to the ground by invading Fair Folk, but their memories endured in the Underworld. While relatively little Ydrossian magitech continued to function in the Underworld, the cities' physical infrastructures did endure, and their citizens were protected from invaders by their king, the ghost of penitent Solar hero Varan Pen. When the Dual Monarchs were forced to flee Stygia after the nephwracks invaded, the noble

Solar sheltered them and allowed them to regroup. Afterward, the Monarchs repaid their debt to Varan and Ydrossos by providing the four cities with military and financial support. The bonds of alliance between Ydrossos and the Dual Monarchy remained strong until the coming of the Deathlords.

When Varan Pen assumed the role of protector for the Ydrossians as a way of atonement for his corruption during his life, his six lieutenants joined his rule. (Each was the ghost of an ancient Dragon-Blood who served Varan in life despite his failings



and who defended him unto death.) Centuries after the Usurpation, Varan was visited by the ghost of another Solar. Calling himself the Repentant Architect, the Solar wore a mask to conceal his former identity out of shame over his conduct during life. It was Repentant Architect who first warned Varan Pen about the emerging Deathlords and who revealed to him that they were fellow Solars who had given away their names to Oblivion itself and sworn service to the Neverborn. Enraged to find that any Solar Exalt could fall even farther in the afterlife than she had in her living days, Varan turned over control of Ydrossos to the Repentant Architect and rode out with his six companions to confront these so-called Deathlords. Only three of the former Dragon-Blooded returned to tell the tale of Varan's Ruin.

Disheartened, the Repentant Architect appointed the three surviving ghosts to serve as the rulers of Kathad, Rhoan and Urdash, and he took the throne of Enlil for himself. Although the Architect has no desire to rule, he feels obligated to prepare the people of Ydrossos for eventual conflict with the Deathlords, and only monarchial control over the nation has any chance of allowing him to do so. The Architect's "palace" is a small, humble bungalow near the center of Enlil. Despite his name, the Repentant Architect eschews elaborate structures as a sign of the egotism that ushered in the doom of the Solars. Today, the Architect focuses his intellect on more practical concerns, such as improving the efficacy of the golem soldiers and other armaments of the Stygian troops who have quietly assured him of their loyalty.

Ydrossos is still loyal to the Dual Monarchy, but its people are not blind to the reality of the situation. The Dual Monarchs are quite clearly hostages of the Deathlords, and their commandments must be viewed as coming under duress. Accordingly, the Ydrossian government works hard to give the appearance of obeisance to those commandments while ignoring or subverting any that might weaken its defenses against the Deathlords. The military commanders assigned to this region agree with that assessment and have essentially placed their armies under the civilian control of the Ydrossian government.

Ydrossos considers itself a nation of refugees. Reborn in the Underworld after the Usurpation, its population swelled during the Contagion and from Fair Folk depredations. Since then, the four cities have also

taken in refugees from fallen Tzatl and from all across the Haslanti territories. The more recent dead have had the most difficulty acclimating to Ydrossian society. Haslanti politics is based on public assemblies that are relatively democratic (albeit more so in some city-states than others), and younger ghosts often chafe under the restrictions of monarchy.

Enlil is home to nearly 250,000 ghosts, making it one of most populous cities in the Underworld. The other four cities are smaller, but each has over 40,000 ghosts and is a major necropolis in its own right. The main Ydrossian military force consists of the 9th Stygian Legion, a force of about 5,000 crack Stygian troops supplemented by an additional 2,500 Ydrossian Guard. The forces at the Architect's disposal are a match for any army in the Underworld save for the ones that the Architect actually fears. The Lover's forces alone could decimate Ydrossos, for example, to say nothing for those of the First and Forsaken Lion. Consequently, the Architect spends much of his time searching for non-military approaches to the Deathlord problem. Under his guidance, the Ydrossians have rediscovered many lost First Age technologies (or at least necromantic surrogates for them), and Ydrossos has tentatively begun trading with Deheleshen in hopes of improving its technical advantages. The Architect has been stymied thus far in his most important policy objective: developing a reliable system of rapid transportation between the four cities that does not depend on feathersteel. Feathersteel is integral to the construction of both airships and ice ships and does not exist in the Underworld.

Occasionally, a Haslanti is buried with a model vessel that manifests in the Underworld as a functional ship, but the nation's fleet-building efforts still proceed slowly.

#### 9TH STYGIAN LEGION

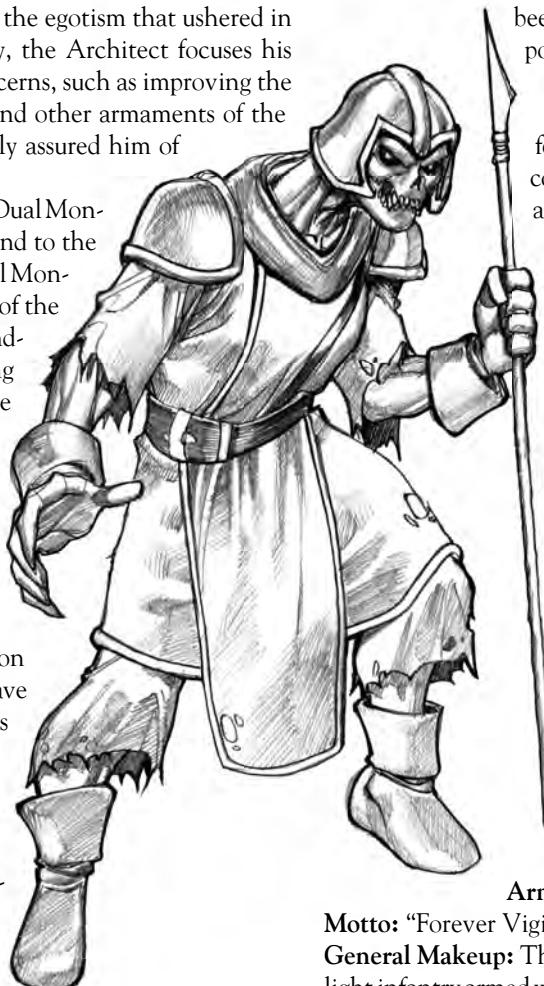
**Description:** With its force of 5,000 Stygian infantrymen supported by 2,500 Ydrossian archers, peltasts and light infantry, the 9th is nearly equivalent in troop strength to a legion of the Old Realm, if not as well equipped. The 9th Legion is based at a garrison in Enlil established when the Dual Monarchy was exiled there. Its mission is to provide defense to Stygia's longtime ally and protect Stygian interests in the North.

**Commanding Officer:** General Steelheart

**Armor Color:** White and black

**Motto:** "Forever Vigilant."

**General Makeup:** The 9th Stygian Legion is a mix of 3,000 light infantry armed with spears and armored with reinforced



buff jackets and 2,000 heavy infantry armed with war sickles, wearing lamellar armor and bearing target shields. It is supported by approximately 2,500 Ydrossian guardsmen archers, peltasts and light infantry, all wearing buff jackets. All are supported with heavy-fire squads, mundane artillery, engineers and others.

**Overall Quality:** Excellent

**Magnitude:** 9

**Drill:** 4

**Close Combat Attack:** 2 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

**Ranged Attack:** 2

**Ranged Damage:** 3

**Endurance:** 7 **Might:** 5 **Armor:** 7 (-2 mobility)

**Morale:** 3

**Formation:** The 9th typically operates in close or skirmish formation as the situation warrants. Given its enormous size, it features no shortage of ghosts operating as heroes, sorcerers and relays.

## TZATLI

Once a wonder of the First Age, the flying city of Tzatli plunged to the ground during the Usurpation, slaying most of its two million citizens in the process. The death and destruction that accompanied the fall of Tzatli plunged the city's spiritual reflection into the Underworld nearly intact, and Tzatli's ghostly population has carried on ever since. Tzatli flies no more. It came to rest in deep, icy valley ringed by tall mountains. The protective shields that kept the bitter Northern winds out of the city still function after a fashion. When explorers enter the valley where Tzatli rests, they notice that the sky is invariably a deep, sapphire blue and no stars appear at night. These shields are, alas, merely decorative, and the cold winds chill every part of Tzatli, the coldest inhabited city in the Underworld.

Some say the terrible cold of Tzatli is the reason why the people here are so devoid of passion, so incapable of any true emotion. They are wrong. Tzatli's people were always cold, for the Solar who built this once-great city did so in order to fulfill her passions and none other. In so doing, she robbed her people of their very capacity to feel. Today, the ghosts of Tzatli, possessed of more functioning First Age artifacts than any in the Underworld save the Deathlords, cannot be bothered to put their panoply to any good use. Instead, most of Tzatli's citizens continue on with the same rote tasks they performed in life. For roughly a quarter of the population, these tasks include performing constant menial service on the city's flying mechanisms, mechanisms that have not functioned in 15 millennia. Perhaps the real reason that Tzatli's people seem so weak is self-selection. Nearly every ghost with any real initiative fled the city long ago to seek refuge in Ydrossos or some other territory, leaving behind those who lacked the courage to face a future outside Tzatli's storied walls.

The most powerful ghost in Tzatli is an ancient spirit now known as Shogun Widowmaker, one of the few ghosts

to still retain his living passions, particularly a passion to rule. A bully and a despot, the Shogun rules large parts of Tzatli with an iron fist, although there is little need for such brutality. Most of the Shogun's subjects are barely aware that their former queen has been replaced by a lesser being. Nevertheless, the Shogun's crystalline legionnaires patrol his domain constantly, looking for any signs of dissent from his subjects or intrusion from rival bosses. Contemptuous of his people's ennui, the Shogun also searches among his people for ghosts who still retain a spark of their living passions. He recruits these ghosts into his service, sending them out into the Underworld to scout, to trade and to negotiate with his regional rivals, including the Deathlords.

Such negotiations are difficult. Across the Black Sea lie Varajtul cannibals, the hypnotic scriptures of the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible and the doom that lies beneath the Hollow Mountain. Nevertheless, the Shogun's agents have begun establishing a trade relationship with Ydrossos, and the Shogun himself believes that perhaps the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears will be more approachable than the Bishop.

More recently, the Shogun has learned of others who have come to Tzatli, this time from the land of the living. Explorers and treasure-seekers have finally found the physical remains of fallen Tzatli, and while far more of the city's First Age technology endures in the Underworld than in Creation, Tzatli's ruins are still an enticing target for the living. Astonishingly, given just how many people died when Tzatli fell, the city's destruction did not create a massive shadowland. Smaller shadowlands exist within the city's confines, however, and when doing so is feasible, the Shogun sends raiding parties out by night through them to stalk Tzatli's living intruders. It seems that Shogun Widowmaker has need of living souls for some purpose he keeps to himself, and the thought of basking in the warmth of such souls leads the frozen ghosts of Tzatli to flock to his banner.

## THE WIDOWMAKER'S GUARD

**Description:** Shogun Widowmaker's Guard is an entire dragon made up of crystalline legionnaires built by Tzatli's dead queen. The automatons are often deployed in smaller units under the command of trusted ghosts but were the entire Guard to be deployed en masse, it would be under the command of Widowmaker himself.

**Commanding Officer:** Shogun Widowmaker

**Armor Color:** Transparent

**Motto:** N/A

**General Makeup:** 500 First Age crystalline automata armed with fire lances

**Overall Quality:** Perfect

**Magnitude:** 5

**Drill:** 5

**Close Combat Attack:** 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 4

**Ranged Attack:** 3

**Ranged Damage:** 3

Endurance: — Might: 6

Armor: 3

Morale: —

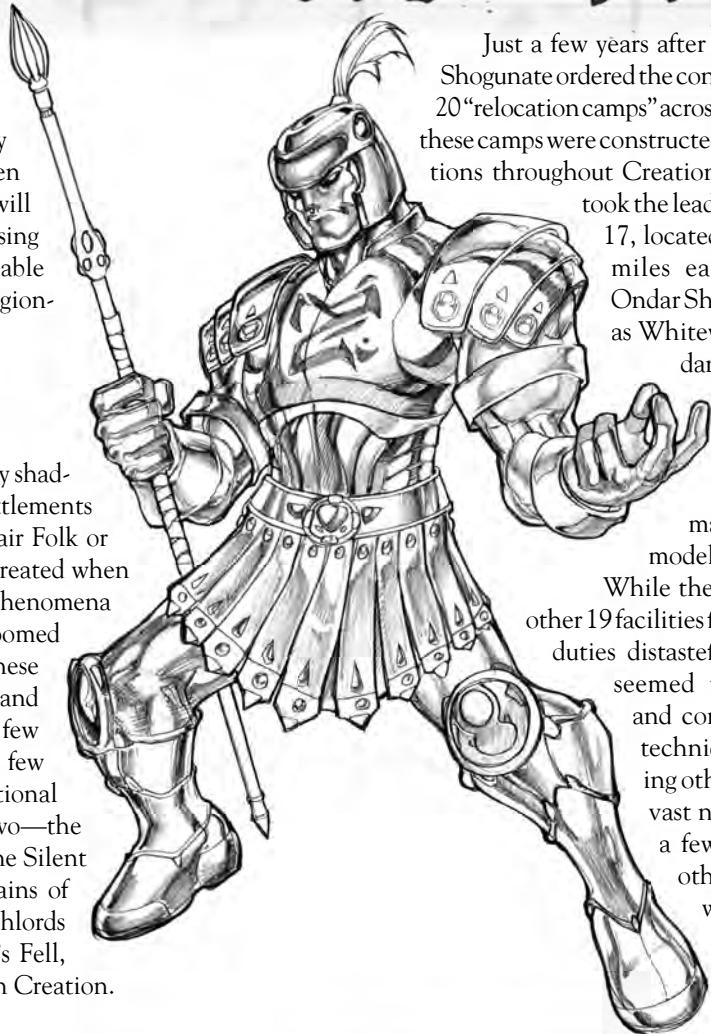
**Formation:** The Guard typically operates in close formation. When the full Guard is deployed, there will be a number of ghost heroes possessing subsidiary command codes available to take over and deploy smaller legionnaire units as needed.

## NORTHERN SHADOLANDS

The North is dotted with tiny shadowlands. Some are the result of settlements massacred by barbarians or by Fair Folk or Realm incursions. Others were created when sudden blizzards or Wyld-related phenomena swept across a village before its doomed people could prepare. Most of these shadowlands are fairly isolated and usually very small, ranging from a few hundred yards in diameter to a few miles. Three, however, are exceptional in both size and reputation. Two—the Vale of Dust and Shadows and the Silent Meadow of Dust—are the domains of Deathlords. Those selfsame Deathlords compete for the third: Marama's Fell, one of the largest shadowlands in Creation.

## MARAMA'S FELL

Sometimes referred to as the Monument of Murder or Genocide's Nation by the people of Whitewall, Marama's Fell is easily the single largest shadowland in the North, extending over almost 10,000 square miles. Considered the most significant threat to Whitewall by the gods who rule it, the shadowland's westernmost tip lies less than 100 miles from the city gates. Marama's Fell was born in the upheaval that accompanied the Usurpation. The victorious Dragon-Blooded suddenly found themselves masters of Creation, a Creation populated by large numbers of artificial life forms that had been engineered by the mad Solar god-kings, as well as beastmen and even entire demon races that had been summoned and enslaved by the debased Lawgivers. Even those creatures that expressed a willingness to accept the rule of the Dragon-Bloods and even to serve them as they had the Solars were of suspect loyalty. The paranoia that had gripped many of the Solars leading up to the Usurpation induced many of them to build failsafes into their inhuman servitors, failsafes designed to subconsciously secure the creatures' loyalty to the old regime even after death. Ultimately, the Dragon-Bloods embraced what they thought was the only logical solution to their problem—a final solution.



Just a few years after the Usurpation, the Shogunate ordered the construction of a series of 20 "relocation camps" across Creation. Although these camps were constructed in convenient locations throughout Creation, one of them soon took the lead—Relocation Camp

17, located approximately 500 miles east by southeast of Ondar Shambal (today known as Whitewall). The commandant of Camp 17 was

Anjei Marama, a brilliant but psychopathic Dragon-Blood who made Camp 17 into a model of brutal efficiency.

While the commanders of the other 19 facilities found their genocidal duties distasteful at best, Marama seemed to enjoy her work and constantly sought new techniques for exterminating other sentient beings in vast numbers. Within just a few years, most of the other relocation camps were decommissioned in favor of shipping all "suspect life forms" to Camp 17, which soon became

known as Marama's Fell as the commandant razed ever larger portions of the Northern forests in order to expand the camp's operations. (A "fell" is an area of forest that has been razed.) By that point, it was clear to most Dragon-Bloods that the area was developing into a shadowland of immense proportions. It was becoming equally clear to the officers of Camp 17 that Commandant Marama was quite insane. Far from being concerned about the growing shadowland, Marama seemed pleased with it. Supposedly, she even told one of her subordinates that she could hear a voice from the shadowland whispering to her at night—letting her know how much it loved her, singing her to sleep at night. (Or so the rumors went. The subordinate in question was summarily executed for sedition.)

The Shogunate was well aware of the problems with Marama's Fell but was preoccupied with other issues in consolidating its authority. The Shogunate did draw up several long-term plans for shrinking Marama's Fell, but it was not able to enact them prior to the onset of the Great Contagion. Camp 17 had long been closed by that time, of course. Unable to neutralize the shadowland, the Shogunate instead evacuated its personnel centuries earlier once the last of the camp's inmates had been exterminated. Anjei



Marama did not make it out. The commandant disappeared from the camp the day after the evacuation order was handed down, and she was never seen again by any living soul. The official inquiry stated that she had died accidentally as a result of some hazard of the shadowland. Yet widely spread rumors suggested that Marama's own subordinates had assassinated her out of disgust over her depravities. The truth is that on her last night as commandant, Marama heard an insistent whisper calling her home and she chose to answer it. She descended into the Labyrinth to offer herself to Oblivion.

While enormous, Marama's Fell is not the largest shadowland in Creation. It does, however, hold the distinction of having the largest population of inhuman ghosts. In fact, the majority of the Fell ghosts consists of specimens of dozens of artificial life forms and numerous species of beastmen. Nor are all the Fell's denizens even ghosts. Lacking an understanding of Solar engineering, the Dragon-Blooded sent many "life forms" to the camps that were actually cunningly designed golems or automatons. These intelligent machines were deactivated but not always destroyed, as the Shogunate harbored vague hopes that its savants could eventually master the intricacies of Solar craftsmanship.

In the centuries since the Contagion, the Fell has changed little, except in size. (The shadowland's area nearly doubled when the Contagion wiped out all the surrounding

villages.) The Fell does not mirror surrounding societies as most shadowlands do. Rather, its denizens have organized themselves into crude associations combining the ferocity of barbarian tribes with the honor of a Nexus street gang. Each pack of Fell ghosts is typically under the command of one or more ghostly warlords who pit their packs against one another in endless territorial disputes. No ghost has ever come close to unifying the various competing factions within the Fell... until now.

Over the last decade, a Fell ghost named Thrice-Dread Achiba has brought a significant percentage of the roaming gangs under his control. If he is not brought to heel soon, he could yet unite the entire shadowland under his banner. Achiba is a kyzvoi, one of an exterminated race of warriors bred by the decadent Solars for gladiatorial combat. The kyzvoi combined the most dangerous aspects of several predatory creatures, including spiders, snow scorpions and several mammalian predators. While they made poor soldiers due to impulse-control problems unintentionally bred into the species, they were otherwise superb fighters. In life, Achiba was a gladiatorial prodigy and a ruthless killing machine. In death, he has honed his skills even further and also begun to explore the finer arts of combat... specifically military tactics. Between his bullying nature, his cunning military genius and his dark charisma, Achiba has evolved into the first true leader that the ghosts of Marama's Fell have ever seen.



Making him even more threatening, Achiba and his growing army are not afraid to leave the Fell. Already, he has staged several nighttime raids on villages in Creation located near the Fell's borders. In the Underworld, he has expanded his own holdings almost 50 miles into the territory of the icewalker ghosts. He has even successfully engaged a sizeable party of war ghosts sent on an exploratory mission by the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears, seizing their artifact weapons for himself and his men. Far more clever than he appears, Thrice-Dread Achiba is aware that both the Lover and the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible have designs on Marama's Fell. He is still considering whether to ally with one or the other or to try playing them off one another while consolidating his own hold over the Fell and its resources.

## THE SILENT MEADOW OF DUST

Domain of the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible, the Silent Meadow of Dust is the largest shadowland in the Kunlun region, with an area of about 70 square miles. Like the desert that surrounds it, the Meadow consists of arid steppes covered in ashy snow. The Bishop's citadel, the Hidden Tabernacle, was forged from the ruins of the First Age city of Cholistan, whose destruction created the Meadow. (See *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex*, p. 84, for more information on the Hidden Tabernacle.) The Tabernacle has no set location, instead actually moving around the shadowland on a prearranged course.

The ghosts of the Meadow tend to congregate in "tent villages" of two types. Some ghosts flock to the banner of those Abyssals in the Bishop's service who favor a martial bent. Eager to become paladins in the service of the Shining Path, these ghosts train at military encampments, learning the arts of soldiering in preparation for Kunlun's next holy war. Others seek enlightenment from Abyssal priests who preach the deeper mysteries of the Shining Path in roaming tent revivals that follow the Hidden Tabernacle across the Meadow.

## THE VALE OF DUST AND SHADOWS

The smallest shadowland that is the primary domain of a Deathlord, the Vale of Dust and Shadows is a patch of shadowland with an area of less than 30 square miles nestled in the heart of Gradales. Long ago, the area was the site of a Shogunate-era monastery whose monks practiced rigorous celibacy and other means of abstinence and self-denial. In doing so, they symbolically punished themselves for the sins of those around them, and the village that grew up around the monastery was an oasis of peace and good health. When the Contagion came, the faith and piety of the monks even gave the monks and those around them a limited immunity to the plague.

Incensed, the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears personally destroyed the monastery, though not through force of arms. She entered the monastery in the guise of a young virginal refugee, and in the space of one night, she seduced every monk, both male and female. Their piety shattered by the Lover's sexual prowess, the monks and those who depended upon them soon fell prey to the Contagion and died. Even death was not a release for the monks of Gradales, unfortunately, for the Lover saw to it that each monk would return as a ghost. She then amused herself by stirring the ghost-monks into a magically induced sexual frenzy and then moliating them so that they would be unable to pleasure themselves or others. To this day, some of the armless monks still wander the grounds of the Lover's citadel, plaintively begging through sealed lips for anyone they meet to masturbate them. Others have been soulforged over the years into various soulsteel artifacts such as daiklavens that do not moan in pain when they strike another, but squeal in orgasmic delight instead.

Other than the monks, few ghosts can be found wandering the Vale of Dust and Shadows. The Lover's citadel, the Fortress of Crimson Ice, summons all ghosts in the area to it, where they submit to the Lover's insatiable lusts and are reduced to the status of concubine at best or rape slave at worst.



I SEE YOUR PIMP  
BELIEVED THE LIES  
I TOLD HIM.

YOU LUCKY THING.

IF ONLY I WERE LESS  
A MAN OF MY WORD.



OR MUTE.

AH WELL. A PROMISE IS A PROMISE.





## CHAPTER SEVEN

# THE LABYRINTH

At the heart of Creation lies Mount Meru, site of the Elemental Pole of Earth, a majestic peak stretching many miles into the sky and serving as an inspiring symbol of the permanence of both the Realm and of Creation itself. The dead have no such inspiration. At the heart of the Underworld lies not a mountain that reaches to the heavens, but a pit that digs into the foundations of existence, past the tomb-cadavers of the fallen Primordials into the infinite nothing of Oblivion. From the vantage of the dead, however, the Mouth of the Void is as far from the surface of Stygia as Meru's summit is from the foothills of the Blessed Isle. Of course, it's far easier for a ghost to reach Oblivion than it is for a living mortal to reach the summit of Meru. Falling is always easier than climbing, and any ghost who seeks his own undoing can simply cast himself into the Well of Oblivion in Stygia and fall all the way down into nothingness, never to return. For those who would look into the Void and come back to tell the tale, they must brave the Labyrinth.

### ENTERING THE MAZE

The Labyrinth has existed as long as the dead have walked the Underworld. Some Stygian savants claim that the Labyrinth was the first part of the Underworld to form, as a new plane of existence formed around the newly dead Primordials, slowing their descent into Oblivion. The rest of the Underworld came later, so the theory goes, as the dreaming Neverborn summoned into existence a dark mockery of the Creation they had left behind. Others claim that the Underworld was created instantly when the first Neverborn died. At the split second of that Primordial's death, a doorway opened between Creation and whatever pseudo-dimension existed between Creation and Oblivion, and the Essence released by the Primordial's demise imprinted itself on the unmapped reality as a mirror reflection of the true Creation. The truth is probably unknown even to the Neverborn themselves, although that has not stopped several of them from proffering theories to the nephwracks

in their service, theories that form the basis for hundreds of blasphemous theologies.

Regardless, the Labyrinth has changed considerably since its formation. Indeed, it changes to this very day, according to the whims of the nephwracks or their dark gods. The Labyrinth is a realm all its own, nearly as large as the Underworld above it, replete with hundreds of individual kingdoms and domains, all centered on the worship of the Neverborn and of Oblivion itself. Few of the Underworld's ghosts have any clue just how large the Labyrinth is. While every ghost knows that the Labyrinth can be accessed via the Mouth of the Void in Stygia, few indeed know that almost any cave system of sufficient size connects to the Labyrinth or can be made to do so with minimal excavation. Indeed, the Labyrinth defies all attempts to map its terrain or its size. The Labyrinth is as much an idea as a place, and its passages and tunnels often seem to open themselves up to any who wish to seek them out... and to many who do not.

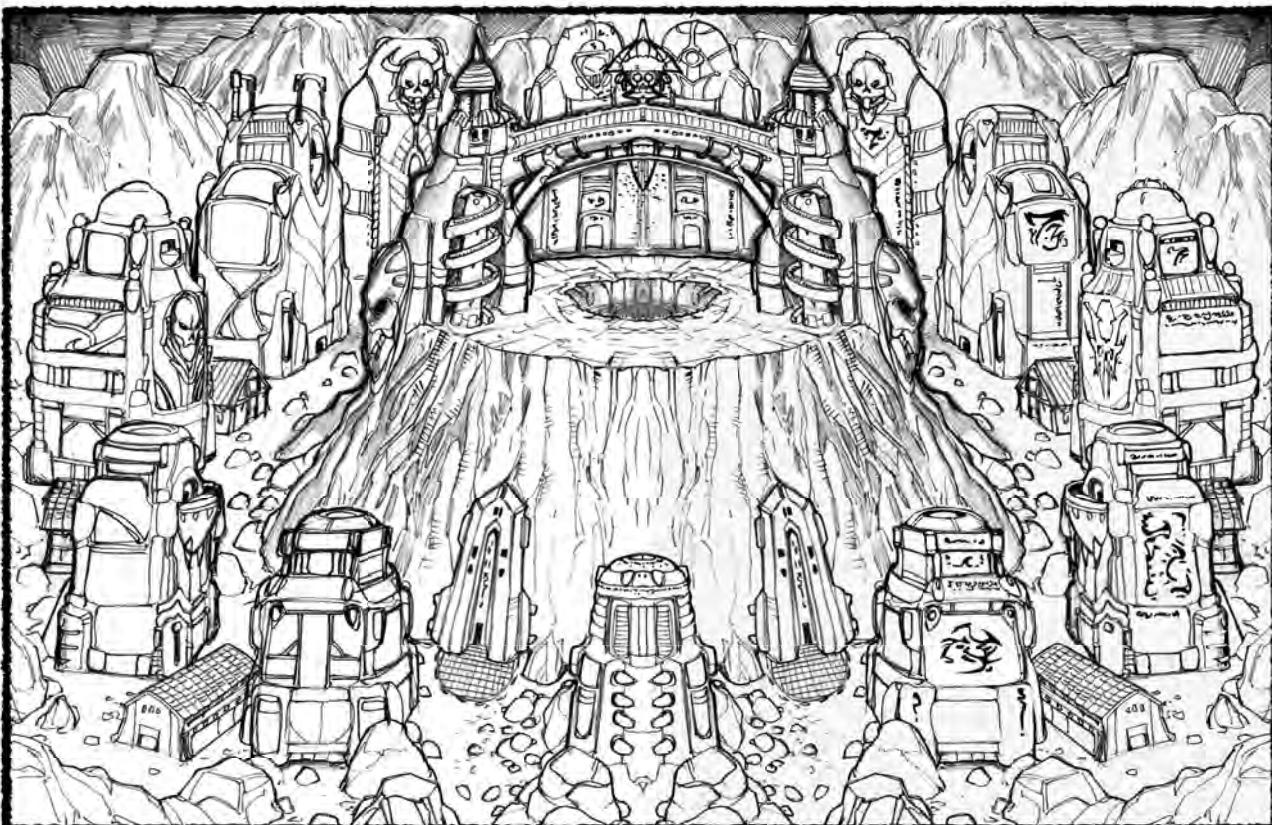
## THE MOUTH OF THE VOID

In the center of Stygia lies a roughly circular hole that is so deep that few can stare into its depths for any length of time without risking madness. This is the Mouth of the Void. At the northern and southern compass points of the hole stand two balconies, each of which opens onto a downward-spiral staircase running counter-clockwise (in defiance of all reasonable geomancy). These staircases, collectively known as the Venous Stairs, seem hewn from the same material as

the walls of the Mouth, but none know who first carved these steps to Oblivion. The Mouth simply always was. The dimensions of the Mouth are 100 yards across... approximately—the Mouth sometimes seems to shrink or enlarge fractionally, like the throat of a great beast. Around the Mouth lies a stone courtyard over 1,000 yards across, with the embassies of the 13 Deathlords artfully arranged at the edge so that each has an equally commanding view of the Mouth of the Void and none stands too close to its master's most hated rivals. Separating some of the embassies are small temples built for the glorification of Oblivion by those so insane that they would worship such a thing. The Dual Monarchy tolerates these blasphemous temples as it does every other obscenity sanctioned by the Deathlords.

As the Venous Stairs descend, they regularly cross tunnels dug into the side of the pit. Stygian savants divide the depths of the Mouth into 10 different strata referred to as bolgias. Each bolgia represents a new area where the mineral composition of the Mouth's wall changes. At the highest levels of the Mouth, these tunnels remain under the control of the Dual Monarchy.

The Monarchy's mining tunnels are large, but they don't extend very deep. Just a few thousand feet below the rim of the Mouth, one begins to enter the true Labyrinth. Tunnels still appear regularly, but they are more roughly hewn, as if they were the products not of excavation but of tooth and claw biting into the cold stone. Stygian mining operations are limited to the first three bolgias, where the





Dual Monarchs' servants toil for soulfire crystals, for the black ore that forms soulsteel and for other esoteric materials. From here, it is possible to enter the Labyrinth proper, but only through foolishness or deliberate intent. As long as miners stick to the lighted areas and marked paths, finding their way back is relatively simple.

The next three bolgias contain the first major entryways into the Labyrinth. Throughout these sections of the Mouth of the Void, nearly any tunnel opening will lead into some part of the Labyrinth, principally the various amphiskopoloi ruled by lesser nephwracks and those few ruled by mortwrights. The Disciples of the Abyss are found mostly on these levels, although the largest Disciple cult, the Deaconry of Profanation, is large enough and powerful enough to inhabit lower levels. Among the major amphiskopoloi that can be found through these bolgias are the city-states of Orak-Tau and Cadaverous. Although spectres, nephwracks and mortwrights are common in these dark tunnels, the levels are considered safer than those below. The maddest and most destructive spectres prefer the lower bolgias where they dwell closer to Oblivion's maw; the higher tunnels are generally too small for most hekatonkhires.

Bolgias seven through nine are considered too dangerous for any remotely sensible ghost to tread. When a ghost leaves the stairwell to enter the Labyrinth, the tunnels quickly open up into vast caverns with 100-plus-foot ceilings. Hekatonkhires dwell on these levels, as do plasmics of enormous size. Nor are such monstrosities the most dangerous threats. These levels of the Mouth lead into some of the most frightening parts of the Labyrinth: the House of Succulent Tears, the Infinite Prison, the Black City of Zhokai. The mightiest heroic ghost signs her death warrant by coming here, and even hardened Abyssals keep one hand on their weapons at all times.

The tenth and final bolgia is not as disturbing to visit as those just above it, but it is no less dangerous. The tenth bolgia is home to the tombs of the Neverborn. Instead of the nameless dread that flows throughout the upper levels, those who make it here experience a strange peace, a feeling that soon all questions will be answered and all doubts stilled. The answers will come in one of two ways—either the ghost hears the Whispers of the Neverborn and becomes their slave, or he hears the soft hum of Oblivion and loses himself to it. There are no amphiskopoloi that branch off the tenth bolgia. The tombs of the Neverborn are the only constructs in this dark place, although some spectre cults have set up crude shantytowns around the tombs of the Neverborn they venerate. Indeed, calling these structures “tombs” is inadequate. All of the tombs are massive in scale, and a few are large enough to function as mausoleum-cities where the very architecture of the tomb provides dwelling space for thousands of spectres to reside and perpetually worship their dead lords.

Lights brought into the tenth bolgia flicker and fail, and not even the most powerful forms of sensory enhancement

can penetrate the gloom here for more than a few dozen feet. There are no tunnels leading off the tenth bolgia. The Venous Stair ends abruptly in a landing of basalt where explorers can step into a vast and blasted plain. The Mouth of the Void continues down, but to take one more step upon it is to become one with Oblivion. Travelers with the strength to resist Oblivion's call can move away from the Mouth's edge. From there, they will stagger through the darkness until they find whichever Neverborn tomb destiny has chosen from them. Those who come here to seek a specific tomb can do so effortlessly. Each of the tombs, including the mausoleum-cities, has one face that looks out directly over the Mouth of the Void with a view that it shares with no other tomb. This is, of course, spatially impossible given the number of Neverborn and the relatively small size of the Mouth of the Void, but impossibility means nothing so close to annihilation.

For whatever reason, the tombs that are the “easiest” to find are those that house Neverborn who have had a more obvious impact on Creation: He Who Holds In Thrall, Abhorrence of Life, Tears of Want, Father of Murder and Perfected Principle of Consumption. It is more difficult to find the tombs of those Neverborn who have been more subtle and circumspect in their activities... unless a Neverborn wishes for its tomb to be found.

A few other structures stand on the tenth bolgia. The most unusual is a balcony jutting out over the Well itself with dozens of ghosts staring into the Void languidly. Only the dead can perceive this balcony in any way—it simply doesn't exist for the living, including Abyssal Exalted. The balcony itself appears to be supported by nothing and unconnected to any structure, and the only way to reach it from the tenth bolgia is to leap out over the Well and attempt to grab its railing. Oblivion's gravity is at its strongest here, and reaching the balcony requires a successful difficulty 10 (Strength + Athletics) roll. Those who succeed will, amazingly, find themselves in the Heart Room of Cold House, the manse-fortress of the Deathlord Eye and Seven Despairs located thousands of miles from Stygia. (See **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abyssals**, pp. 64-65).

Spectres, nephwracks, mortwrights and even hekatonkhires can be found on the tenth bolgia in large numbers, but these denizens rarely pose a threat to any intruder. No one comes here save by the will of the Neverborn, and no one leaves in defiance of their will either.

## WALKING THE LABYRINTH

As a traveler enters the tunnels that connect the Mouth of the Void to the Labyrinth, she first notices the strange texture of the cave surfaces. In the higher bolgias, where the Monarchs' servants dig for valuable ores, the terrain generally has a consistently rock-like texture, although a blow from a miner's pike can occasionally cause a wall to bleed or to ooze pus. In the lower levels, the nature of each passage changes over time, often before the traveler's startled eyes. The nature of the

Labyrinth echoes with the fever dreams of the Neverborn... and with the fears of the traveler. A rocky surface suddenly becomes sticky with blood. A narrow pathway is covered with cobwebs, the residue of thousands of plasmic spiders. Hard stone shapes itself into the form of jagged, rusty metal. In some places, the Labyrinth resembles a living thing, with walls made of snakeskin or slick fish scales. In others, it looks like a long-abandoned clockwork mechanism, whose gears and pulleys are stuck fast with aeons of corrosion. Whatever shape the local environment takes, the Labyrinth is always at once alien and familiar to those who walk it, like a fleeting memory of a long-forgotten nightmare.

Once inside the Labyrinth proper, the twisting tunnels can assume the shape of constructed corridors in an old, abandoned building, or even a rough-hewn path through a dark and foreboding jungle. At this point, some ghosts are lost forever... or until they encounter something that ends them. Ghosts of stronger will and determination can use the malleable nature of time and distance in the Labyrinth to travel quickly where they will. The dank corridor or twisting cave can stretch for one mile or a thousand, but the determined traveler can follow it to whatever destination he seeks. Some pathways are well trod and fairly secure. The environment of such passages is generally consistent from one traveler to the next, and a ghost who knows the way can travel great distances with a certain degree of safety (to the extent such a thing can be had in the Labyrinth). Less familiar paths change with each crossing.

Further complicating travel in the Labyrinth is its vast size. While a clever ghost could use the Labyrinth to shave days or weeks off her travel time (more if she has access to specialized Arcanoi), doing so might require her to cross several spectral kingdoms and territories. It could even take her through the hunting grounds of hekatonkhires and deadly plasmics.

#### NAVIGATING THE LABYRINTH

Finding one's way in the Labyrinth requires an extended (Wits + Survival) roll. The total number of successes needed depends on the distance the traveler ultimately wishes to cover, as shown under "Labyrinth Navigation Successes Required" on page 116. (That distance refers to either the distance one wishes to travel between Labyrinth destinations—such as between Labyrinthine Kingdoms—or the distance one wishes to travel between Underworld destinations, using the Labyrinth as a shortcut.) On each individual roll, the traveler compares his successes to the chart under "Labyrinth Navigation Results" on page 116. The results the chart describes affect the next roll to be made. Additionally, the difficulty of every individual roll within the extended roll increases according to how quickly the traveler wishes to reach her destination, as shown under "Travel Time Penalties" on page 117.

Further complicating things, the warped nature of time and distance within the Labyrinth inflicts a cumulative -1

internal penalty on each roll to be made. If this cumulative penalty reduces the traveler's dice pool to zero, she is lost in the Labyrinth. A group of travelers can attempt to navigate the Labyrinth together, but one person must serve as the leader and be responsible for all dice rolls. If the traveler becomes lost in the Labyrinth, she loses all accumulated successes and must start again... assuming she survives the circumstances in which she immediately finds herself.

Maps can be very helpful to someone who seeks to traverse the Labyrinth. To create such a map, the player of the mapmaker, who can be the same person who uses the map, rolls (Intelligence + Lore). The base difficulty of this roll is determined by the chart under "Labyrinth Navigation Successes Required," on page 116, plus half the difficulty required to reduce travel time if the map is intended to reduce travel time. Each extra success on the mapmaking roll adds a +1 bonus to the navigator's (Wits + Survival) roll.

Unfortunately, travel through the Labyrinth is frowned upon by the Dual Monarchy, and Labyrinth mapmaking is a conspicuous activity. Properly drafting a map of a route through the Labyrinth requires tools for black astrology and unholy geomancy that cost Resources •••• and fill up a small tent. Trafficking in Labyrinth maps carries a steep penalty in Stygia, but the demand for such maps makes the risk profitable enough. Because of the Labyrinth's ever-changing nature, each map is good for only one journey and must take astrological principles into account. Preparing a map for a journey through the Labyrinth takes one day (eight hours) of work per point of the difficulty of the roll to make the map.

While mapmaking is a science, travel through the Labyrinth is an art for some ghosts. A few such ghosts hire themselves out as guides through the Labyrinth for those rich enough to pay their fees and desperate enough to trust their experience. Actually locating a reliable guide requires a (Charisma + Investigation) roll at a difficulty of 3. If the roll succeeds, the guide is generally trustworthy and the navigator gains a +1 (or more) bonus on any appropriate rolls while traversing the Labyrinth. On a failure, the guide is either incompetent or treacherous. On a botch, the guide is actively working for the character's enemies and seeks to lead him into a trap. Needless to say, the Storyteller should make the (Charisma + Investigation) roll on the player's behalf.

#### KINGDOMS OF THE LABYRINTH

The vastness of the Labyrinth cannot be overstated. Some savants speculate that its true size is coextensive with that of both the Underworld and Creation. This theory is supported by the fact that entryways to the Labyrinth can be found at the extreme edges of the Underworld and that one such portal, the Well of Udr, lies just a few hundred miles from the Elemental Pole of Wood. Some nephwrack priests maintain that the Labyrinth is actually *bigger* than either the Underworld or Creation. As a construct meant to house the very totality of the dead Primordials' beings, the Labyrinth

## LABYRINTH NAVIGATION TABLES

### LABYRINTH NAVIGATION SUCCESSES REQUIRED

The total number of successes needed on the extended (Wits + Survival) roll to reach a particular destination is determined according to the distance to be traveled, as per the following chart:

Distance to be Traveled	Travel Difficulty	Mapmaking Difficulty
100 miles or less	20	2
101–250 miles	25	3
251–500 miles	30	3
501–1,000 miles	35	4
1,001–2,000 miles	40	5
2,001–5,000+ miles	45	6

### LABYRINTH NAVIGATION RESULTS

After each interval of the extended (Wits + Survival) roll, compare the successes *on that interval's roll* to this chart to determine the immediate results of the traveler's navigation. Dice bonuses and/or penalties are not cumulative. The results of each roll affect only the roll immediately following. Remember that each successive roll, regardless of any other result, suffers a cumulative -1 internal penalty.

Level of Success	Results
Succeed by 5+	The navigator has been remarkably successful. The reduction in travel time is one degree better on the "Travel Time Difficulty" table. That is, if the travel time was to be reduced by a fifth, it is now reduced by two fifths. Also, the navigator gains a +3 bonus on the next navigation roll. Add extra successes to the total successes for the extended test.
Succeed by 4	The navigator has had good luck finding a familiar landmark or a helpful marker to point the way. The navigator gains a +2 bonus on the next navigation roll. Add extra successes to the total successes for the extended test.
Succeed by 1–3	The navigator is having problems but he perseveres. The navigator gains a +1 bonus on the next navigation roll. Add extra successes to the total successes for the extended test.
Fail by 1	The navigator has lost his bearings. He suffers a -1 penalty to his next roll.
Fail by 2	The navigator encounters an obstacle—a natural hazard, a small band of guardians or a warder. Even if he overcomes the obstacle, he suffers a -1 penalty to his next roll.
Fail by 3	The navigator encounters a more dangerous hazard or a more complicated situation. The navigator suffers a -1 penalty on his next roll.
Fail by 4+	The navigator encounters a serious threat—a hekatonkhire, a numerous war party or a potentially lethal environmental hazard (such as the tunnel suddenly flooding with acid) that will probably inflict some heavy cost on the characters in terms of health levels, Essence, Willpower or Storyteller characters. Additionally, the result of the next roll made by the navigator is treated as if it were two levels worse on this chart. For instance, if the roll result is "Succeed by 5+," treat it as if the result was actually "Succeed by 1–3." Finally, the navigator suffers a -2 penalty on the next roll.
Botch	The navigator is hopelessly lost in the Labyrinth and is probably facing an imminent and nasty demise. Assuming the navigator survives his current situation, <i>all</i> subsequent rolls suffer a -1 penalty for the duration of the trip, and his next (Wits + Survival) roll suffers a -3 penalty. In addition, the next <i>two</i> (Wits + Survival) rolls are treated as if their results were two levels lower on this chart.

## LABYRINTH NAVIGATION TABLES

### TRAVEL TIME PENALTIES

When using the Labyrinth to reduce travel time, the difficulty of each interval of the extended (Wits + Survival) roll is as follows.

Desired Length of Trip	Difficulty
Travel time reduced by 1/5	2
...by 2/5	3
...by 3/5	4
...by 4/5	5
...to instant	6

would have to be greater than those domains created by discrete aspects of their existence. Such theologians have no proof for their speculation, but far stranger legends about the Labyrinth have proven true over the millennia.

Whatever its true size and nature, the local reality of the Labyrinth is malleable and shapes itself in response to the fervid dreams of the Neverborn. Such dreams lack the structure of the dreams of mortals. Instead, Neverborn dreams wash out over vast areas of the Labyrinth in nightmare waves. These waves themselves do not actually change the terrain. Instead, they destabilize the local environments, which then warp themselves to fit the fears, guilty consciences and hidden desires of those caught in the nightmare waves' wakes. The actual architecture of the Labyrinth rarely changes unless the id of someone in the area demands that it do so.

Compared to the frighteningly malleable tunnels that make up most of the Labyrinth, the Labyrinthine Kingdoms are islands of stability. They are no less dangerous, however, for the relative stability of these domains stems from the madness of their inhabitants, most commonly spectres who share common forms of insanity as a bulwark against the nightmare waves. As the population of a kingdom grows, its territory gains greater stability and its inhabitants can extend its borders by digging into the substance of the Labyrinth. The term "kingdom," as used to describe these domains, is a word of convenience used by the ghosts of the Underworld. Few such territories have any political structure as efficient as a monarchy. In fact, few have any coherent political structure at all, save for a ruling gang or a spectral strongman powerful enough to bully all others into submission.

### CAVERN OF THE ENDING

Usually found about 500 miles north of Stygia (and occasionally a quarter of a mile beneath the city of Gem), the Cavern of the Ending is a mammoth cave whose ceiling is more than 1,000 feet above its floor. The entire cave is oval-shaped, reaching about 10 miles in width and about three times that in length. Unlike most of the Labyrinthine Kingdoms, the Cavern of the Ending is relatively well lit.

The ceiling is coated in a thick, viscous growth of fluorescent algae, which gives the entire area a perpetual sickly green sheen. Occasionally, an enormous glob of algae comes loose and falls to the Cavern's floor, where it devours anyone nearby with its undulating acidic tentacles until it is destroyed by spectral guards.

Tens of thousands of spectres reside within the Cavern of the Ending, all of them hideously disfigured even by the standards of their kind. The Cavern of the Ending is a monument to pride, and those who dwell here (or are brought here in chains) are those who, in life, considered themselves superior due to good looks or material status. The Cavern's floor consists of a vast maze dug into the earth. Designed according to unholy geomancy, the maze is adorned with thousands of soulsteel blades heated red-hot by soulfire crystals and an equal number of mirrors of polished soulsteel. As new initiates and captured prisoners alike wander the maze's narrow corridors, its geomancy causes them to see their own reflections as visions of their own worst nightmares. Most poor souls are so frightened by their own reflections that they repeatedly leap back... right onto the waiting spikes. By the time a wanderer reaches the center of the maze, her corpus is usually a hideous mass of lacerations and burns. The last mirror the wanderer faces depicts her true form, and it is enough to drive most—ghosts and living alike—utterly mad. No form of magical healing short of Solar-level sorcery or the equivalent can repair the scars inflicted by the maze.

The actual population of the Cavern dwells in rough-hewn caves dug into the sides of the Cavern's walls. Most spend eternity staring at their own hideous faces in shards of polished onyx. Occasionally, one will become accustomed to her face and recognize that she might have some tiny spark of inner beauty that has survived traversing the maze. She will then crawl down to the maze's entrance and traverse it once more to extinguish that hateful particle of beauty.

At the maze's center lies a blasted ruin of shattered basalt and onyx. Not long ago, the ruin was a temple to the Neverborn known as Tears of Want, but it was destroyed under circumstances unknown to the ghosts of the Underworld.

Some say that an Abyssal who served another Neverborn destroyed the temple for reasons of his own. Others say that a Solar Exalt somehow passed unscathed through the maze surrounding the temple and that alone caused the temple to self-destruct, allowing her to escape with some nameless artifact. Only the spectres of the Cavern know, and few would dare to ask them.

The de facto ruler of the Cavern of the Ending is an ancient nephwrack known as Servant of Oblivion. Some whisper that he was the *first* servant of Oblivion, the very first ghost to fall to the Whispers of Oblivion and embrace Oblivion's call. Regardless of his pedigree, Servant of Oblivion has accepted the destruction of his patron's temple with surprising equanimity. Indeed, Servant of Oblivion now believes that the temple fell due to its own inadequacies as much as any outsider's actions. He is now resolved to build a grander temple more befitting to Tears

of Want. For building materials, he has decided on a new and more audacious medium—he wishes to find and collect the 500 most beautiful ghosts in the Underworld and the 500 most beautiful mortals in Creation and construct his new temple out of their molted corpus and violated flesh. His architectural plans near completion, and he will soon send his thousands of spectres out on a quest for the proper building materials.

## OBLIVION'S PASSAGE

Just a few hours north of the Venous Stair off of the sixth bolgia lies a warren of tunnels that lead to Oblivion's Passage. The passage itself is a vast, subterranean canyon stretching for about 80 miles. And in the heart of the canyon lies a vast military encampment, the operational headquarters for the Hundred Nightmares Army, the Labyrinth's largest (and possibly only) spectre mercenary company. Under the



command of its mortwright general, Seven Murders' Son, the Hundred Nightmares Army offers itself out as support troops to nearly any military force in the Labyrinth or the Underworld that can meet its price.

That price fluctuates according to the insane whims of Seven Murders' Son but usually takes the form of fresh ghosts for the company to torment in one ghoulish fashion or another. The Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears keeps a detachment of the army on retainer. She pays for their services by regularly providing dozens of new ghost-slaves (who she found unsatisfactory at lovemaking) to serve as concubines for the ghost-soldiers, many of whom were barbarian raiders in life. The Mask of Winters also made use of the Hundred Nightmares Army's mercenaries during the conquest of Thorns, although even he found their methods distasteful and ended the contract as soon as he had enough loyal local ghosts to bolster his own forces. From him, Seven Murders' Son demanded not slaves, but necrotechnology, which the Deathlord provided in the form of the 200 inferno cages that provide light for Oblivion's Passage. A particularly nasty form of necrotech, an inferno cage is just big enough to hold a single ghost, which bursts into flames as soon as the cage door is locked. The cage gives off enough light to see by for 300 yards. The doomed ghost locked inside screams in agony throughout her imprisonment, automatically losing one temporary Willpower point per day, then one permanent Willpower point per day, then one Compassion point per day and, finally, one corpus level per day. If the mercenaries have spare ghosts on hand to fill the cages, a ghost will usually be released when she is drained of all Compassion and driven into madness by her agony. Otherwise, the ghost will be left to meet her ultimate annihilation.

Seven Murders' Son also accepts payment in the form of walking dead soldiers, soulsteel weapons and other necromantic components. He has a very active soulsteel-forging infrastructure. Politically, the Hundred Nightmares Army (which actually numbers more than 30,000 spectres) is not allied with any specific Neverborn, let alone any Deathlord. Instead, the mortwright who leads the army sees himself as the consummate support officer. Seven Murders' Son realizes that, as a mere mortwright, he could never hold any position of true importance in Labyrinthine politics. Instead, he (in what the mortwright views as "altruism") provides his resources to anyone who seems to have a credible plan for achieving Oblivion's goals. That this approach allows both Seven Murders' Son and his soldiers to act on their most depraved and nihilistic fantasies is only a side benefit.

The one entity in the Underworld to whom Seven Murders' Son will not commit his forces is the First and Forsaken Lion, not that the Deathlord would need support from a band of mortwright mercenaries. A significant percentage of the Hundred Nightmares Army came from ghosts who were forced to flee into the Labyrinth to escape the Legion Sanguinary during the Lion's sack of Stygia. Although they are devoted to Oblivion's cause, the spectres who make up this army

have no love for the arrogant Lion, perhaps because his own devotion to Oblivion seems comparatively weak.

## THE OCEAN OF UNENDING NIGHT

A traveler who steps off the Venous Stair onto the eighth bolgia soon finds herself in brackish cold water up to her knees. After a half-day of journeying (and assuming she doesn't get lost), she will find that the tunnels open up into vast grotto, where the waters are lit by the glow of thousands of luminescent fish. The grotto is hundreds of miles across and filled with small islands and treacherous reefs. This is the Ocean of Unending Night, a pretentious name to be sure, as the grotto itself is not nearly large enough to be an ocean. Rather, the kingdom's name comes from its most unusual property. A captain who knows the currents that flow throughout the grotto can pilot his boat into any of several fog banks that continuously roll throughout the grotto, and if the captain's navigation is true, he can emerge wherever he wishes on the Sea of Shadows. With enough skill, the captain could even emerge onto the Great Western Ocean of Creation.

The Ocean of Unending Night is ruled by a powerful nephwrack called Never-Ending Silence, who is a nominal ally of the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water. Never-Ending Silence provides the Deathlord and his agents free and secret travel into the heart of Stygia and other places across the Underworld in exchange for amenities such as boat repairs and necrotic weaponry. While the nephwrack is generally loyal to the Deathlord, he is not a believer in the Bodhisattva's New Order theology and finds it laughable that so many mortals could be deceived by the Deathlord's lies. Nevertheless, Never-Ending Silence is aware of the Bodhisattva's secret First Age shipyards. When the Black Fleet of Skullstone takes to the seas, the ships of the Ocean of Unending Night will sail with them.

The territory claimed by the Ocean of Unending Night includes over 30 small islands with a population of about 20,000 spectres, most of whom have naval skills. A significant percentage of the population consists of mortwrights, principally the ghosts of sailors who drowned in the Western Ocean, as well as hundreds of pirates and sailors alike who died in combat. Never-Ending Silence's naval forces conduct themselves essentially as a vast pirate fleet. When the moon is dark and the stars are hidden behind clouds, sailors across the West know to fear the sight of a flotilla of ghost ships flying pirate banners.

Never-Ending Silence's flagship is not actually a ship at all. With the blessing of his Neverborn patron, the powerful nephwrack has tamed an ancient aquatic hekatonkhire known as Orcinus Rex, the Father of Whales. The prototype for all cetacean life forms, Orcinus Rex was once a huge cachalot measuring about three miles long. During the Primordial War, the great beast fought on the side of its Primordial creators and eventually shared their fate. Slain in Creation, Orcinus Rex was reborn in the black waters of



the Sea of Shadows, a ghost-whale that is perhaps the largest thing in all the seas of the Underworld. Still loyal to the Primordials, Orcinus Rex serves as a mobile, submersible city for the spectres of the Ocean of Unending Night. Thousands of spectres reside within the whale, where they hollow out its innards to make dwelling places for themselves. Doing so does not harm the hekatonkhire in the slightest. In fact, it tickles somewhat. When Orcinus Rex enters combat, it first opens its great maw and unleashes dozens of spectre-laden attack ships before rushing forward to smash any large vessels in its way.

## ZHOKAI

The dark kingdom of Zhokai is the largest spectral kingdom within the Labyrinth. Zhokai is accessible through the ninth bolgia of the Mouth of the Void, through a long forgotten crypt within the Font of Mourning or by way of the crematorium in Relocation Camp 17, the murder-camp that lies at the heart of Marama's Fell, among other entryways across the Underworld. Even Creation has hidden pathways to Zhokai. There is a butcher in Sijan who steals children in the night and slaughters them in his basement to feed his cats, and in the back of one of his storage closets, one can find a passage to Zhokai. To the extent that Zhokai has any fixed geographic location, it occupies an area of about 3,000 square miles that is located about five miles beneath that part of the Underworld bounded by the rivers Acheron and Eridanus. Ultimately, however, Zhokai accepts visitors from anywhere.

Zhokai is a spectre-ruled kingdom dedicated to the concept of genocide and ritualistic murder. While most of Zhokai's citizens are spectres, the kingdom is unusual in that so many of its citizens are non-human spectres. Almost 30 percent of the nation's burgeoning population consists of alien life forms. Some are lost races fashioned by the Primordials and later exterminated by the Solars, while others are artificial species created by the Solars and then exterminated by the Dragon-Blooded usurpers. Regardless of origin, Zhokai welcomes all those who died to satisfy the hatreds of bigots and xenophobes.

Most of the non-human races are reclusive and rarely seen outside Zhokai's borders, though they are fully integrated into Zhokai culture (to the extent that it exists). In the wastes of southern Zhokai lie hundreds of sand mounds, each 50 feet high, entryways into the subterranean hives of the mazriki, a long-extinct species of telepathic mantises that fed on the fears of mortal men. In the Bahst Mountains of northern Zhokai dwell the scathacs, mighty humanoid giants formed of great colonies of crimson, flesh-eating worms. In the lakes and seas of Zhokai, the sheedai float serenely amid schools of murder-fish. Tall and thin, with blue skin and large dorsal fins down their backs, the sheedai were created to serve as an entire breed of love-slaves for a Twilight sorcerer. Now, their sole desire is to feed on the souls of the Dragon-Blooded who exterminated them.

The people of Zhokai come from diverse backgrounds but are united in their adoration of the Primordials and of the religion that holds them together. Zhokai's religion is strange in that it has no principles at all. Its adherents can act as they wish as long as they pray to the Primordials and to the priests of the Blind Lamasery, a nephwrack temple in the Black City, Zhokai's capital. Powerful nephwracks, these priests have learned how to harvest the dark prayers of Zhokai's citizenry and direct them upward into Creation. The effects are subtle. The prayers of Zhokai do not bring down cities or destroy nations. Rather, the blind priests of the Lamasery reach out to individuals, a killer here, a sadist there. Zhokai's prayers filter up to Creation, carrying with them the Whispers of the Neverborn. Zhokai's prayers help those whispers to find those among the living who are willing to listen.

## MAJOR AMPHISKOPOLOI

The Labyrinthine Kingdoms represent large areas of (relative) stability within the greater Labyrinth, but even those kingdoms are subject to the effects of nightmare waves. The only reasonably stable locations within the Labyrinth are the amphiskopoli, spectral cities whose populations are large enough to provide a consistently stable reality. When the Neverborn stir in their tombs, the surrounding areas may be inundated with pyre flame blizzards or flocks of pain-birds or some other incomprehensible horror, but the amphiskopoli stand fast. Each city is still a place of unremitting horror, but it is a horror unique to each amphiskopolis rather than one imposed by Neverborn will.

## THE BLACK CITY OF ZHOKAI

Home of the Blind Lamasery, the Black City is the spiritual capital of Zhokai. With a population of over two million spectres, it is also the largest amphiskopolis in the Labyrinth and one of the largest cities in the Underworld. The architecture of the Black City is a hodge-podge of styles from across Creation's history. Throughout mortal history, whenever a great city fell to utter destruction, parts of it—typically those parts most associated with misery and death—somehow found themselves in Zhokai, where the local spectres cannibalized their remains to add to the Black City's infrastructure. Notable landmarks within the Black City include the infamous Zen-Lah Prison from Tchoto-Killi, the Blessing of Serenity Hospital from Hollow, and even parts of *Inevitable Victory of the Noonday Sun*, the flagship of the infamous First Age Solar Admiral Kendik Arkadi. All of these and more found their way to Zhokai, where they emerged blackened and tainted by horror. To supplement the detritus that fell from Creation, armies of nephwrack engineers mined rusted black iron from the unliving earth of their domain and fashioned it according to the dreams of the Neverborn.

The vast majority of the Black City appears to be forged wholly of rusted black metal, with a recurring clockwork

mechanism motif appearing nearly everywhere in the city. Some whisper that this motif is more than artistry, that the Black City is itself an immense machine of unknown purpose. The largest single structure within the Black City is the Blind Lamasery. Forged principally of basalt, the Lamasery contains structural elements from hundreds of profane temples from across Creation that have been razed and demolished over the millennia. The nephwracks of the Blind Lamasery willingly sacrifice their eyes upon entering the service of the Primordials. Others who serve the Lamasery never had any choice. Ghosts who enter the grounds of the Lamasery, willingly or not, are instantly and permanently struck blind, deaf and dumb, their normal perceptions replaced by an endless series of nightmare images which drives the poor spirits mad. Once such ghosts fully become spectres, they regain their hearing and speech. They also gain a powerful "second sight" that obviates the need for vision and makes them highly efficient predators. Even away from the grounds of the Lamasery, any ghosts who come to the Black City are filled with mindless terror. The Whispers of the Neverborn are strong here, and few ghosts have the strength to resist them for long.

## CADAVEROUS

Located a day's journey from the fifth bolgia or through a half-dozen burial cairns located across the island of Rajtul, the amphiskopolis of Cadaverous is the sacred "lower city" of the afterlife as envisioned by the Varajtul cannibals. According to the traditions of the Varajtul, those who have served their tribes well, who have won many skins for their families and who have battened themselves on the flesh of their enemies are rewarded with a place of honor in the twin cities of Ravenous and Cadaverous. (See p. 98 for more information on the city of Ravenous.) Varajtul who become spectres (which is to say, most Varajtul ghosts) reside in the so-called lower city, close to the dark deities they worship.

These spectres do not enter their holy land empty-handed, however. The cannibalistic rites of the Varajtul are not without a purpose, for when a Varajtul devours her victim according to the sacred rituals, she always keeps a memento such as an ear or a scalp. In the afterlife, the ghost of that victim is bound to the cannibal as grave goods, doomed to spend eternity as slave to his devourer.

The Varajtul noble dead have used their slaves to raise their twin cities, but of the two, Cadaverous is the grander. The amphiskopolis is located in an enormous inverted bowl of pure obsidian with a diameter of more than six miles. Ascending from the center of Cadaverous, all the way to the top of this bowl and beyond is a spiral staircase of bone and sinew that rises all the way up to Ravenous, connecting the two cities. The spectres of the lower city use the staircase to enter the shadowlands above on their masters' bidding, while the Varajtul ghosts wind their way down in search of the enlightenment that their shamans say comes from Oblivion.

## THE DEACONY OF PROFANATION

Found four miles off the seventh bolgia, the Deaconry of Profanation is the largest cult within the panoply of heresies collectively known as the Disciples of the Abyss. As with all Disciple cults, the spirits who reside within the Deaconry are, for the most part, ghosts rather than spectres. This does not make the Profane Deacons any more palatable to the Dual Monarchs than spectres are, however. The cruelties that spectres inflict out of insanity, the Deacons inflict out of choice.

The Deaconry itself is relatively small compared to most amphiskopoloi. Rather than a city, the Deaconry is a single building, albeit a huge one. It might also be a familiar one to any living Dragon-Blooded unfortunate enough to encounter it, for the Deaconry is designed as a grotesque parody of the Cloister of Wisdom. But where the Cloister is topped with majestic spires, the Deaconry's towers twist and turn skyward as if they had been melted and then reformed. And where the Immaculate Order forbids iconography, the Profane Deacons revel in it. Seemingly every inch of the Deaconry's walls are covered with lewd and disturbing images, many of them blasphemous reinterpretations of Immaculate scripture. Such profanity is perhaps understandable when one realizes that most of the Profane Deacons are, in fact, the ghosts of Immaculate monks and faithful Immaculate worshipers who find themselves post mortem, in a dark Underworld instead of the blissful reincarnation into a better life that they were promised.

Truthfully, any of the Profane Deacons remains as free to enter Lethe and seek reincarnation as any other ghost is. They have not done so for the same reason that every ghost who lingers in the Underworld has not yet reincarnated: because they remain emotionally tied to something in Creation that they cannot let go. Unfortunately, the most devoted servants of the Immaculate faith (which shuns ghosts as perversions of the natural order) are the least likely to realize this fundamental truth. Those who cannot do so are the ghosts most likely to be swept up by the Deacons for indoctrination into a new faith, one that teaches that all of the Immaculate Philosophy is a lie and that those who espouse it deserve only misery and death.

Consequently, the Profane Deacons conduct themselves very much like an Immaculate monk might—if the Immaculate were a psychopath obsessed with the destruction of Creation's most widely spread religious faith. Fortunately for the Immaculate Order, the Deacons have little opportunity to put their faith into practice, as there are no shadowlands in Creation capable of serving as a staging ground for the Deacons against their enemies. Profane Deacons regularly travel alongside packs of spectres and hungry ghosts in shadowlands in the more loyal satrapies, however, hoping that a Wyld Hunt will dare to challenge them. In earlier times, such impetuous Deacons usually met Oblivion in such challenges. These days, the much weaker Wyld Hunts sent on



missions into shadowlands might find themselves outwitted and outmatched by the tactics of undead Immaculate monks, many of whom retain knowledge of their Martial Arts Charms post-mortem. The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible has taken a special interest in these phantom warrior-priests, as well, and he has made his extensive studies of occult martial arts available to the Deaconry of Profanation. As a result, even Deacons who were not Dragon-Blooded in life and who never studied Immaculate martial arts often have training in at least one Terrestrial Style.

Like most Disciples of the Abyss, the Profane Deacons mimic the familial titles associated with mortal monks: Father Sin, Brother Hate, Sister Revenge, et cetera. The current abbess of the Deaconry of Profanation, Mother Transgression, achieved that rank three centuries ago when she killed and ate her predecessor. She has since eaten seven other spectres who sought to replace her. Mother Transgression is a powerful ghost as much for her pedigree as her experience and Essence-wielding. In life, Mother Transgression was the very first Immaculate to serve as Mouth of Peace under the Scarlet Empress. The Bronze Faction had not yet learned to enslave the wills of each successive Mouth of Peace, and Mother Transgression went to her grave uncertain as to the correctness of her beliefs and the moral fitness of the Empress to rule. Upon emerging in the Underworld, she was not surprised to find that the religion for which she had been the public face was an utter sham.

## THE INFINITE PRISON

Four days journey from the eighth bolgia stands the Infinite Prison. It can also be found by hanging yourself in a prison cell to evade your own just execution or by being buried alive by someone whom you wronged badly enough to justify such a punishment. The Infinite Prison is the ultimate expression of sadism masquerading as justice, and its populace has two categories of citizen: prisoner and guard. All those who come to this place, willingly or no, are adjudicated by a nephwrack known only as the Warden of Conscience, though he has no conscience himself. After just a glance at a visitor, the Warden decides whether that visitor is fit to be a guard or deserves to be a prisoner. Whether the Warden has any criteria for his judgments other than mere whim is unknown. Those sentenced to imprisonment are placed into one of the Infinite Prison's seemingly infinite number of cells, where they are tortured by the most ingenious devices. Those chosen as guards are assigned to *inflict* those tortures on the prisoners, with the understanding that any hesitation in carrying out a torture—even the appearance of doubt—will lead to the guard and the prisoner swapping places. Those who have suffered for centuries in the Infinite Prison are often experts at appealing to the sympathies of new guards. Once those prisoners suddenly find themselves in the uniform of the jailer, they rarely hesitate in introducing their unwitting saviors to the agonies they have just avoided themselves.

Of course, that's not the only way for the prison's caste structure to change. The Warden of Conscience regularly wanders the corridors of the Infinite Prison, reassigning guards who lack ingenuity and drive to the status of prisoner and prisoners who are beginning to accept or even enjoy their misery to the status of guards. Every few centuries or so, a small coterie of guards and/or prisoners—inevitably those who haven't been at the prison for very long—actually think that they can overcome the Warden and escape the Infinite Prison. Their hopes are soon dashed, for the Warden of Conscience himself is just another guard, albeit one with privileges the other guards lack. Indeed, the current Warden is only the latest of thousands of prior Wardens of Conscience, each of whom was replaced when the Infinite Prison became disappointed with him or else felt it was time for a change.

The truth is that the Infinite Prison is, if not alive, at least aware. The entire amphiskopolis is actually a hekatonkhire that takes the form of a giant cube of pure basalt, over half a mile on each side. The Infinite Prison seems incapable of movement, but that doesn't stop it—the creature can teleport itself anywhere in the Labyrinth that its Neverborn masters desire. Some say it can even manifest in shadowlands and that soon, one Deathlord or another will deploy it as the Mask of Winters did with Juggernaut. If so, it will be a Deathlord steeped in the ecstasy of suffering and the agony of control. The Infinite Prison will accept no other master.

Although its walls seem featureless, the prison can open an entry point for those who want inside. Presumably, it could do the same if it wanted to release one of its prisoners. It has never done so. The very first inmate of the Infinite Prison is a spectre known only as Xo, once a mortal soldier executed for cowardice after fleeing battle in the Primordial War. Today, untold millennia later, Xo rots in a cell on the prison's lowest levels, nervously awaiting the next day's round of torture, even as he patiently awaits his next turn as a guard. An ancient spectre of unimaginable power, Xo would be a terrifying opponent even to an Exalt, yet he is only one such being among the prison's populace, hundreds of whom date back to the earliest days of the First Age. Xo has served as Warden of Conscience four times over his long sentence, and he has been switched from prisoner to guard and back again untold thousands of times. In the Infinite Prison, *everyone* eventually gets a turn.

## ORAK-TAU

Sometimes called the Hanging City, Orak-Tau is a testament to the ingenuity of ghostly artisans, builders and engineers. The amphiskopolis takes up about 14 square miles and is populated by about 5,000 ghosts and spectres. Virtually all of the ghosts are Disciples of the Abyss, but a few are just so obsessed with their work that they are happy to stand alongside spectres and Disciples. Orak-Tau is located about seven days journey from the fifth bolgia.

It can also be accessed via certain tree hollows in the Far East (including one in the Noss Fens) or by digging at least 10 feet down from base of a tree from which an innocent man was lynched.

Those who arrive in Orak-Tau by way of the Venous Stairs come out onto the ledge of a vast circular chasm, 20 or more miles across and seemingly bottomless. The cavern ceiling is half a mile up. Snaking down through the ceiling are what appear to be the roots of a truly gargantuan tree. The smallest root is more than 20-feet in diameter where it enters the cavern, and the largest is several thousand feet. These roots descend from the ceiling, getting smaller as they go before terminating about a half a mile below. In a marvel of engineering, the city of Orak-Tau has been built both in and around these roots.

From an engineering standpoint, Orak-Tau's construction resembles that of the tree cities of Halta but in reverse, with the buildings constructed in and among the roots of trees instead of their branches. But where the Haltans build their cities of wood, Orak-Tau is constructed almost entirely of soulsteel and vast quantities of it. Long before the Dual Monarchs rose to power, the city called out to the artists, builders and engineers of the Underworld. In response to its urgent whispers, they came by the thousands, ghost and spectre alike. And the message that all of them heard was, *Come to me. Help me to grow, and know peace.* The message was heard and answered, and today, the dead of Orak-Tau do indeed know peace. Of a sort.

The spectres of Orak-Tau are far less violent than those found elsewhere in the Underworld. Even the hungry ghosts found here seem almost... tame. Likewise, any new arrivals in Orak-Tau immediately sense a feeling of peace and contentment. Even the construction noises that constantly fill the city's air with hammering and clanging seem almost musical. When they're not working on the city's construction, Orak-Tau's citizens attend plays and operas, relax in taverns and bathhouses, and engage themselves in the activities that the people of any civilized city-state would.

The problems arise when the noises stop. The peace of Orak-Tau lasts only as long as the city's construction continues. When it ceases—for any reason, but most commonly due to a temporary want of soulsteel—the people of Orak-Tau suddenly are overcome with a feeling of nameless dread and hopeless despair. Such is the intensity of this dread that the citizens will do anything to get construction restarted.

The source of the city's obsession with construction originates in the city's very heart. One of the oldest buildings in Orak-Tau is its Council Chamber, where the Chief Architect (the city's ruler) meets with his underlings to discuss the city's future expansion. The Chief Architect has another name—Orak-Ro. The forbidden god for whom the city is named was once the city-god of Meru when that fabled city was occupied by the gods and the Primordials ruled Creation. After the War, Orak-Ro, ever loyal to his Primordial masters, fled to the Underworld to avoid ex-

ecution. After communing with the Neverborn and with Oblivion itself, Orak-Ro decided to create a new city to rival Meru, one that would bear his name, one that would be the last inhabited city in all of existence.

Orak-Ro once ruled over the very idea of a metropolis, and his powers, though now darkened, are still oriented to that purpose. The roots to which his city clings are actually the roots of the First Tree, which stands at the very Elemental Pole of Wood. Eventually, Orak-Tau will become so large and so heavy that it will pull that tree down into the space that separates Creation and the Underworld. When the seat of one of the Elemental Dragons itself falls into the Labyrinth, then the rest of Creation will soon follow.

Or so, Orak-Ro believes. Construction is slow, since the god considers only soulsteel to be a material worthy of his metropolis. To get it, the ghosts of Orak-Tau kidnap ghosts and mortals alike by the ten thousands each year. So far, after millennia of effort, there has been no discernible movement in the roots of the First Tree. But the Chief Architect is patient, and he is also less interested in serving Oblivion's cause than in satisfying his own artistic sensibilities. And so, the city grows slowly, an oasis of peace and contentment within the heart of the Labyrinth.

Until the hammering stops.

## THE HOUSE OF SUCCULENT TEARS

Accessible via the eighth bolgia or by the bloodstains of any prostitute ever murdered by her pimp, the House of Succulent Tears styles itself as the Labyrinth's "pleasure house." A more accurate description is rape camp, a place where ghosts and spirits alike are subjected to the most grotesque of sexual torments and debasements. And yet, as horrific as the House of Succulent Tears must seem to all who know of it, those aware of its secrets find a certain dark justice in it. All of the shapely sex slaves and concubines chained to filthy beds were once rapists themselves, now moliated into the form of desirable women and enslaved for the pleasure of lustful spectres, morally debased ghosts and even a tiny handful of Cynis orgiasts who would quite literally go anywhere for a new thrill.

There are no men in the House of Succulent Tears. Or rather, there are no prostitutes there who bear the shapes of males. The only "true" women in the amphiskopolis are its rulers, the Blue-Painted Ladies, a council of 29 ancient mortwrights who made their way to the Labyrinth after being raped to death in a single night by a lust-crazed Solar Exalt not long before the Usurpation. Save for these 29, all of the hundreds of broken ghost-whores of Succulent Tears were once men who exulted in the cruel exploitation of women. Some were drawn here by the Whispers of the Neverborn to be molded into more... interesting identities. Others came here of their own accord, foolishly believing that they could prey upon the "helpless women" of this amphiskopolis as they did mortal women during their living days. Still others are kidnapped and smuggled here. The Hundred Nightmares



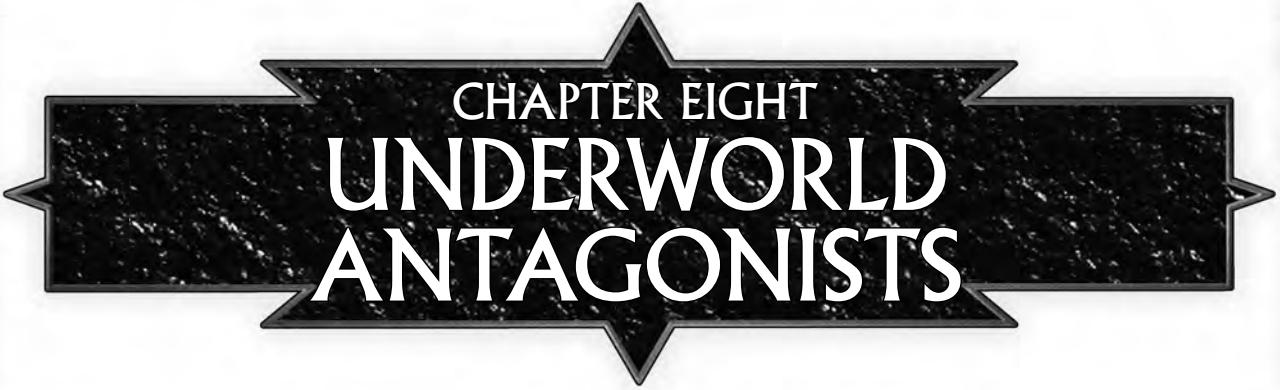
Army has an “arrangement” whereby they provide specially targeted rapists to the Blue-Painted Ladies in exchange for the opportunity to toy with some of their harlots.

Regardless of how a new addition arrives, the processing is always the same. First, each of the male victims is ceremonially castrated. Then, his body is moliated into the shape of an extremely beautiful courtesan. Finally, his severed manhood is forged with ore from the Venous Stair to make the chains that will bind him for eternity. The harlots of the House of Succulent Tears do not have the possibility of escape into Lethe or even the hope of resistance, no matter how feeble. The techniques used to forge their bindings were invented by the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears, who had a hand in the creation of the amphiskopolis. Even today, the Lover regularly sends male ghosts and mortals who have offended her in some way to Succulent Tears for reeducation in what a place in her service truly means.

When a spectral client begins what it is pleased to call “lovemaking,” the victim’s chains cause him/her to display whatever emotions the client wishes. He/she may scream in terror or in ecstasy, whichever his/her attacker wishes. The victim’s true emotions are concealed. None of the rapists held here ever concerned themselves with their victims’ feelings before, and no thought is giving to their feelings now that the tables are turned.

From the exterior, the House of Succulent Tears appears to be a palace of blue salt crystal, supposedly fashioned from the dried tears of every rape victim in Creation’s history. Inside, there are thousands of rooms each designed to fit the aesthetics of the bordello’s clients. Some are richly decorated with red silk sheets and satin pillows, while other rooms are deliberately designed to resemble a dingy back alley. The House of Succulent Tears caters to all tastes.





## CHAPTER EIGHT

# UNDERWORLD ANTAGONISTS

The Underworld holds many dangers, both for the dead who dwell there and the living who visit. The dead themselves are a hazard to mortals... and each other, especially now that the art of smelting soulsteel has spread through the Underworld. The worst threat, of course, comes from spectres and the other servants of Oblivion, of whom the Deathlords are merely the most powerful. What's more, the Deathlords have brought powerful living agents into the Underworld—deathknights and occasionally other Exalted minions.

### DEATHLORDS AND THEIR AGENTS

The 13 Deathlords are the most powerful individuals within the Underworld. In addition to their personal power, most Deathlords control extensive organizations. Some of them rule whole nations outright; others lead far-flung cults. All of them take tribute from dozens of small nations of the dead. Even if a Deathlord claims no outright vassals in the

Underworld, few ghosts would dare to openly reject any Deathlord's demand.

The Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water, also called the Silver Prince, is not the mightiest Deathlord in terms of raw personal power, but he likely leads the group in institutional power. The living and the dead of the Skullstone Archipelago accept him as their legitimate monarch. He can bring the resources of an entire nation to any task he wants. His current project is building a fleet of First Age battleships—the sort no one has built since the Usurpation. He expects to conquer at least the entire West, Creation and Underworld both, as only the first step in dragging Creation into the Void.

The Silver Prince empowered several Abyssal Exalted as his minions. The most active and aggressive of these is the woman called Ebon Siaka. His most famous (or infamous) servant is a Solar Exalt: the privateer named Moray Darktide. The Silver Prince finds Darktide useful as he is, and the Deathlord can find no trace of doubt or disloyalty in him. Darktide has fought a number of other Lawgivers

in the Silver Prince's name. Nevertheless, the Bodhisattva does not entirely trust the Solar. He keeps Darktide busy harrying the Lintha pirates well away from Skullstone. He promises Darktide command of Skullstone's fleet when the great war comes, but only the nation's publicly known fleet of mundane ships. The new fleet of First Age ships will go to Ebon Siaka.

The two Exalts heartily dislike each other. Apart from their metaphysical difference as Solar and Abyssal, Darktide is a fervent, jingoistic patriot who sincerely believes that Skullstone deserves to rule the West, while Ebon Siaka fervently wants to crush the West into a bloody ruin as an offering for her beloved Deathlord master. The Bodhisattva encourages their rivalry.

The Deathlord's most unusual minion, however, is a young Sidereal who defected from the Bureau of Destiny. Once known as the Green Lady, she now calls herself the Unfolding Corpse-White Lotus. The Bodhisattva finds it amusing how the Sidereal infiltrates the organization of his rival Deathlords the Mask of Winters, the Walker in Darkness and the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurile. Of course, the Silver Prince considered the possibility of her being a double agent. He has not, however, considered the possibility that anyone could craft a false identity he could not penetrate.

### THE BODHISATTVA ANOINTED BY DARK WATER

This Deathlord currently takes the form of a tall man clad in robes of bladelike plates of silver-washed, razor-edged soulsteel. (These robes act like soulsteel superheavy plate armor but have no mobility or fatigue penalties.) He wears a mask of opal and has a short sword belted at his side. When he draws this weapon, it expands into a soulsteel grand daiklave. Yet despite his skill as a swordsman, the Bodhisattva prefers to get his way through political machinations and negotiation—from a position of strength, of course—until he maneuvers an enemy or victim into a position where she has no choice but to submit completely. At all times, the Deathlord tries to appear rational and honorable, an enlightened despot who seeks a common good for the living and the dead.

If he must give up an artifact, a soul or a minor conquest in order to preserve his façade, he does so. He can afford small losses, because they won't matter once he finishes building the Black Fleet.

The Silver Prince makes extensive use of his mutable form and acting skill. He arranges elaborate deceptions in which he plays most of the parts: as himself, the servant who reveals which minister an Exalt or ghostly diplomat can bribe, the minister bribed to reveal what the Silver Prince really wants... The Deathlord's plots all involve multiple layers of disinformation and hidden agendas, as he dupes other powerful folk into working his will.

**Motivation:** Conquer Creation, then destroy it.

**Attributes:** Strength 8, Dexterity 10, Stamina 10; Charisma 7, Manipulation 9, Appearance 7; Perception 6, Intelligence 5, Wits 7

**Virtues:** Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 5, Valor 4

**Abilities:** Archery 8, Athletics 8, Awareness 7, Bureaucracy 8, Craft (Genesis) 5, Craft (Magitech) 7, Craft (Moliation) 5, Craft (Pandemonium) 5, Craft (Soul-forging) 7, Craft (Wood) 7, Dodge 8, Integrity 7, Investigation 5 (Reading Motivation +2), Larceny 8, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Other: Ancient Naval Ciphers, Claw-speak, High Realm, Pelagial, Riverspeak,



Seatongue, Skytongue) 7, Lore 7, Martial Arts 8, Medicine 3, Melee 6 (Swords/Daiklaves +3), Occult 6 (Oblivion +1), Performance 8, Presence 9 (Reasonable Suggestions +2), Resistance 7, Ride 6, Sail 9, Socialize 9 (Lying +3), Stealth 7, Survival 6, Thrown 4, War 8 (Naval Warfare +2)

**Backgrounds:** Allies (Deathknights) 5, Artifact 5, Cult 4, Followers 5, Manse 5, Resources 5, Spies 4, Whispers 5

**Arcanoi:** All known, whether he meets the Virtue minimums or not

**Deathlord Powers:** All Deathlords have these powers. (See *The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abyssals* for further details.)

*Command of the Dead:* As a reflexive action, the Bodhisattva may take control of any walking dead in his presence that is not controlled by another Deathlord of higher Essence. This power costs five motes to use in Creation and 0 motes in the Underworld or a shadowland.

*Eyes of Oblivion:* With a glance, the Deathlord can slay any single mortal who lacks an enlightened Essence. This power costs two motes. The victim invariably becomes a ghost.

*Feed on the Dead:* At will, the Silver Prince can drain one dot of permanent Essence from any single ghost he sees, gaining three motes from this process.

*Mutable Form:* As a miscellaneous action, the Silver Prince can assume any form, mortal or spiritual, between the size of small dog and a large man. This power costs 10 motes and one Willpower. The Silver Prince can impersonate anyone he has seen—at least in terms of appearance.

*Unkillable:* Any force or attack that would “kill” the Deathlord merely dismembers him. Over the course of the coming year, the Deathlord resumes his form in the Labyrinth.

**Charms:** All Solar and Abyssal Charms for which he possesses the prerequisite Ability ratings.

**Martial Arts:** All Charms of Orgiastic Fugitive Style, Seafaring Hero Style, Snake Style, Solar Hero Style and Violet Bier of Sorrows Style.

**Spells:**

*Necromancy:*

*Shadowlands Circle, Labyrinth Circle:* All spells given in **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The Black Treatise**, and more as the Storyteller desires.

*Void Circle:* Abyssal Aegis, The Barless Gate, Birth of Sanity’s Sorrow, Empty Night Future, Forsaken Life Engine, Inauspicious Citadel, Lord of the Dead, Obsidian Countermagic, Poisoning the Well, Summon Hekatonkhire, Void Cocoon Warrior; others as the Storyteller desires.

**Sorcery:**

*Terrestrial Circle, Celestial Circle:* All spells from **Exalted and The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The White Treatise**.

**Special Charms:** The Silver Prince has developed several high-Essence variations on Solar and Abyssal Charms that give him scene-long or permanent benefits.

**Abyssal Guardian Mastery:** For three motes and one Willpower, this variation on Heavenly Guardian Defense enables the Silver Prince to perfectly parry any attack he perceives in

the rest of the scene. Each parry costs another three motes but does not count as Charm usage.

**Commanding Whisper Mastery:** As the Abyssal Charm called Poisoning the Will, but it costs only five motes and the target’s Dodge MDV is inapplicable.

**Perpetual Incubus Mastery:** The Silver Prince has the benefit of the Abyssal Charm called Irresistible Succubus Style whenever he wants, at no Essence cost.

**Join Battle:** 14 (likely doubled by Violet Bier of Sorrows Style)

**Attacks:**

*Punch:* Speed 5, Accuracy 19, Damage 8B, Parry DV 10, Rate 3

*Kick:* Speed 5, Accuracy 18, Damage 11B, Parry DV 8, Rate 2

*Bloodspike Harness (Glittering Shadow):* Speed 6, Accuracy 23, Damage 17L\*, Parry DV —, Rate 1

\* Whenever this clinch strikes a target and inflicts damage, it also drains the target of a number of motes of Essence equal to the wielder’s Essence.

*Soulsteel Grand Daiklave (Howler in Darkness):* Speed 5, Accuracy 25, Damage 23L/5\*\*, Parry DV 10, Rate 2

\*\* Whenever this grand daiklave strikes a target and inflicts damage, it also drains the target of a number of motes of Essence equal to the wielder’s Essence. If Howler in Darkness inflicts more levels of damage than the target’s Dodge MDV (and does not kill the target outright), the target is compelled to obey any commands given by the Silver Prince for the next 100 days... no matter who struck the blow.

*Soak:* 22L/27B (Glittering Shadow, soulsteel superheavy plate/bloodspike harness, +17L/17B, Hardness: 11L/11B)

**Corpus Levels:** -0x20/-1x10/-2x10/-4x5/Icap (dematerialized, not killed)

**Dodge DV: 14** **Willpower: 10**

**Essence: 10**

**Personal Essence: 80** **Peripheral Essence: 204 (225)**

**Committed Essence: 21**

**Other Notes:** When the Silver Prince must engage in combat, he activates Abyssal Guardian Mastery then waits for enemies to exhaust their Essence. He avoids using Charms for attacks, so he can use a perfect dodge such as Flickering Wisp Technique, if need be. His Combos always include at least one reflexive perfect defense. He rarely augments his damage unless his opponent shows truly incredible Hardness. At a minimum of nine dice per attack, he expects to whittle away any foe less tenacious than a hekatonkhire or another Deathlord.

If the Silver Prince is somehow denied the use of his soulsteel robes, he favors Charms from the Violet Bier of Sorrows style, for he is inordinately proud of learning this “secret” style. He certainly uses Blade of the Battle Maiden to increase his chance to hit for the scene. He has placed every attack in the style into its own Combo with Flickering Wisp Technique and Iron Skin Concentration. Resistance Essence Flow gives him near-certainty to resist all damage from an attack, even from the most powerful foes.

## EBON SIAKA

Tales say that Ebon Siaka was a Tya—a woman of the West who lives as a man—before her Black Exaltation, but her lack of Tya tattoos puts the lie to the story. No, she was simply a robber who found it useful sometimes to pose as a Tya. A ship of real Tya eventually caught up to her gang, slaughtered the rest and threw her into the sea with an anchor-stone tied to her feet. As a group of siaka swam toward her sinking body, the Silver Prince offered her the Black Exaltation.

The Silver Prince seldom gives Ebon Siaka free time to indulge her taste for piracy. He keeps her too busy dealing with sea gods, elementals and Fair Folk who trespass against Skullstone. He also sends her on missions on the Sea of Shadows, bullying ghostly communities throughout the West and destroying sea monsters and oceanic hekatonkhires who do not submit to Skullstone.

Back home, she participates in building the Bodhisattva's new fleet, so that she will understand the principles of the ships she will command.

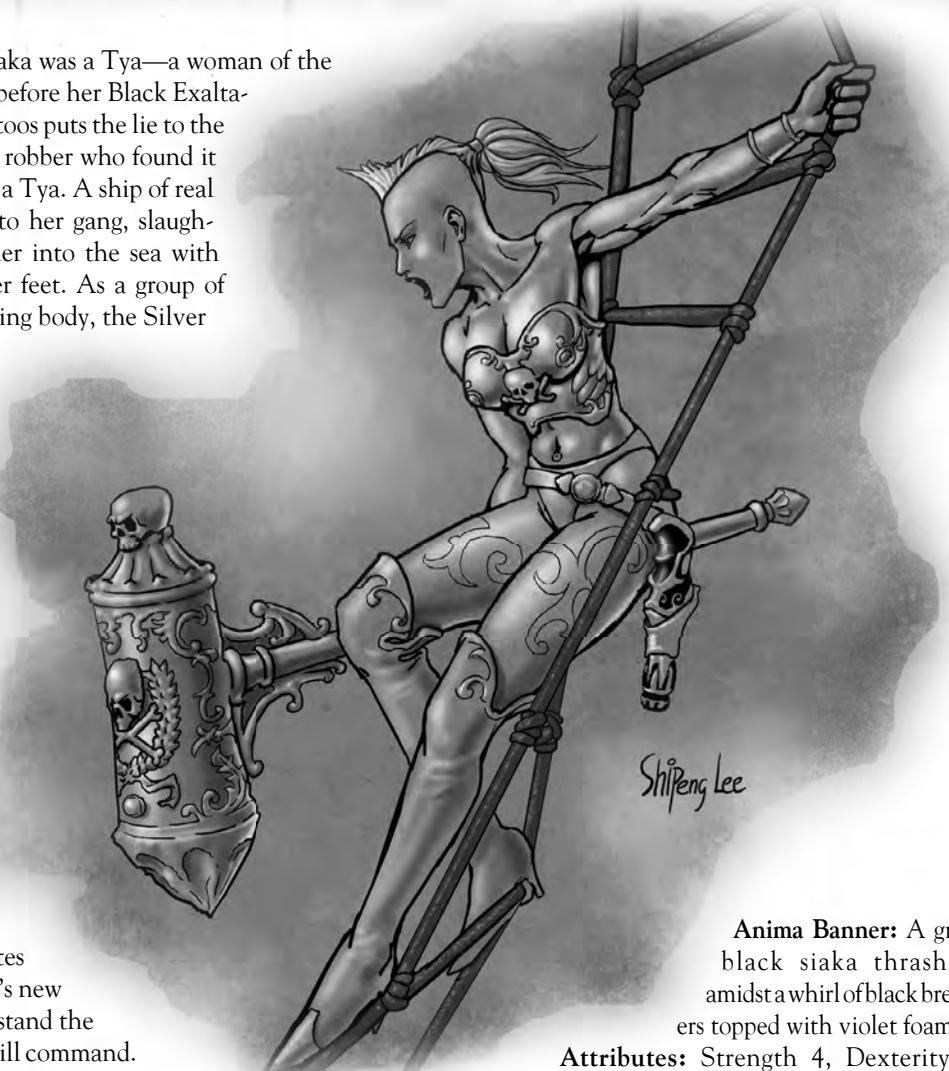
Ebon Siaka has found that she has a knack for necrotech, though the hot-tempered Abyssal still prefers battle to artifice. While she has a number of abilities suitable for criminal and undercover work, her favorite investigative method is to assault anyone who might know anything, terrify the survivors and command any ghosts of the slain to talk.

Although the Silver Prince promises Ebon Siaka the command of the Black Fleet, the deathknight is intensely jealous of Moray Darktide. Her adventures and achievements equal his, and he has killed at least as many mortals as she has, but people respect him more. It gnaws at her.

The “Hammer of Skullstone” seems quite a short woman to carry such an immense stone maul (equal to a grand goremaul). She wears soulsteel plate armor painted with Skullstone’s insignia. Ebon Siaka also carries a very small concussive Essence cannon holstered at her side. (See **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age**, p. 131.) She wears her green-black hair cropped short.

**Motivation:** Ravage the West for the Bodhisattva’s glory.

**Caste:** Dusk



Shipeng Lee

**Anima Banner:** A great black siaka thrashing amidst a whirl of black breakers topped with violet foam.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4; Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2; Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Virtues:** Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 4

**Abilities:** Archery 2 (Essence Weapons +2), Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1, Craft (Fire) 2, Craft (Magitech) 2, Dodge 4, Integrity 2, Investigation 2, Larceny 3 (Posing as Tya +1), Linguistics (Native: Seatongue; Other: Old Realm) 1, Martial Arts 2, Medicine 2, Melee 5, Occult 2 (Underworld +2), Presence 3 (Terrorize +2), Resistance 3, Sail 4, Socialize 2, Survival 3, War 3

**Backgrounds:** Abyssal Command 3, Artifact (Soulsteel Articulated Plate) 4, Artifact (Soulsteel Grand Goremaul) 3, Artifact (Soulsteel Hearthstone Amulet) 1, Artifact (Soulsteel Hearthstone Bracers) 2, Artifact (Very Small Concussive Essence Cannon) 2, Backing 4, Contacts 2, Liege 3, Resources 2, Underworld Manse 4, Whispers 1

**Charms:** Armor-Calling Kata, Blade-Summoning Gesture, Command the Dead, Deck-Striding Phantom, Ebon Lightning Prana, Elegant Flowing Deflection, First Archery Excellency, First Melee Excellency, First Presence Excellency,

First War Excellency, Five Shadow Feint, Flitting Shadow Form, Maelstrom-Weathering Indifference, Ox-Body Technique, Raiton's Nimble Perch, Savage Shade Style, Second Larceny Excellency, Second Resistance Excellency, Second Sail Excellency, Spider Pounce Technique, Spirit-Sensing Meditation, Thieving Raiton Claws, Vengeful Riposte

**Join Battle:** 6

**Attacks:**

**Punch:** Speed 5, Accuracy 6, Damage 4B, Parry DV 4, Rate 3

**Kick:** Speed 5, Accuracy 5, Damage 7B, Parry DV 2, Rate 2

**Clinch:** Speed 6, Accuracy 5, Damage 4B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Soulsteel Grand Goremaul (Weight of Oblivion):** Speed 5, Accuracy 14, Damage 20L/5\*, Parry DV 5, Rate 1

\* Whenever this weapon strikes a target and inflicts damage, it also drains from the target a number of motes of Essence equal to the wielder's Essence.

**Very Small Concussive Essence Cannon (Coffin Nailer):** Speed 4, Accuracy 10, Damage 10B (piercing), Range 50, Rate 1

**Soak:** 16L/20B (Soulsteel articulated plate, +14L/16B, Hardness: 9L/9B, -2 mobility penalty, 1 fatigue value)

**Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 6    **Willpower:** 7

**Essence:** 4

**Personal Essence:** 19    **Peripheral Essence:** 25 (45)

**Committed Essence:** 20

**Other Notes:** Ebon Siaka's grand goremaul, Weight of Oblivion, has a stone head but is principally made of soulsteel. It grants the normal magical material benefit to an Abyssal.

Ebon Siaka carries one hearthstone of Creation and three Underworld hearthstones: a stone of aquatic prowess, a flawed gem, a gemstone of last resort and a crystal of seawalking. All are gifts from the Silver Prince, through the Underworld Manse Background (although one stone comes from a manse in Creation and one from a shadowland manse). Ebon Siaka does not personally control any manses. She carries the hearthstones in her goremaul, her armor, hearthstone bracers and a hearthstone amulet.

**MORAY DAKTIDE**

*Your blade shall bring my light into dark places. Hold fast to faith and courage, Moray Darktide, for soon you sail on strange seas. Thus spoke a voice unknown to Captain Moray Darktide, pirate of Skullstone, and a battle against Lintha pirates ended with their deaths instead of his own. On his return to Onyx, Darktide told the Silver Prince about his strange empowerment and asked what it meant.*

Captain Darktide still serves the Deathlord of Skullstone. The patriotic captain sees no contradiction between being a

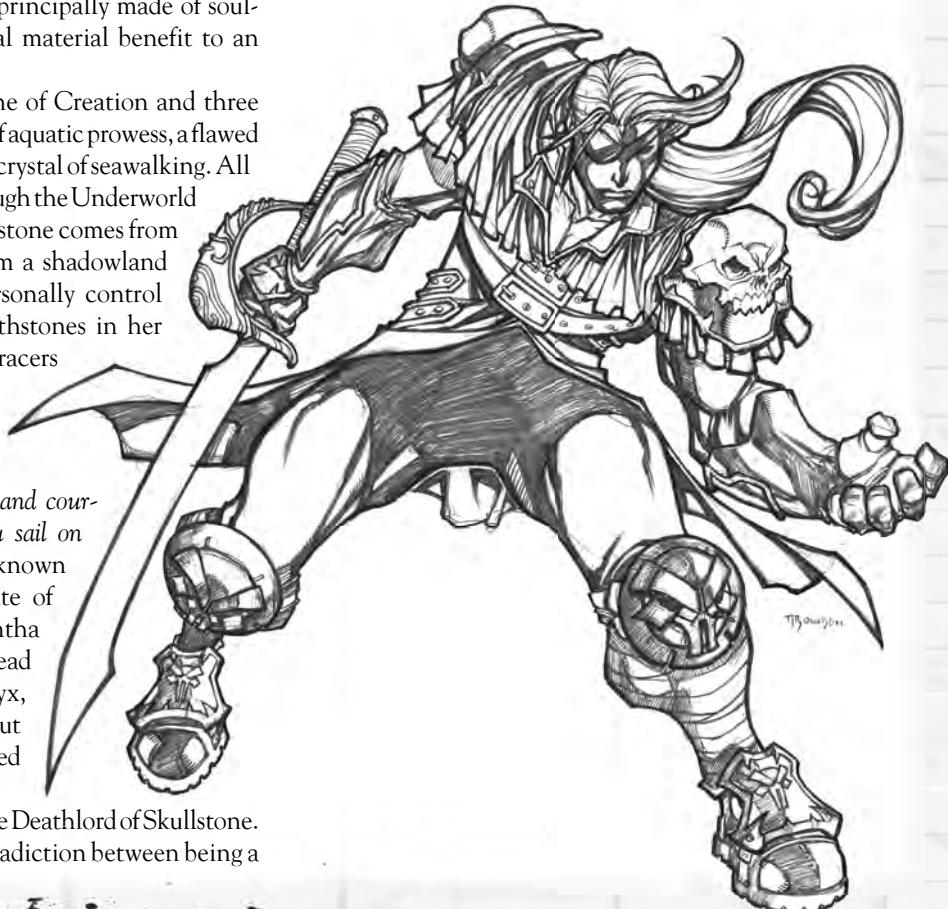
Dawn Caste Solar and serving a Deathlord. He believes the Silver Prince's propaganda about a New Order of cooperation between the living and the dead. Any foe of Skullstone, whether mortal, demon or Exalt, is a foe of Moray Darktide. He takes a special pleasure in slaying the Lintha and their demons, though.

The Silver Prince keeps a close watch on Darktide. The Solar pirate seems utterly loyal and utterly ruthless in battle, but... the stories spreading about him have an edge of admiration, as well as fear. Darktide keeps his promises and respects parleys. People throughout the West welcome new stories about Darktide's victories. Skullstone is creepy, but they hate the Lintha. Pictures of the square-jawed, strong-bodied captain with long, windblown hair, eyepatch and skull epaulettes on his naval greatcoat appear throughout the West—and now, they are not always "wanted" posters. In the Underworld, the inhabitants of Skullstone's tributaries through the West (many of whom died under Lintha blades) welcome visits from the bold captain who brings the light of Creation's sun. The Deathlord knows that his devoted servant must not learn certain things or rise too high in the public's estimation. Moray Darktide does not realize how great a threat he could be to the Bodhisattva's reign.

**Motivation:** Bring about the Silver Prince's New Order

**Caste:** Dawn

**Anima Banner:** A host of skeletal warriors amid crashing waves of light



**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4; Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3; Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Virtues:** Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 4

**Abilities:** Archery 2, Athletics 5 (Swinging on Ropes +2), Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1, Craft (Wood) 1, Dodge 3, Larceny 1, Lore 1, Martial Arts 3, Melee 5, Occult 2 (Ghosts +2), Presence 3 (Inspire Crew +1), Resistance 3, Sail 4, Socialize 1 (Waterfront Taverns +1), Survival 2 (Oceanic +2), Thrown 2, War 3

**Backgrounds:** Abyssal Command 2, Artifact (Orichalcum Hearthstone Amulet) 1, Artifact (Orichalcum Hearthstone Bracers) 2, Artifact (Orichalcum Reinforced Buff Jacket) 2, Artifact (Orichalcum Wavecleaver Daiklave) 2, Contacts 3, Influence 3, Liege 2, Manse 3, Resources 4, Underworld Manse 3

**Charms:** Call the Blade; Durability of Oak Meditation; Feather-Foot Style; First Melee Excellency; First Resistance Excellency; Graceful Crane Stance; Hungry Tiger Technique; Iron Skin Concentration; Melee Essence Flow; Monkey Leap Technique; Mountain-Crossing Leap Technique; One Weapon, Two Blows; Peony Blossom Attack; Reflex Sidestep Technique; Salty Dog Method; Sea Ambush Technique; Second Sail Excellency; Soaring Crane Leap; Spirit-Detecting Glance

**Join Battle:** 6

**Attacks:**

**Punch:** Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 4B, Parry DV 5, Rate 3

**Kick:** Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 7B, Parry DV 3, Rate 2

**Clinch:** Speed 6, Accuracy 7, Damage 4B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Orichalcum Wavecleaver Daiklave (Sun Kisses the Waves):** Speed 5, Accuracy 13, Damage 11L/3, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

**Soak:** 11L/16B (Orichalcum reinforced buff jacket, +9L/12B, Hardness: 6L/6B, -1 mobility penalty)

**Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 6    **Willpower:** 7

**Essence:** 4

**Personal Essence:** 19

**Peripheral Essence:** 33 (46)

**Committed Essence:** 13

**Other Notes:** The Silver Prince gave Darktide an orichalcum hearthstone amulet and a set of orichalcum hearthstone bracers (Dodge DV bonus is already factored in). Darktide carries five hearthstones, three from Creation and two from the Underworld, which he switches between his artifacts as needed. They include a windhands gemstone, a bloodstone, a ghostwalker crystal, a gemstone of shadows and a survival stone. Only the windhands gemstone is Darktide's own. He received the others from the Silver Prince through the Underworld

Manse Background.

Note that Moray Darktide has a number of Backgrounds normally reserved for Abyssals. See **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abyssals** for their descriptions.

### THE GREEN LADY

After the Deathlords and the Dual Monarchs, the Sidereal Exalt called the Green Lady is perhaps the most powerful person in the Underworld. (Few consider the Neverborn or hekatonkhires to be persons.) She knew the Mask of Winters and Walker in Darkness before the Usurpation and found them both in the Underworld, shortly after they became Deathlords. They are both now her lovers. Neither one realizes that she also attends the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible and the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water, in various capacities. All her masters—including the Bureau of Destiny—think she betrays the others and *really* works for them alone. The truth is hidden so deeply in the hall of mirrors that is her soul that no one could find it... by now, not even the Green Lady herself. She has mastered so many ways of disguising and fragmenting her mind and identity that

she is no longer sure of her own ultimate loyalty.

One could encounter the Green Lady almost anywhere in the Underworld, on a mission for one of the four Deathlords against their enemies—including others among her masters. She prefers to achieve her goals by seduction, deception, bribery or other manipulations. If she has to, however, she is more than capable of using her Charms, martial arts and sorcery to fight.

Indeed, one of the Green Lady's well-kept secrets is her true prowess as a martial artist. Her assorted Deathlord associates know that she has mastered the Violet Bier of Sorrows Style, Dreaming Pearl Courtesan Style and the Night Breeze Style, as well as much of the



Terrestrial Hero Style. They also know she knows many Charms from the Obsidian Shards of Infinity and Prismatic Arrangement of Creation Styles of Sidereal martial arts. They do not know that she has mastered them completely—especially the Prismatic Arrangement of Creation Form that lets her wield multiple martial arts Form-type Charms at once.

A number of Abyssal, Solar and Lunar Exalts have had memorable encounters with the Green Lady. They don't realize that they have never met her at all, only the assorted false identities she uses so that people can remember her. "The Green Lady" is merely a common title assumed by several of these identities. She has also posed as an elderly male Sidereal, an Abyssal, a Solar Exalt and an Air-aspected Dragon-Blood, with the correct anima banners and powers.

The Green Lady has no objection to helping Creation's heroes, as long as doing so helps one of her patrons. In fact, she has already helped several Lawgivers make deals with the Deathlords. Exactly who comes out ahead in these bargains depends on one's point of view. Anyone who deals with the Green Lady finds that accepting her help aids one of Creation's deadliest enemies but blocks others. For instance, in trading an artifact to the Mask of Winters for help against a demonic invasion, a Lawgiver might find that he also gave the Deathlord the only weapon that can kill a powerful god, but in the course of obtaining the weapon, he disrupted a Fair Folk plot. Or a Lunar might find that, in stopping the Green Lady from performing a task for the Mask of Winters, he killed an enemy of the Walker in Darkness. Any encounter with the Green Lady tends to be confusing, what with all the double and triple agendas, but never dull.

**Motivation:** To find the secret of destroying the Deathlords. Maybe.

**Caste:** Chosen of Secrets

**Anima Banner:** A pale green radiance

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5; Charisma 7, Manipulation 7, Appearance 7; Perception 6, Intelligence 6, Wits 6

**Virtues:** Compassion 3, Conviction 5, Temperance 2, Valor 4

**Abilities:** Archery 3, Athletics 7, Awareness 7, Bureaucracy 5, Craft (Air) 2, Craft (Earth) 2, Craft (Fate) 6, Craft (Fire) 2, Craft (Genesis) 2, Craft (Magitech) 3, Craft (Water) 3, Craft (Wood) 2, Dodge 6, Integrity 6, Investigation 6, Larceny 7, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Other: Forest-Tongue, High Realm, Riverspeak, Seatongue, Skytongue) 5, Lore 5, Martial Arts 7, Medicine 4, Melee 4, Occult 5 (Ghosts +1), Performance 5 (Fan/Veil Dance +3), Presence 4, Resistance 5, Ride 3, Sail 4, Socialize 6, Stealth 5, Survival 3 (Underworld +2), Throw 5, War 3

**Backgrounds:** Acquaintances 3, Allies 5 (multiple Deathlords but only one at a time), Artifact (Skin Mount Amulet) 2, Artifact (Starmetal Straps) 3, Connections (Division of Secrets) 2, Connections (Kunlun City-States) 2, Connections (The Pyrron Ossuary) 2, Connections (The Skullstone Archipelago) 2, Connections (Stygia) 4, Connections (Thorns) 2,

Manse 3, Savant 3, Underworld Manse 5, Whispers 1

**Charms:** Absence, Auspicious Prospects for Secrets, Auspicious Prospects for Endings, Auspicious Prospects for Serenity, Avoidance Kata, Avoiding the Truth Technique, Blinding the Boar, Burn Life, Cash and Murder Games, Ceasing to Exist Approach, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Conning Chaos Technique, Creation-Preserving Will, Death-of-Self Meditation, Dream Confiscation Approach, Duck Fate, Efficient Secretary Technique, Embracing Life Method, Essence Thorn Practice, Expected Pain, Fateful Integrity Excellency, Fateful Lore Excellency, Fateful Resistance Excellency, Fateful Socialize Excellency, Favorable Inflection Procedure, First Dodge Excellency, First Larceny Excellency, First Melee Excellency, First Resistance Excellency, First Thrown Excellency, Forgotten Earth, Fortuitous Fellowship, Gift of a Broken Mask, Harmony of Blows, Heartless Maiden Trance, Impeding the Flow, Life Without Compunction, Mark of Exaltation, Masque of the Uncanny, Methodology of Secrets, Name-Pilfering Practice, Of Horrors Best Unknown, Of Secrets Yet Untold, Of the Shape of the World, Of Things Desired and Feared, Of Truths Best Unspoken, Optimistic Security Practice, Ordained Bridle of Mercury, Ox-Body Technique, Preservation of Resolve, Prior Warning, Propitious Martial Arts Alignment, Propitious Stealth Alignment, Research Assistant Invocation, Second Investigation Excellency, Second Lore Excellency, Second Martial Arts Excellency, Second Presence Excellency, Second Socialize Excellency, Second Stealth Excellency, Serenity in Blood, Shadow Piercing Needle, Shadowland Circle Necromancy, Shield of Destiny, Shun the Smiling Lady, Sidereal Shell Games, Soft Presence Practice, Someone Else's Destiny, Stern Essence Replenishment, Subordinate Inspiration Technique, Supernal Awareness, Telltale Symphony, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Third Athletics Excellency, Third Integrity Excellency, Third Larceny Excellency, Thought-Swiping Distraction, Transcendent Hatchet of Fate, Unhearing Dedication, Unwavering Well-Being Meditation, Walking Outside Fate, Wanting and Fearing Prayer, Wise Choice, Yellow Path, You and Yours Stance

**Martial Arts:**

*Dreaming Pearl Courtesan Style:* All Charms

*Violet Bier of Sorrows Style:* All Charms

*Night Breeze Style:* All Charms

*Obsidian Shards of Infinity Style:* All Charms

*Prismatic Arrangement of Creation Style:* All Charms; Air-aspected Terrestrial Ways, Changing Moon Lunar Ways, Night Solar Ways

*Terrestrial Hero Style:* Currents Sweep to Sea, Flow from the Rocks, Pounding Surf Style, Riptide Method, Terrestrial Hero Form

**Spells:** Banish Ghost, Cirrus Skiff, Demon of the First Circle, Disguise of the New Face, Dolorous Reflection, Door of the Dead, Dusk Eyes, Emerald Circle Banishment, Emerald Countermagic, Flight of Separation, Infallible Messenger,

Sapphire Circle Banishment, Sapphire Countermagic, Soul Brand, Summon Elemental

**Colleges:** The Banner 1, The Captain 1, The Corpse 3, The Crow 2, The Ewer 2, The Gauntlet 1, The Guardians 4, The Gull 1, The Haywain 2, The Key 3, The Lovers 3, The Mask 5, The Mast 1, The Messenger 2, The Musician 1, The Peacock 3, The Pillar 3, The Quiver 2, The Rising Smoke 3, The Shield 1, The Ship's Wheel 2, The Sorcerer 4, The Spear 1, The Sword 2, The Treasure Trove 3

**Join Battle:** 26

**Attacks:**

**Punch:** Speed 5, Accuracy 14, Damage 4B, Parry DV 8, Rate 3

**Kick:** Speed 5, Accuracy 13, Damage 7B, Parry DV 6, Rate 2

**Clinch:** Speed 6, Accuracy 13, Damage 4B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Starmetal Strap Whip:** Speed 4, Accuracy 15, Damage 9B, Parry DV 7, Rate 2

**Needle:** Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 1L, Rate 3, Range 10

**Soak:** 3L/5B

**Health Levels:** -0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/-

**Incap**

**Dodge DV:** 10 **Willpower:** 8

**Essence:** 7

**Personal Essence:** 22 **Peripheral Essence:** 61 (64)

**Committed Essence:** 3

**Other Notes:** The leather straps that form the Green Lady's only clothing are edged with fine starmetal stitching. They compose an artifact that she can unwind and wield like a collection of whips for the Dreaming Pearl Courtesan Style. The combat traits given here include the whips' magical material bonus but not the effects of Charms.

The Green Lady always uses at least two methods to disguise her identity. For instance, she uses a resplendent destiny and Disguise of the New Face; or she uses God Ways to inhabit someone else's body, then a stone of gender transformation in her skin mount amulet—and mundane disguise skills on top of that. Each of the Deathlords she serves believes that he has penetrated the Green Lady's disguises. All are wrong.

## GHOSTS

Ghosts who endure for centuries or millennia can become very powerful. Those who wielded Essence in life—ghosts of the Exalted and such ilk—have a head start, but any ghost can achieve a strength of Essence comparable to an experienced Exalt. Such ghosts

become leaders and power brokers among their kind. Rather less often, ghosts interact with powerful, ghostly creatures that have no connection to humanity, such as hekatonkhiros.

## THE COUNCIL OF THIRTEEN

The rulers of Stygia's districts—those who actually dwell in the city, at least—form a diverse group of ghosts. They know they rule at the sufferance of the Deathlords, because those mighty ghosts do not care to assume the tedium of administering the Underworld's largest city. Some Councilors accept this as a fact they must endure. Others try to curry favor with Stygia's true masters. Still others—prouder, braver or perhaps simply more foolish—dare to stand against the Deathlords with whatever power they command. None of them, however, are weak or stupid. A visitor opposes a Councilor at her peril.

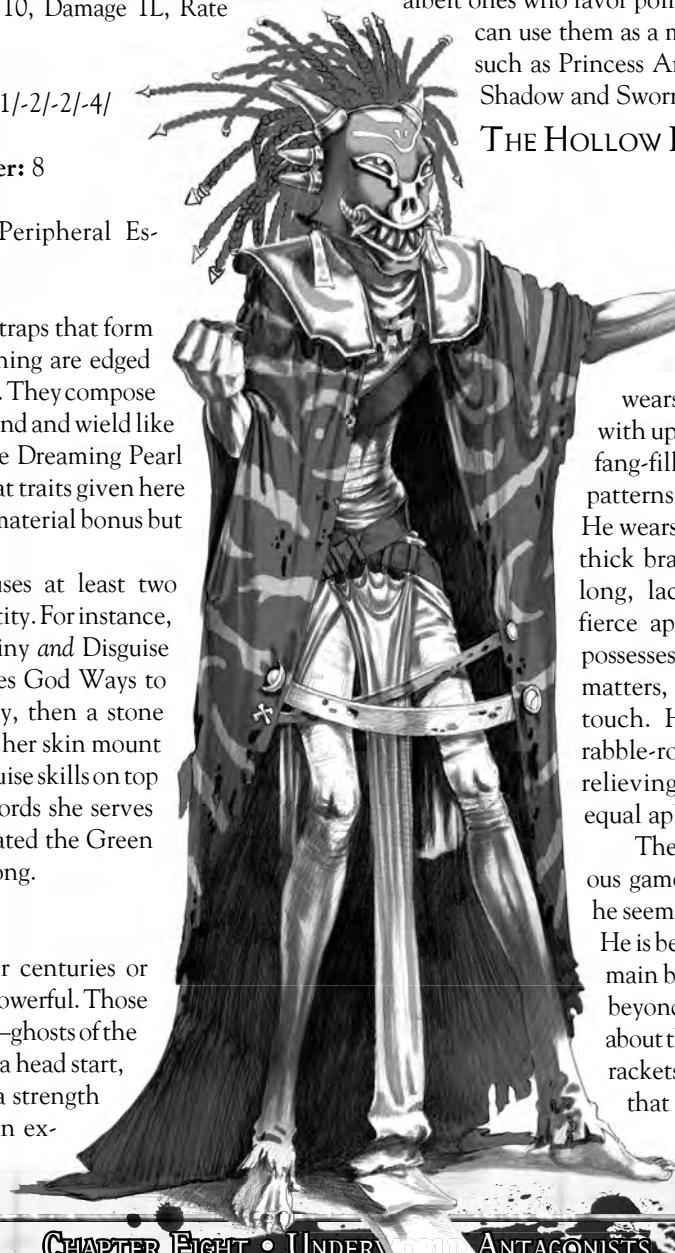
The following includes only five of the 13 Councilors. It provides a representative sampling of old, powerful ghosts, albeit ones who favor politics over combat. Storytellers can use them as a model for other ghostly rulers, such as Princess Annuaski, Queen Defiance-in-Shadow and Sworn-to-Fireblood.

### THE HOLLOW KING

The longest seated member of the Council rules the Little Shoe District. The Hollow King

wears a grotesque wooden mask with upturned eyes and a smiling but fang-filled mouth. Swirling, hypnotic patterns cover his silk and linen robes. He wears his dark, coarse hair in long, thick braids, while his fingers end in long, lacquered talons. Despite his fierce appearance, the Hollow King possesses an urbane wit and graceful manner, while keeping the common touch. He can deliver thunderous, rabble-rousing oratory or a tension-relieving, humorous anecdote with equal aplomb.

The Hollow King plays a dangerous game of intrigue. On the surface, he seems like a minor power in Stygia. He is beyond challenge in his own domain but demonstrates no ambitions beyond Little Shoe. He cares little about the graft, kickbacks and assorted rackets that afflict his district—only that he gets his cut. Nevertheless, the Hollow King recognizes



that, for the good of the Underworld, the Dual Monarchy must stand and the Deathlords must fail. This elder ghost constantly prunes back the Deathlords' organizations in Stygia, whether by assassin's blades or by drawing their agents into scandals that ruin their effectiveness. The Hollow King knows he cannot interfere too much, lest a Deathlord notice the hindrance and trace it to its source, but he does what he can and renders covert aid to other foes of Oblivion.

While the Hollow King avoids combat when possible, he secrets about his person a number of throwing knives and phials of poison (obtained from the Mistress with the White Hands) he can place on those blades or on his own claws. When he assumes his Ghost-Devil Form, his lacquered nails swell into monstrous talons, he gains three extra pairs of arms (enabling him to flurry up to three attacks without a multiple action penalty), and he gains +2L/2B soak. If an encounter goes badly, the Hollow King can use Assassin's Subtle Escape to leap to an object in Creation then use Motivated Shell to move somewhere else before returning to the Underworld.

**Motivation:** Block the plans of the Deathlords.

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5; Charisma 6, Manipulation 6, Appearance 2; Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

**Virtues:** Compassion 4, Conviction 3, Temperance 5, Valor 3

**Abilities:** Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 5 (Organized Crime +2, Bribery +1), Craft (Moliation) 4, Dodge 4, Integrity 5, Investigation 5 (Hidden Vices +3), Larceny 5 (Manufacture Scandals +3), Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Others: Low Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 3, Lore 2 (Stygian History +2), Martial Arts 4, Melee 2, Occult 4, Performance 5 (Raconteur +2), Presence 5 (Rabble-Rousing +2), Resistance 3, Socialize 5, Stealth 4, Survival 2, Thrown 5 (Knives +3)

**Backgrounds:** Allies 5, Artifact (Soulfire Mask) 2, Backing (Council of Thirteen) 3, Contacts 5, Followers 3, Influence 3, Resources 4, Underworld Cult 3

**Arcanoi:**

Common Arcanoi: Assassin's Subtle Escape, Motivated Shell

Essence-Measuring Thief Arts: All Charms

Shifting Ghost-Clay Path: All Charms

Stringless Puppeteer Art: All Charms

Tangled Web Arts: All Charms

**Join Battle:** 10

**Attacks:**

*Punch:* Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 2B, Parry DV 5, Rate 3

*Kick:* Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 5B, Parry DV 3, Rate 2

*Clinch:* Speed 6, Accuracy 8, Damage 2B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

*Ghost-Devil Claws:* Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 5L, Parry DV 5, Rate 2

*Knife:* Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 4L, Parry DV 3, Rate 3

*Lacquered Nails:* Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 2L, Parry DV 5, Rate 3

*Knife (thrown):* Speed 5, Accuracy 12, Damage 4L, Rate 3, Range 15

*Soulfire Mask Arc:* Speed 4, Accuracy 11, Damage 7L, Range 20 (maximum range), Rate 1

**Soak:** 3L/5B

**Corpus Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 7

**Willpower:** 8

**Essence:** 5

**Essence Pool:** 104

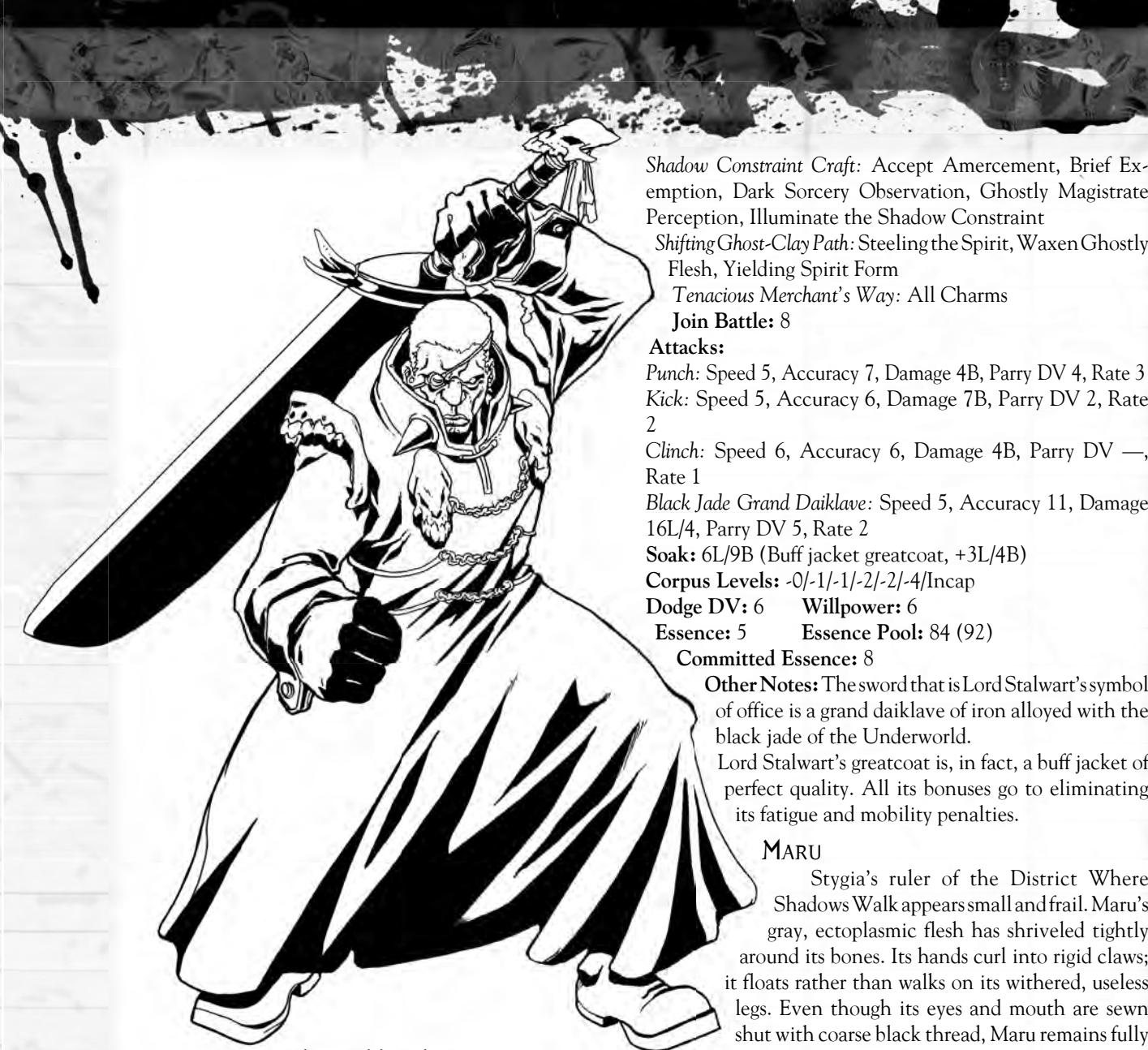
**Other Notes:** The mask the Hollow King wears is an artifact known as a soulfire mask. It possesses sockets containing two four-dot Essence-containing gems (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abyssals**, pp. 215 and 216, for details) as its power source. By expending three motes of the mask's Essence, the Hollow King can reflexively surround himself in a crackling nimbus of energy that increases his soak by 4L/6B against a single attack. By expending four motes of the artifact's Essence, the ghost can instead fire an arc of the same blue-white energy against a target up to 20 yards away (as per the listed attack).

## LORD STALWART

The wealthiest and perhaps most powerful member of Stygia's Council rules the Street of Swords. He looks like a fit, middle-aged man with a lined face and close-cropped, iron-gray hair. Lord Stalwart usually wears dark clothing with a vest and greatcoat adorned with silver buttons and thin silver chains. He carries the symbol of his district and office, a huge sword of black iron, slung on his back. Lord Stalwart seldom raises his smooth tenor voice. He is well known as a keen debater and a witty conversationalist.

Lord Stalwart is also known as a greedy, ruthless and power-hungry businessman whose "business" often involves threats from armed thugs and other tactics not usually considered acceptable under Stygian law. He routinely bribes or bullies anyone who gets in the way of his profits. The ghosts of Lord Stalwart's district dislike him, for they know that he places his own profit above the public good. Unfortunately for those who would replace him, Lord Stalwart also wields his sword with great skill.

Perhaps more importantly, Lord Stalwart has powerful associates. He allied with the First and Forsaken Lion when that Deathlord invaded Stygia. The partnership was not as equal as Lord Stalwart hoped. Recently, he turned to the Courtier of Silk and Shadow and the Emissary of Righteous Victory in hopes of gaining some leverage on the Deathlord. Instead, he found himself still more tightly trapped in intrigue with creatures immensely more dangerous than himself. Oblivion has already claimed three of Lord Stalwart's lieutenants, and he now hears its whispers himself. At last, he understands the true agenda of his allies—too late. He seeks an alternative to the madness of the Void or destruction by its servants, but he sees no escape that does not involve him abandoning his wealth and power. In Lethe, you can't take it with you...



**Motivation:** Increase his wealth and power.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5; Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3; Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

**Virtues:** Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 4, Valor 3

**Abilities:** Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 4 (Bribery +3), Dodge 3, Integrity 3, Investigation 4, Larceny 2 (Bald-Faced Lies +3), Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Flametongue, Riverspeak, Seatongue) 3 (Written Veiled Promises +2), Lore 2 (Stygian History +2), Martial Arts 2, Melee 5, Occult 2, Performance 3, Presence 4, Resistance 2, Ride 2, Socialize 5, Stealth 2, War 2

**Backgrounds:** Allies 4, Artifact (Black Jade Grand Daiklave) 2, Backing (Council of Thirteen) 3, Contacts 4, Followers 3, Grave Goods 2, Influence 3, Resources 5, Whispers 1

#### **Arcanoi:**

Common Arcanoi: Assassin's Subtle Escape, Former Life Destruction Method, Motivated Shell

Essence-Measuring Thief Arts: All Charms

**Shadow Constraint Craft:** Accept Amercement, Brief Exemption, Dark Sorcery Observation, Ghostly Magistrate Perception, Illuminate the Shadow Constraint

**Shifting Ghost-Clay Path:** Steeling the Spirit, Waxen Ghostly Flesh, Yielding Spirit Form

**Tenacious Merchant's Way:** All Charms

**Join Battle:** 8

#### **Attacks:**

**Punch:** Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 4B, Parry DV 4, Rate 3  
**Kick:** Speed 5, Accuracy 6, Damage 7B, Parry DV 2, Rate 2

**Clinch:** Speed 6, Accuracy 6, Damage 4B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Black Jade Grand Daiklave:** Speed 5, Accuracy 11, Damage 16L/4, Parry DV 5, Rate 2

**Soak:** 6L/9B (Buff jacket greatcoat, +3L/4B)

**Corpus Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Icap

**Dodge DV:** 6    **Willpower:** 6

**Essence:** 5    **Essence Pool:** 84 (92)

#### **Committed Essence:** 8

**Other Notes:** The sword that is Lord Stalwart's symbol of office is a grand daiklave of iron alloyed with the black jade of the Underworld.

Lord Stalwart's greatcoat is, in fact, a buff jacket of perfect quality. All its bonuses go to eliminating its fatigue and mobility penalties.

#### **MARU**

Stygia's ruler of the District Where Shadows Walk appears small and frail. Maru's gray, ectoplasmic flesh has shriveled tightly around its bones. Its hands curl into rigid claws; it floats rather than walks on its withered, useless legs. Even though its eyes and mouth are sewn shut with coarse black thread, Maru remains fully aware of its surroundings. It speaks in a shifting, ethereal voice, as if many different people spoke from far away and Maru picked words from their speech and assembled them into sentences.

Like all nephwracks, Maru is completely mad. It speaks with unusual coherence for a nephwrack, though, and its stranger utterances often seem quite insightful when taken in a different context. Its actions similarly often seem random, but nevertheless advance it toward its goals. (How could it have known that by launching a crude toy boat with an Akian flag on the Styx, it would bring together two old enemies who would then fight to the second death to remove one of its rival rulers' most valued agents?) Sane ghosts speculate that Maru hears more in the Whispers of the Neverborn than most spectres manage.

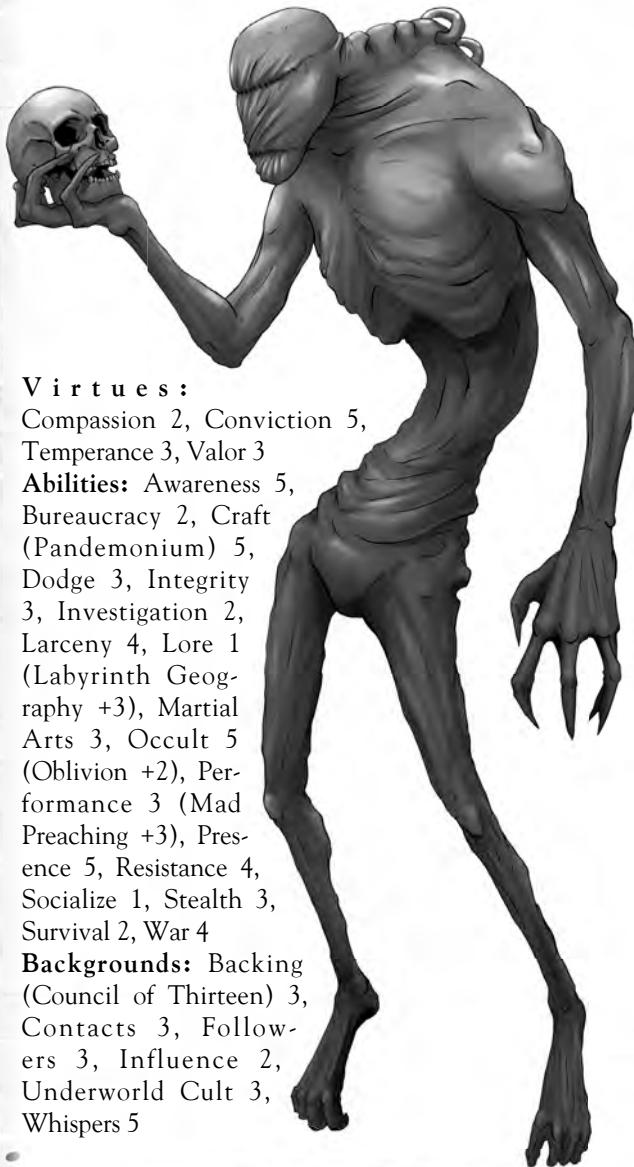
Maru has kept peace among the spectre factions for almost a year and seems likely to set a duration record as ruler of its district. Its prowess at Arcanoi and necromancy has few equals in Stygia. The newly arrived Emissary of Righteous Victory surpasses it, though. Maru hates the Emissary and works about

as coherently as a nephwrack can to expel or destroy its rival. It also frequently interferes with anything the other districts' rulers try to achieve, whether good, bad or indifferent.

The nephwrack's withered body is unskilled at physical combat. Therefore, Maru prefers to attack using terrifying illusions (crafted using Terror-Spreading Art) or necromancy (Banish Ghost against ghosts, Bone Puppet Dance or Flesh-Sloughing Wave against mortals). It also wears a collar bearing four delicate bone pendants. Each pendant is a shade prison amulet for a hungry ghost that Maru can release and command to fight on its behalf.

**Motivation:** Disrupt every plan that does not serve the Neverborn.

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4; Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 1; Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5



**Virtues:**

Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 3, Valor 3

**Abilities:** Awareness 5,

Bureaucracy 2, Craft (Pandemonium) 5, Dodge 3, Integrity 3, Investigation 2, Larceny 4, Lore 1 (Labyrinth Geography +3), Martial Arts 3, Occult 5 (Oblivion +2), Performance 3 (Mad Preaching +3), Presence 5, Resistance 4, Socialize 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2, War 4

**Backgrounds:** Backing (Council of Thirteen) 3, Contacts 3, Followers 3, Influence 2, Underworld Cult 3, Whispers 5

**Arcanoi:**

Common Arcanoi: Breeze-Carried Ash Form, Moon's Cold Glow, Pyre Smoke Form

Essence-Measuring Thief Arts: All Charms

Savage Ghost Tamer Arts: Call the Ravening Hound, Command the Hungry Devil, Diversion of the Savage Hunger, Dust Commands Litany, Tame the Wicked Appetite, Taste the Demon Wind

Shadow Constraint Craft: Brief Exemption, Dark Sorcery Observation, Ghostly Magistrate Perception, Illuminate the Shadow Constraint

Stringless Puppeteer Art: Skin-Riding Prana, Soul-Whispering Empathy Discipline, Spirit-Catching Eye Technique

Terror-Spreading Art: All Charms

**Spells:** Banish Ghost, Bone Puppet Dance, Flesh-Sloughing Wave, Gathering a Ghost's Strings, Iron Countermagic, Shade Prison Amulet

**Join Battle:** 10

**Attacks:**

**Claw:** Speed 5, Accuracy 6, Damage 2L, Parry DV 4, Rate 3

**Clinch:** Speed 6, Accuracy 5, Damage 2B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Soak:** 2L/4B

**Corpus Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 5

**Willpower:** 8

**Essence:** 5

**Essence Pool:** 100

**Committed Essence:** 0

**Other Notes:** None

## THE MISTRESS WITH THE WHITE HANDS

The pallid beauty of the Mistress with the White Hands has few equals in Stygia. The ruler of the District with the Bone Lanterns has a face as white and delicate as that of a porcelain doll. An unfelt wind moves her long, dark hair; a lover could drown in her dark, long-lashed eyes. Robes of sheer, translucent silk emphasize rather than conceal her small, shapely body. She removes her long, white gloves only when she intends to kill and assumes her clawed Ghost-Devil Form.

The Mistress with the White Hands was a slave and a whore in life, and was forced to continue that trade in death... though not forever. She no longer offers her favors except when it advances her own goals. The Mistress owns much of the district she rules, and her courtesans tell her all the secrets they hear. At Stygia's Council meetings, she listens more than she speaks. When she does address her colleagues, her counsel is logical, astute and to the point. Many view her as the wisest and most compassionate member of the Council of Thirteen. The other Councilors view her warily, for they know the subtlety of her plots. The Mistress with the White Hands does not wish to cause pain or discord, but she will keep her district safe, and she will never, ever be a slave again.

**Motivation:** Control everyone who would control her.

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3; Charisma 5, Manipulation 6, Appearance 5; Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

**Virtues:** Compassion 5, Conviction 3, Temperance 4, Valor 2

**Abilities:** Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 4, Craft (Moliation) 4 (Entrancement Visage +2), Craft (Pandemonium) 3, Dodge 4, Integrity 4, Investigation 4 (Pillow Talk +2), Larceny 3 (Sleight of Hand +3), Linguistics (Native: Riverspeak; Other: High Realm, Low Realm, Old Realm) 3, Lore 3 (Stygia's Secrets +2), Martial Arts 2, Medicine 2 (Underworld Drugs and Toxins +2), Melee 2, Occult 3, Performance 5, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Socialize 5 (Blackmail +2), Stealth 3

**Backgrounds:** Allies 4, Backing (Council of Thirteen) 3, Contacts 4, Influence 3, Resources 4, Underworld Cult 3

#### **Arcanoi:**

Common Arcanoi: Former Life Destruction Technique, Pyre Smoke Form, Two-World Vision, Whispers of the Living Essence-Measuring Thief Arts: Aura-Reading Technique

Shifting Ghost-Clay Path: All Charms

Tangled Web Arts: All Charms

Terror-Spreading Art: Black Breath of the Abyss, Corpse-Fed Radiance, Painting the Sunset Picture

*Irresistible Visage:* This refinement on the Vision of Loveliness effect of the Nine Terrors Visage Charm from the Shifting Ghost-Clay Path gives the Mistress with the White Hands such beauty that any creature with a mind of its own falls recklessly in love with her. The victim must follow her suggestions or do whatever he thinks will please her, unless his player succeeds at a Temperance roll at difficulty 2. The enthrallment lasts one scene and costs the Mistress eight motes.

**Join Battle:** 9

#### **Attacks:**

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 2B, Parry DV 4, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 6, Damage 5B, Parry DV 2, Rate 2



**Clinch:** Speed 6, Accuracy 6, Damage 2B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Ghost-Devil Claws:** Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 5L, Parry DV 4, Rate 2

**Stiletto:** Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 2L (piercing + poison), Parry DV 3, Rate 3

**Soak:** 2L/3B

**Corpus Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/  
Incap

**Dodge DV:** 6 **Willpower:** 7

**Essence:** 4 **Essence Pool:** 89

**Committed Essence:** 0

**Other Notes:** The Mistress with the White Hands knows how to brew and use various Underworld poisons. She usually anoints her stiletto with a toxin equal to arrow frog venom (see *Exalted*, p. 131). She also employs a soporific toxin with the same traits, except it inflicts bashing damage. This toxin can be placed on her stiletto or in a cup of ghostly wine. She even keeps a small supply of Lethe serpent venom (see p. 151) on hand, perhaps the kindest way to "kill" a ghost.

## UNWANTED WHISPER, THE ORPHAN QUEEN

The ruler of the District of the Whispering Streets looks like a young girl with large, soulful eyes and dark hair in a pageboy cut. Her grand robes look ridiculously oversized on her small frame. Her grave goods are limited to a sling.

She speaks in a soft, little-girl voice, sounding timid and uneducated. She prefers for the other Council members to ignore her, and they usually oblige.

Yet Unwanted Whisper does rule a district of Stygia. In life, she was a street rat. The streets killed her, but she refused to die. The District of the Whispering Streets tried to break her mind, but she resisted. Unwanted Whisper never quits or surrenders. She might not know the great occult secrets other Councilors hold, but she knows what's fair and what's sane. The Orphan Queen also knows well what horrors the Labyrinth and Oblivion wreak upon her district. She knows that the Deathlords are mad tyrants who spread Oblivion's poison, and she says so. In public. Repeatedly.

Politically minded ghosts anticipate Unwanted Whisper's assassination, but her district's ghosts revere her for having the guts to say what no one else would dare. Outside her cursed district, the Orphan Queen has no wealth or power, but her personal honor guard is fiercely loyal. She also has hidden friends on the Council, who share her view regarding the Deathlords. Unwanted Whisper cannot really fight the Deathlords or their servants, though. At most, her followers can engage in petty sabotage and obstruction of their minions.

**Motivation:** Survive to say what no one else would dare.

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3; Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2; Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Virtues:** Compassion 4, Conviction 4, Temperance 2, Valor 2

**Abilities:** Athletics 2, Awareness 4 (Spot Ambush +2), Bureaucracy 2 (Obstructionism +3), Craft (Pandemonium) 3, Dodge 3, Integrity 5 (Resist Oblivion +3), Investigation 3, Larceny 5, Linguistics (Native: Low Realm; Others: High Realm, Old Realm) 2, Martial Arts 2 (Wriggle Free +3), Melee 1, Occult 1 (Oblivion +1), Presence 2 (Truth to Power +2), Resistance 3, Socialize 2, Stealth 4 (Fade into the Background +2), Survival 2 (Urban +2), Thrown 4

**Backgrounds:** Allies (Two Other Councilors) 2, Artifact (Night Mother Doll) 3, Backing (Council of Thirteen) 3, Contacts 2, Followers 2, Grave Goods 1, Influence 2, Resources 1, Underworld Cult 3, Whispers 1

#### Arcanoi:

Common Arcanoi: Breeze-Carried Ash Form, Pyre Smoke Form

*Savage Ghost Tamer Arts:* Call the Ravening Hound, Diversion of the Savage Hunger, Tame the Wicked Appetite, Taste the Demon Wind

*Stringless Puppeteer Art:* All Charms

*Tenacious Merchant's Way:* Careful Debtor Stance, Earnest Creditor Technique, Jangling Coin Pouch Sense

#### Join Battle: 8

#### Attacks:

**Punch:** Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 1B, Parry DV 4, Rate 3

**Kick:** Speed 5, Accuracy 6, Damage 4B, Parry DV 2, Rate 2

**Clinch:** Speed 6, Accuracy 6, Damage 1B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Knife:** Speed 5, Accuracy 6, Damage 3L, Parry DV 3, Rate 3

**Knife (thrown):** Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 3L, Rate 3, Range 15

**Sling:** Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 3L, Rate 1, Range 100

**Soak:** 2L/3B

**Corpus Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 6      **Willpower:** 8

**Essence:** 4      **Essence Pool:** 88

**Committed Essence:** 0



**Other Notes:** Unwanted Whisper has come into possession of a night mother doll. This large doll of jade and silk can be commanded by the Orphan Queen to grow to the size of an adult, in which form it possesses the attributes of an unarmed jade effigy (see pp. 147-148 and 158). Only the ghost of a child who died prior to her tenth birthday can claim a night mother doll.

## OTHER NOTABLE INDIVIDUALS

Most of the Underworld's powerful entities prefer to operate independently, or at least keep their associations looser and less formal than the Deathlords' mastery of their minions or the Council of Thirteen. Each of the following characters expects to be the most powerful person in any encounter with anything less than

a Deathlord. Each can become a formidable adversary, though a few could become dangerous and unreliable allies. Any meeting between two of these entities holds great significance for entire nations of the Underworld.

## THE COURTIER OF SILK AND SHADOW

His official title is Chief Liaison of Stygia to the Deathlords. A more honest title would be Chief Panderer. Whatever the Deathlords want when they visit Stygia—from a lavish party to a ghostly virgin to sacrifice—the Courtier of Silk and Shadow strives to provide. He wields tremendous power in the Palace of the Dual Monarchy and the city beyond, simply by asking anyone who balks him if they want to be known as the ghost who disappointed and irritated a Deathlord. If that does not suffice, the Courtier calls upon a small army of war ghost bodyguards or assassins supplied by his ally Lord Stalwart. The Courtier also trades favors with the Emissary of Righteous Victory. Stygia's highest-placed toady seeks power by serving the powerful. He sees the forces of Oblivion as the greatest power in Stygia.

The Courtier of Silk and Shadow looks like an incredibly handsome man on the young edge of middle age. His looks make him seem distinguished rather than a boy-toy. Long, dark, oiled ringlets frame his flawless face. His eyes, however, are pits of darkness and hunger. He dresses in dark silk and velvet robes tastefully adorned with inconspicuous jewelry. He carries no weapons except his enchanted robes. He has 20 war ghost bodyguards (see *Exalted*, p. 318) to protect him, however, as well as a constant retinue of clerks, gofers and valets to hide behind. The Courtier of Silk and Shadow would fight to defend himself only if he had no alternative.

**Motivation:** Serve the powerful.

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4; Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 5; Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

**Virtues:** Compassion 3, Conviction 3, Temperance 3, Valor 2

**Abilities:** Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 5 (Organize Fêtes +2), Craft (Moliation) 4, Dodge 3, Integrity 4 (Hide Emotions +3), Investigation 4 (Finding People +3), Larceny 2 (Organized Crime +3), Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Others: Low Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak, Skytongue) 4 (Flattering Phrasing +3), Lore 2 (Dossiers on the Great +3), Martial Arts 1, Medicine 2 (Recreational Drugs +3), Occult 1 (Unusual Powers +3), Performance 5, Presence 5 (Uncouth +3), Ride 1, Socialize 5 (Courtly Grace +3)

**Backgrounds:** Allies 5, Artifact (Demon-Embracing Robes) 3, Artifact (Essence-Containing Gem) 5, Backing (Court of the Dual Monarchy) 4, Contacts 5, Followers 2, Influence 3, Resources 5

#### **Arcanoi:**

Essence-Measuring Thief Arts: All Charms

Shifting Ghost-Clay Path: Steeling the Spirit, Stolen Wax Discipline, Waxen Ghostly Flesh, Yielding Spirit Form Stringless Puppeteer Art: Skin-Riding Prana, Soul-Whispering Empathy Discipline, Spirit-Catching Eye Technique

#### **Join Battle:** 7

#### **Attacks:**

Punch (with demon-embracing robes): Speed 5, Accuracy 11, Damage 7B, Parry DV 3, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 4, Damage 5B, Parry DV 1, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 4, Damage 2B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Soak:** 8L/8B (Demon-embracing robes, +6L/4B)

Corpus Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 5 Willpower: 7

Essence: 4 Essence Pool: 75 (83)

Committed Essence: 8

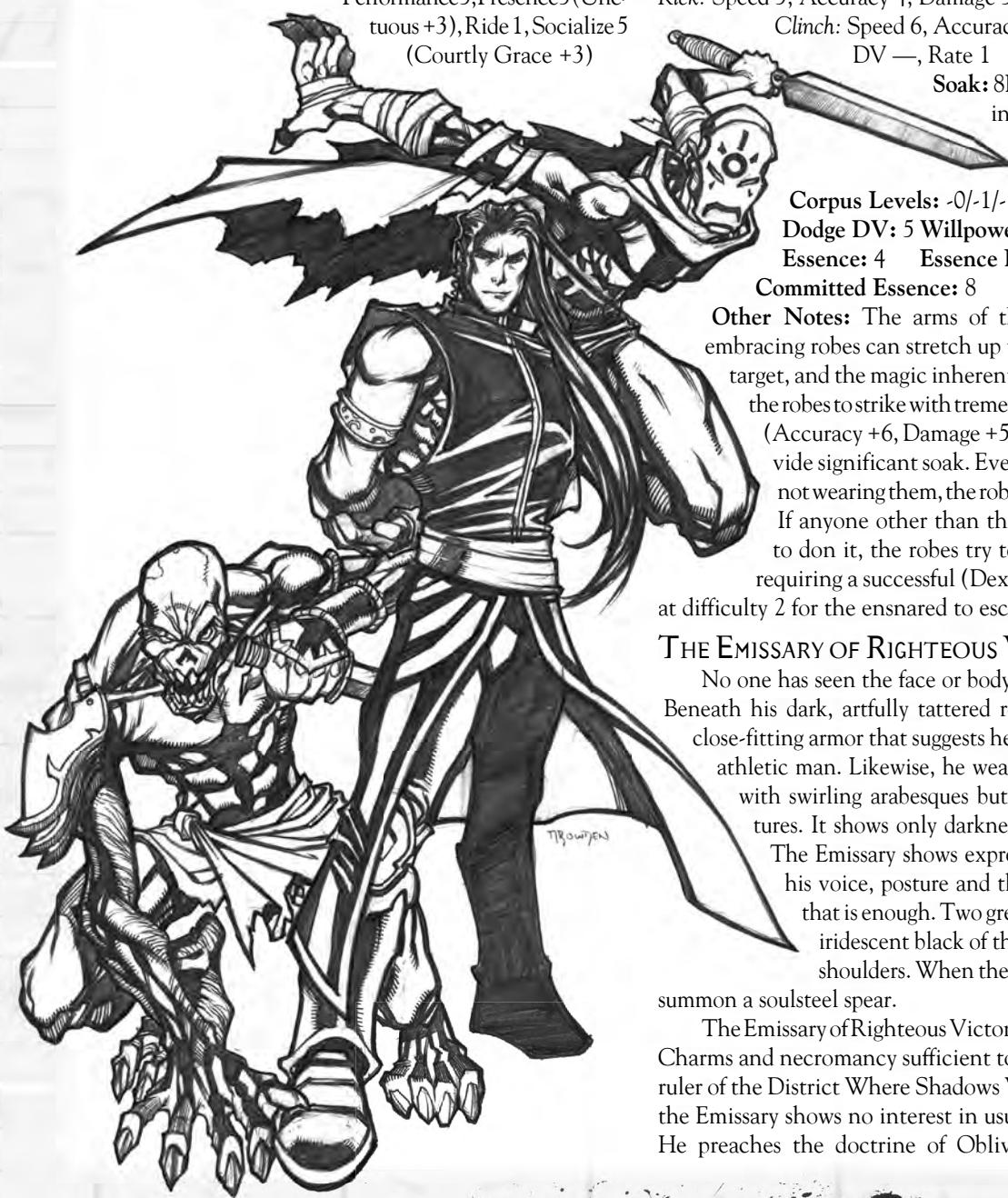
**Other Notes:** The arms of the Courtier's demon-embracing robes can stretch up to two yards to strike a target, and the magic inherent to the garment allows the robes to strike with tremendous skill and strength (Accuracy +6, Damage +5B). The robes also provide significant soak. Even when the Courtier is not wearing them, the robes can prove dangerous. If anyone other than the artifact's owner tries to don it, the robes try to ensnare that person, requiring a successful (Dexterity + Athletics) roll at difficulty 2 for the ensnared to escape.

### THE EMISSARY OF RIGHTEOUS VICTORY

No one has seen the face or body of this potent spectre. Beneath his dark, artfully tattered robes, he wears silvery, close-fitting armor that suggests he has the body of a slim, athletic man. Likewise, he wears a silver mask chased with swirling arabesques but devoid of human features. It shows only darkness behind the eye slits.

The Emissary shows expression entirely through his voice, posture and the tilt of his head, and that is enough. Two great wings, fledged in the iridescent black of the Void, spring from his shoulders. When the Emissary wants, he can summon a soulsteel spear.

The Emissary of Righteous Victory has evinced Arcanoi, Charms and necromancy sufficient to overpower Maru, the ruler of the District Where Shadows Walk. So far, however, the Emissary shows no interest in usurping the nephwrack. He preaches the doctrine of Oblivion (with far greater



coherence and logic than any nephwrack) and assists the Deathlords as a neutral agent and interlocutor, working for all and beholden to none. At times the Emissary seems amused by the Deathlords' pretensions, though he respects their power.

**Motivation:** Draw other creatures willingly to the Abyss.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6; Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4; Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

**Virtues:** Compassion 3, Conviction 5, Temperance 4, Valor 4

**Abilities:** Athletics 5, Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 2 (Chains of the Ancient Monarchs +3), Craft (Fire) 4, Craft (Pandemonium) 4, Dodge 6, Integrity 6, Investigation 3 (Spot Deception +3), Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Flamentongue, Forest-Tongue, High Realm, Low Realm, Riverspeak, Skytongue) 6, Lore 3 (Artifacts of Oblivion +2), Martial Arts 3, Melee 4 (Spears +2), Occult 5 (Oblivion +3), Performance 4, Presence 5, Resistance 4, Socialize 2 (Courtly Grace +2), Stealth 6 (Appear Suddenly +2)

**Backgrounds:** Allies (Deathlords) 5, Artifact (Soulsteel Articulated Plate) 4, Artifact (Soulsteel Dire Lance) 4, Contacts 3, Followers 3, Influence 3, Underworld Cult 2, Underworld Mans 5

**Arcanoi:**

Chains of the Ancient Monarchs: All Charms

Essence-Measuring Thief Arts: All Charms

Noble Craftsman Ways: All Charms

Savage Ghost Tamer Arts: All Charms

Scholarly Ways: Discerning Student Technique, Imperious Instructor's Dictate, Masterly Pedagogical Inquiry, Unseemly Librarian Nature

Shadow Constraint Craft: All Charms

Terror-Spreading Art: All Charms

**Abyssal Charms:** Blade-Summoning Gesture, Crouching Gargoyle Stance, Dread Lord's Demeanor, Essence-Draining Touch, Exquisite Etiquette Style, Falling Scythe Attack, First Athletics Excellency, First Melee Excellency, First Performance Excellency, First Presence Excellency, Five Shadow Feint, Mist Over Ice, Morbid Fascination Style, On Wings of Night, Ox-Body Technique (x3), Raiton's Nimble Perch, Second Dodge Excellency, Shadowlands Circle Necromancy, Soul-Flaying Gaze, Spider Pounce Technique, Void Sheath Technique

**Spells:** Banish Ghost; Death Inversion Loop; Five Gifts; Iron Countermagic; Silent Master's Pollen; Soul Brand; Stones Worn Smooth; Summon Ghost; Without Pity, Without Scorn

**Join Battle:** 10

**Attacks:**

**Punch:** Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 4B, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

**Kick:** Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 7B, Parry DV 4, Rate 2

**Cinch:** Speed 6, Accuracy 9, Damage 4B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Soulsteel Dire Lance (Void Apostle):** Speed 5, Accuracy 14, Damage\* 12L/16L, Parry DV 7, Rate 2

\* Anyone struck by Void Apostle hears the Whispers of Oblivion (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The Black Treatise**, p. 33 or, for more extensive explanation, **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abyssals** or **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. V—The Roll of Glorious Divinity II**). The target, ghost or mortal, hears Oblivion's voice until his player succeeds at an (Integrity + Willpower) roll at difficulty 5, checked daily. Failure means the target spends the day engaged in abhorrent crimes against existence and all he holds dear. Exalted can resist this Total Control effect for a day by spending four Willpower.



**Soak:** 15L/20B (Soulsteel articulated plate +12L/14B, Hardness: 8L/8B, -2 mobility penalty, 1 fatigue value)

**Corpus Levels:** -0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Icap

**Dodge DV:** 7    **Willpower:** 10

**Essence:** 6    **Essence Pool:** 111 (122)

**Committed Essence:** 11

**Other Notes:** The Emissary of Righteous Victory prefers to convert foes rather than destroy them. His favorite tactic is to immobilize a foe using Essence Lasso Form, then pierce the enemy with Void Apostle to inflict no more than one level of damage. Afterward, the Emissary leaves. Unless the victim is unusually strong-willed and self-controlled, he soon commits such abominable deeds that he has no choice but to join Oblivion's side. (Barring that, he can certainly never show his face in Stygia again.) Only if the Emissary faces powerful foes (especially Exalts) does he use his unique Arcanos Charms (which mirror certain Abyssal Charms). He particularly likes the spectacular Falling Scythe Attack, leaping high in the air with the help of his wings and stabbing downward with Void Apostle as he falls.

The Emissary can banish ghosts who offend him, but he more often uses necromancy or Arcanoi to set events in motion. For instance, he might bribe a ghost with use of Five Gifts or send an obstructionist ghost into Lethe using Silent Master's Pollen.

The Emissary has a gem of the night sky set into Void Apostle.

## THE INFINITE PRISON

Few people know that the Infinite Prison is a hekatonkhire, and no god, ghost or mortal knows its proper name. It was certainly a greater soul of a Primordial—perhaps the fetich soul of He Who Holds in Thrall or a slain soul of Malfeas, the Demon City.

Now, it prefers to manifest as a basalt cube half a mile wide, within which it confines thousands of ghosts in an eternal dance of torturer and victim.

The Infinite Prison can draw some souls to itself. If it chooses, it can manifest anywhere in the Underworld and take other shapes. It might become a basalt mountain with a single inviting cave mouth, or hide its bulk underground with just a bit

of itself protruding in the form of a long-neglected manse or mausoleum. A passage leads deeper into its interior... a passage that closes behind unwary explorers.

The hekatonkhire materializes guard and prisoner uniforms and whatever implements of torture and restraint it needs. When a prisoner and guard change roles, the Infinite Prison alters their uniforms, releases the prisoner from his cell, and materializes bars and chains around the former guard. Signs in Old Realm appear carved in the walls to notify inmates of regulations and the installation of new guards. If the Infinite Prison can communicate other concepts or produce other objects from its substance, it apparently chooses not to. The Infinite Prison shows no power to *compel* one inmate to torture another... it simply does not permit any other activity. Most inmates quickly accept their roles as victimizer and victim.

**Motivation:** Gather more victims and make them torture each other for eternity.

**Attributes:** Strength 15, Dexterity 4, Stamina 18; Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2; Perception 5, Intelligence 2, Wits 5

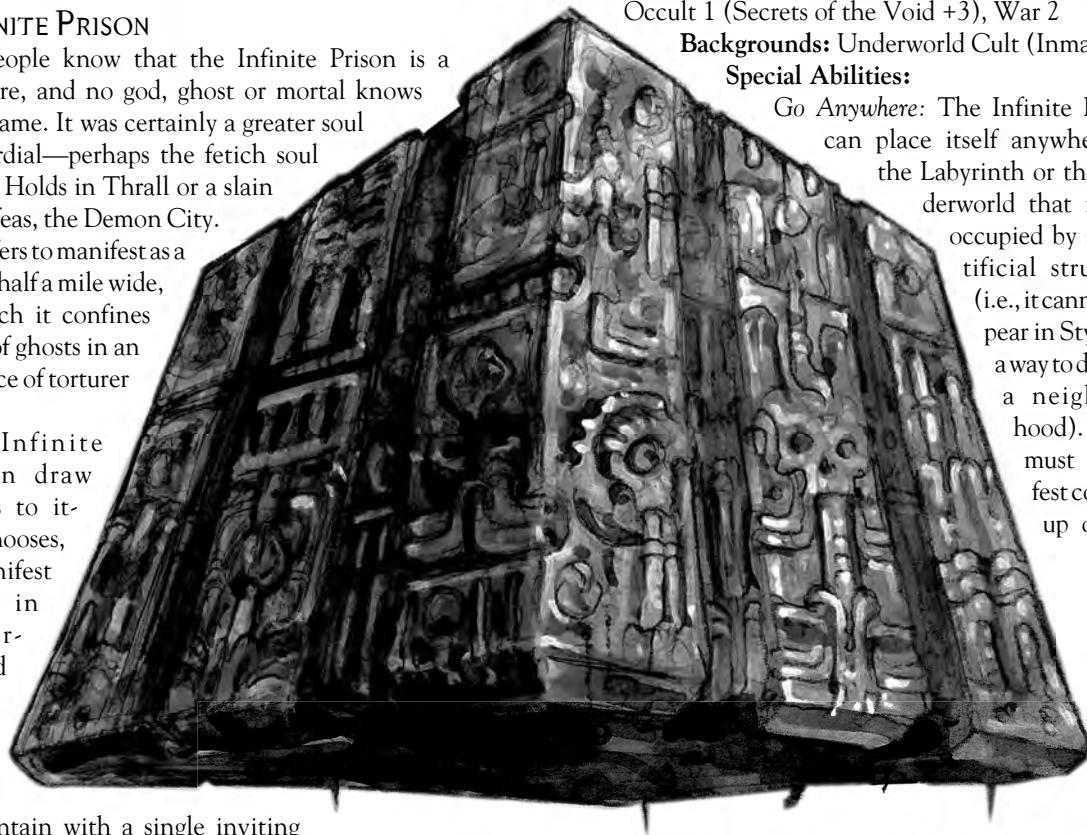
**Virtues:** Compassion 0, Conviction 6, Temperance 3, Valor 4

**Abilities:** Athletics 5, Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 2 (Prison Routine +2), Craft (Earth) 3, Craft (Fire) 3 (implements of Torture +2, Restraints +1), Integrity 5, Investigation 1 (Spot Conspiracies +3), Lore 2 (Psychology of Sadism +3), Occult 1 (Secrets of the Void +3), War 2

**Backgrounds:** Underworld Cult (Inmates) 3

### Special Abilities:

**Go Anywhere:** The Infinite Prison can place itself anywhere in the Labyrinth or the Underworld that is not occupied by an artificial structure (i.e., it cannot appear in Stygia as a way to destroy a neighborhood). It also must manifest coming up out of



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the ground, so it cannot crush someone beneath itself (though it could rise up *around* someone and imprison him). Moving is a miscellaneous action.

**Inescapable:** No supernatural power can enable a creature to enter or leave the Infinite Prison unless the hekatonkhire itself permits this. It always permits entry. A slain ghost reappears still trapped within the prison. The only escape lies with Lethe or Oblivion—or somehow breaking through its basaltic substance or forcing the hekatonkhire to disgorge a victim.

**Materialize Implements:** The hekatonkhire can materialize cell bars, whips, racks or anything else it needs to restrain an inmate or enable one inmate to torment another. It also produces uniforms. Everything it produces disappears if taken outside the Infinite Prison. Materializing objects is a miscellaneous action. Materializing soulsteel costs one mote per cubic foot. The hekatonkhire cannot materialize other magical materials or artifacts.

**Reshape:** At will, the Infinite Prison can open or seal off cells, corridors and other interior spaces, as well as altering its external appearance. Its exterior always looks like basalt. This ability enables the Infinite Prison to repair damage to itself at a cost of one mote per level. Doing so is a miscellaneous action.

#### Join Battle: 10

#### Attacks:

None. The Infinite Prison relies completely on its staff or on trapping enemies in sealed-off chambers.

**Soak:** 12A/12L/18B

**Corpus Levels:** -0x1,000/Incap

**Dodge DV:** N/A **Willpower:** 10

**Essence:** 9 **Essence Pool:** 146

**Other Notes:** The Infinite Prison itself is almost indestructible through its sheer bulk. Interior barriers can take as many levels of damage to break through as a mundane stone wall (see *Exalted*, p. 154). Only one-tenth of such localized damage counts as damage to the Infinite Prison itself. Therefore, destroying a stone wall to break someone out of his cell would inflict only eight levels of damage to the Infinite Prison. Any exterior wall is at least 10-yards thick and requires 250 levels of damage to penetrate. Strength and Athletics ratings permit contested rolls for cases when characters try to pry open a door that the prison wants to keep shut or to close a door it wants to remain open.

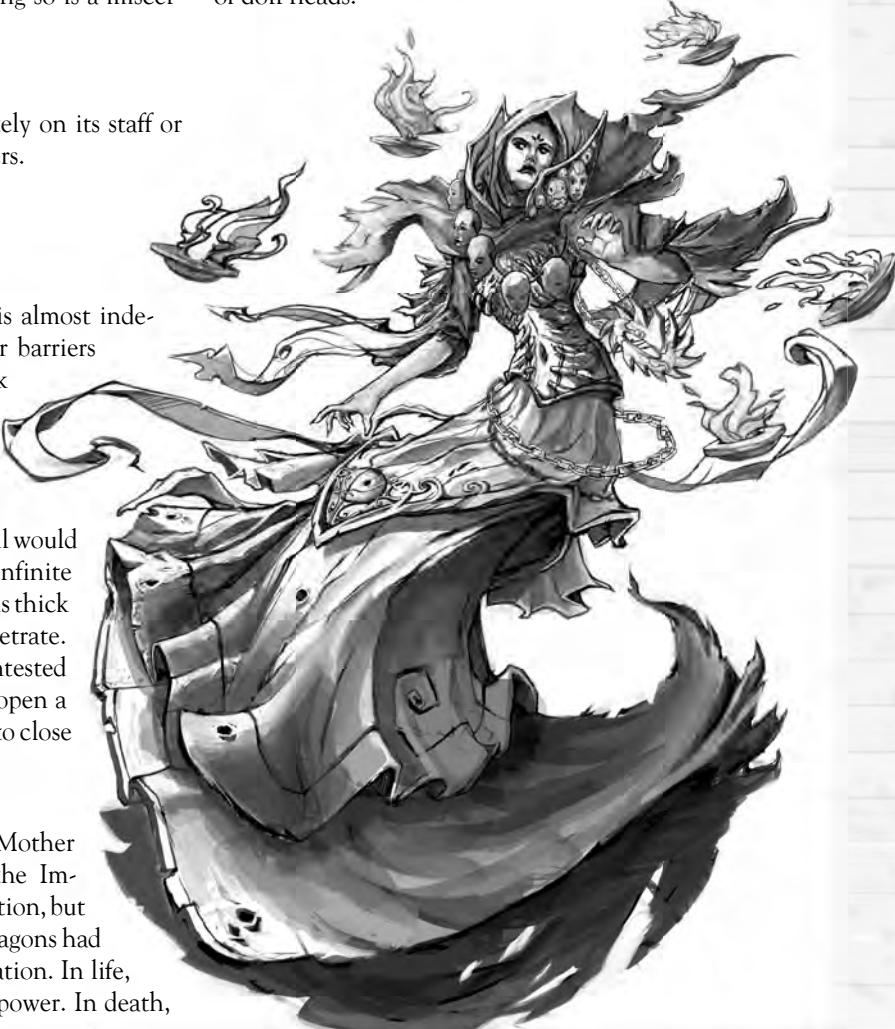
### MOTHER TRANSGRESSION

The Terrestrial Exalt who became Mother Transgression rose to the pinnacle of the Immaculate Order through her skill and ambition, but she never completely believed that the Dragons had anointed the Scarlet Empress to rule Creation. In life, she quashed those doubts for the sake of power. In death,

her ambition and moral confusion prevented her from entering Lethe at once, the way Immaculate doctrine said she should. She could not accept that the fault lay in herself, so she blamed the doctrine.

Mother Transgression now leads the Deaconry of Profanation and seeks to destroy the Order she once led. Although she spends most of her time at the Deaconry itself, a sustained challenge to the Profane Deacons can draw her into the field. She also personally negotiates with other ghostly and spectral leaders in hopes of assembling forces to attack Immaculate temples and monasteries in Creation. Her force of Essence is even stronger than it was in life, and she retains her mastery of the Air Dragon martial arts style.

Mother Transgression died when she was very old, but her ghost looks like a woman of healthy middle age, with her hair coiled in a braid at the back of her head. Instead of the robes of the Immaculate Order, she wears a hooded cloak of multicolored tatters over lamellar armor that looks like dozens of skeletal jade-steel hands clutching her body. She also wears a soulsteel dire chain as a belt, while a jagged-edged ring of soulsteel and bruise-hued Underworld jade—equal to an infinite jade chakram—hangs from a collar of doll heads.



**Motivation:** Force Creation's people to admit the Immaculate Order is false.

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5; Charisma 4, Manipulation 6, Appearance 3; Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

**Virtues:** Compassion 4, Conviction 4, Temperance 4, Valor 4

**Abilities:** Athletics 4 (Jumping +2), Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 5 (Bureaucratic Infighting +2, Currying Favor +1), Craft (Pandemonium) 3, Dodge 4, Integrity 3, Investigation 3 (Finding Dirt on Opponents +2), Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Other: Flametongue, Old Realm, Riverspeak, Skytongue) 4 (Writing Sermons +3), Lore 4 (Immaculate Texts +1, Shadow Constraint Craft +2), Martial Arts 5, Melee 3, Occult 4, Performance 3 (Preaching +2), Presence 4, Resistance 4, Ride 1, Sail 1, Socialize 2, Stealth 5, Throw 5, War 2 (Coordinating Martial Artists +3)

**Backgrounds:** Artifact (Jade Lamellar Armor) 2, Artifact (Infinite Underworld Chakram) 2, Artifact (Soulsteel Dire Chain) 1, Backing (Cult Leader) 4, Contacts 3, Followers 2, Influence 2, Underworld Cult 2

#### Arcanoi:

Common Arcanoi: Moon's Cold Glow, Two-World Vision, Whispers of the Living

Essence-Measuring Thief Arts: All Charms

Savage Ghost-Tamer Arts: Call the Ravening Hound, Command the Hungry Devil, Diversion of the Savage Hunger, Tame the Wicked Appetite, Taste the Demon Wind

Shadow Constraint Craft: All Charms

Terror-Spreading Art: All Charms

#### Martial Arts:

Air Dragon Style: All Charms

Terrestrial Hero Style: Currents Sweeps to Sea, Flow from the Rocks, Pounding Surf Style, Rip-tide Method, Terrestrial Hero Form

#### Join Battle: 9

#### Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 11, Damage 3B, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 6B, Parry DV 4, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 10, Damage 3B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

Soulsteel Dire Chain (Ensnaring Lies—strike): Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 11B, Parry DV 6, Rate 2

Soulsteel Dire Chain (Ensnaring Lies—clinch): Speed 6, Accuracy 11, Damage 9B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

Infinite Underworld Chakram: Speed 4, Accuracy 10, Damage 6L, Rate 4, Range 50

Soak: 11L/14B (Clasp of Dead Hands, jade lamellar armor, +8L/9B, Hardness: 5L/5B, -1 mobility penalty)

Health Levels: -0/-1x5/-2x5/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 7 Willpower: 8

Essence: 6 Essence Pool: 105 (116)

Committed Essence: 11

**Other Notes:** Mother Transgression prefers to fight at range. She begins a fight by assuming Air Dragon Form, then using Wrathful Winds Maneuver (from Air Dragon Style) to knock down opponents and leave them easy marks for her allied combatants. She also uses Avenging Wind Strike to keep enemies at a distance while she whittles them down with her chakram attacks. For infighting, she relies on her dire chain. Against the living, Mother Transgression favors Breath-Seizing Technique to render foes unconscious so she and her cohorts can take live prisoners. Such prisoners are of little value to the Profane Deacons themselves but often of great value to their spectre allies. Likewise, she uses Terrestrial Hero Charms (which forbid weapon use) only when she wants to take victims alive, or if she's lost her dire chain or didn't have time to ready it.

## SHOGUN WIDOWMAKER

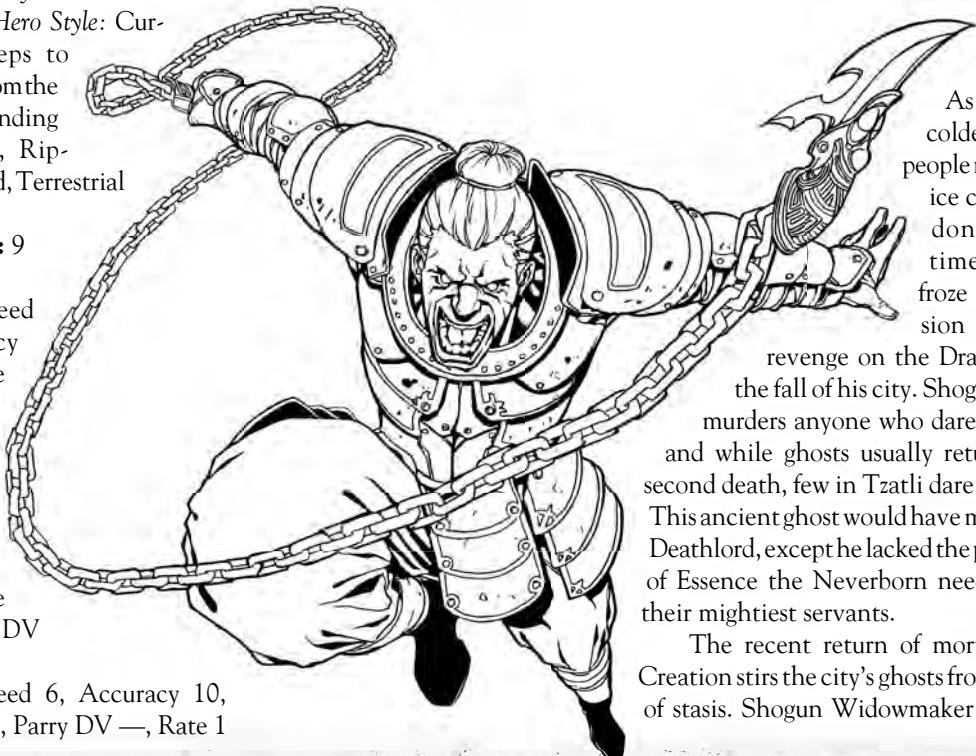
The ruler of Tzatl's ghosts is as cold and deadly as the icy wastes around the Far Northern necropolis. For almost a century after the fall of Tzatl, Shogun Widowmaker

tried to guide the survivors' descendants.

As the North grew colder, however, his people moved South and ice covered his abandoned city. Cold, time and isolation froze away every passion except that for revenge on the Dragon-Blooded for the fall of his city. Shogun Widowmaker

murders anyone who dares to oppose him, and while ghosts usually return from such a second death, few in Tzatl dare defy the shogun. This ancient ghost would have made an excellent Deathlord, except he lacked the pre-existing force of Essence the Neverborn needed to empower their mightiest servants.

The recent return of mortals to Tzatl in Creation stirs the city's ghosts from their centuries of stasis. Shogun Widowmaker sends envoys in





search of the Deathlords in hope of an alliance, but he would help anyone who pledged to massacre the Dragon-Blooded and ravage their cities as Tzatl was ravaged. (He would, of course, cement this pledge using his mastery of Shadow Constraint Craft, while neglecting to mention that this Arcanos has no power once a person leaves the Underworld.) The ancient ghost has not yet figured out that the Haslanti who explore Tzatl's ruins are his own descendants. If he knew, he would likely try to bend the Haslanti to his will as a tool for his revenge.

Shogun Widower looks like he once was a strong man, but his body is shriveled and blackened with frostbite. He wears his iron-gray hair twisted into a topknot. The Shogun of Tzatl wears a blackened jade suit of First Age articulated plate armor and carries an unusual weapon called a chain daiklave (see **Scroll of the Monk**, p. 159). These artifacts are both grave goods versions of the weapon and armor that were buried with the Shogun. Incidentally, the original items form his principal fetters. The ancient ghost knows a great deal about artifact construction, both conventional weapons and armor and the lesser sorts of magitech. He also knows the location of several caches of magitech fragments that the Haslanti have not yet discovered in their excavation of the ruined city—and, of course, the location of his own long-frozen body.

**Motivation:** Make the Dragon-Blooded suffer before they die.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6; Charisma 5, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1; Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

**Virtues:** Compassion 3, Conviction 5, Temperance 5, Valor 5

**Abilities:** Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 2, Craft (Pandemonium) 5, Craft (Magitech) 3, Craft (Fire) 4, Dodge 3, Integrity 4, Investigation 1, Linguistics (Native: Skytongue, Others: Old Realm) 1, Lore 3 (Old Realm Technology +2), Martial Arts 4, Melee 4, Occult 3 (Magitech +2), Presence 5 (Menace +2), Resistance 4, Survival 4, Thrown 3, War 4

**Backgrounds:** Artifact (Jade Articulated Plate) 4, Artifact (Jade Chain Daiklave) 2, Backing (Tzatl) 3, Followers 3, Influence 2, Underworld Cult 2

#### Arcanoi:

*Common Arcanoi:* Angry Trickster Ghost Method, Assassin's Subtle Escape, Ox-Body Technique (x3), Two-World Vision, Whispers of the Living

*Chains of the Ancient Monarchs:* All Charms

*Essence-Measuring Thief Arts:* All Charms

*Honored Ancestor Ways:* All Charms

*Shadow Constraint Craft:* All Charms

*Terror-Spreading Art:* Black Breath of the Abyss, Corpse-Fed Radiance, Hand of the Wind, Painting the Sunset Picture, Strike of Dead Hands

**Join Battle:** 9

#### Attacks:

**Punch:** Speed 5, Accuracy 11, Damage 4B, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

**Kick:** Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 7B, Parry DV 4, Rate 2

**Cinch:** Speed 6, Accuracy 10, Damage 4B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Jade Chain Daiklave (Whirlwind—blade only):** Speed 4, Accuracy 14, Damage 8L, Parry DV 6, Rate 2

**Jade Chain Daiklave (Whirlwind—blade and chain):** Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 9L, Parry DV 6, Rate 2

**Jade Chain Daiklave (Whirlwind—chain strike):** Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 12B, Parry DV 6, Rate 2

**Jade Chain Daiklave (Whirlwind—chain clinch):** Speed 6, Accuracy 11, Damage 10B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Soak:** 15L/20B (Jade articulated plate, +12L/14B, Hardness: 8L/8B, -2 mobility penalty, 1 fatigue value)

**Corpus Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Icap

**Dodge DV:** 6    **Willpower:** 8

**Essence:** 6    **Essence Pool:** 110 (120)

**Committed Essence:** 10

**Other Notes:** The buried originals of Shogun Widower's armor and chain daiklave are made of blue jade alloy. (Today he carries only the grave goods of those items.) His chain daiklave includes a single hearthstone setting, and it bears a gemstone of spoken language from the most powerful manse in the Underworld city.

## THRICE-DREAD ACHIBA

In the height of the Old Realm's decadence, the Solars created artificial life forms just to watch them fight one another. One such, the kyzvoi, combined a human(ish) intelligence with aspects of spider, wolverine and several other predators. The Dragon-Blooded exterminated the abominations as soon as possible after the Usurpation, but hundreds of them left ghosts in Marama's Fell.

The most powerful of them is Thrice-Dread Achiba. He became a warlord among ghosts soon after his execution. In the ensuing centuries, he honed his combat prowess further, warped his corpus to become more terrifying and acquired a number of artifacts from war ghosts sent by the Deathlords to occupy the Fell. A number of ghosts worship Thrice-Dread Achiba, and even some mortals around the Fell pray to him.

Thrice-Dread Achiba looks humanoid, but no true human was so thickly muscular. He also stands eight feet tall, with black chitin covering his body, as well as compound eyes, arachnid mandibles, clawed fingers and a surprisingly resonant, basso profondo voice. Achiba wears an ill-fitting reinforced breastplate of soulsteel and carries ghostly weapons called ghost-strengthening links and a repeating maggot-caster.

**Motivation:** Defeat the other ghost warlords of the Fell and anyone else who would rule him.

**Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6; Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1; Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 6

**Virtues:** Compassion 3, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 5



## ANCIENT LINTHA GHOST

The ghosts of the ancient Lintha still revere their progenitor, the Yozi called Kimberly, the Sea That Marched Against the Flame. The Yozi, however, can seldom influence the Underworld. The Lintha dead have a more immediate connection to Kimberly's slain siblings, the Neverborn. These ghosts have not pledged fealty to the Neverborn and Oblivion, but they cooperate out of hatred for their shared enemies, the Exalted and the human race. While the Lintha dead have use for grave goods, soulfire crystals and other Underworld treasures, they attack other ships chiefly to capture their crews and render their corpus for Essence—all in the most lingering and painful ways possible, before sacrificing the last shred of the ghost to Kimberly.

These traits represent a typical Lintha ghost that might be encountered sailing the Sea of Shadows. Their officers have higher Essence, many additional Arcanos Charms and possibly necromancy as well. A crew of Lintha dead typically keeps a number of plasmic horrors as allies, such as algal dragons (see pp. 153 and 159) or shadowtides (see pp. 155 and 160), just as their living descendants use demons. Most crews also carry a number of Underworld artifacts.

These elder ghosts have the same green skin, slightly elongated heads and pointed chins as their descendants. Over the millennia, however, they have forgotten many details about their own appearance, such as hair or facial expressions. Lintha dead look like animate statues, perfect in their subtly inhuman symmetry. They wear garments resembling kimonos, with strips of unnaturally lightweight armor woven among the folded cloth, equal to exceptional reinforced buff jackets. They wield the Lintha's infamous back-hooked sword, the auhzian, as well as bows made from the bones and sinew of plasmic sea beasts and target arrows dipped in spectral soporifics that tranquilize even the dead.

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4; Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2; Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Virtues:** Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 2, Valor 3

**Abilities:** Archery 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 3, Integrity 2, Lore 1, Martial Arts 2, Medicine 1 (Torture +3), Melee 3 (Auhzian +1), Occult 2 (Labyrinth +2),

Presence 2, Resistance 3, Sail 3, Socialize 2, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Thrown 2, War 3

**Backgrounds:** Allies 3, Backing 2, Whispers 1

### Arcanoi:

Common Arcanoi: Pole the Black Depths

Chains of the Ancient Monarchs: All Charms

Essence-Measuring Thief Arts: Aura-Reading Technique, Blending the Streams of Essence, Delicious Essence Scent, Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch, Feeding the Lamprey's Appetite, Ravening Life Force Hunger

Evoke the Ancient Clay: Birth the Perfected Master, Conjure the Defeated Vessel, Embody, Marsh Light, Sleeper's Caul, Sweet Winsome Light, Tinker's Body, Whisper

### Join Battle: 7

#### Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 3B, Parry DV 5, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 6B, Parry DV 3, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 7, Damage 3B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

Auhzian: Speed 4, Accuracy 11, Damage 7L, Defense 9, Rate 2

Composite Bow: Speed 6, Accuracy 8, Damage 3L (piercing) + poison (6B, 3, -/-, -5)

Soak: 7L/12B (Exceptional reinforced buff jacket, +5L/8B, -1 mobility penalty, 1 fatigue value)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 5 Willpower: 7

Essence: 3 Essence Pool: 71

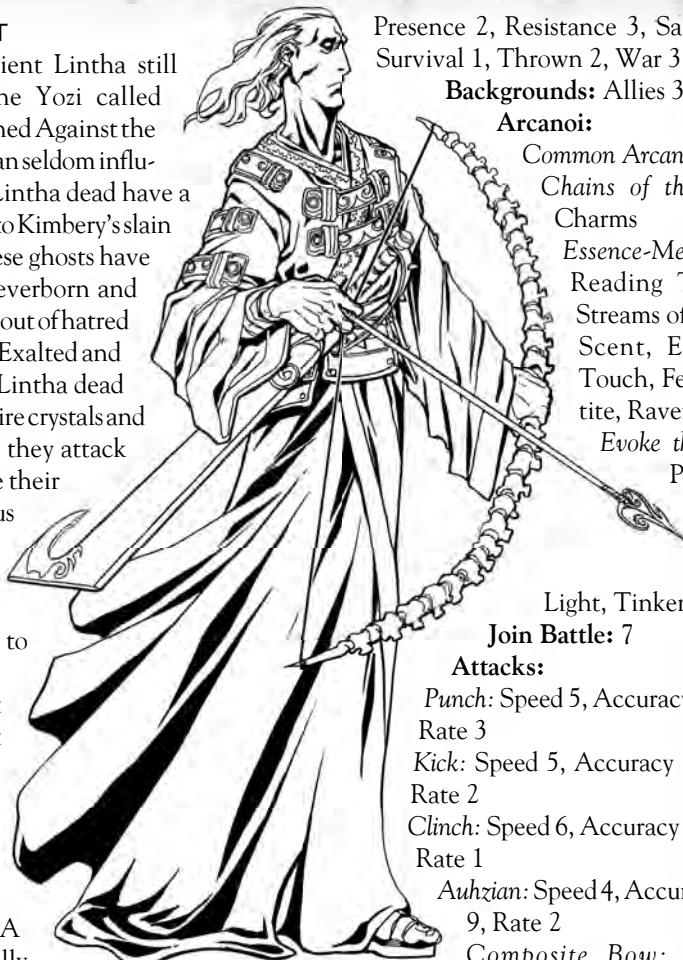
Committed Essence: 0

**Other Notes:** The ancient Lintha dead are never extras. Each has endured for more than 1,000 years in the Underworld and grown strong on his hatred.

## MORTWIGHT

Some people hate the world and want to punish it for the shortcomings of their lives. On death, their souls hear the call of Oblivion... but instead of accepting personal dissolution, they endure as spectres called mortwights so they can force Oblivion on everyone else. They lose their names, their memories and what's left of their sanity to the Void. They also forget their human form and devolve into long-limbed, clawed and fanged figures that resemble skeletons wrapped in gleaming, black leather. They can speak, but most simply shriek or howl with killing-lust.

Mortwights enjoy ripping apart mortals, ghosts or each other, but they sometimes gather in packs. They also collect the hungry ghosts that descend to the Labyrinth



and torture them into servitude as hunting beasts. Only nephwracks and other powerful servants of Oblivion can impel mortwrights to work together for long, though, or to follow any plan more complicated than going someplace and killing everyone there. Mortwrights often direct armies of hungry ghosts at the command of nephwracks or Deathlords.

**Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5; Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1; Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

**Virtues:** Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 4

**Abilities:** Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Craft (Moliation) 2, Dodge 4, Integrity 2, Martial Arts 4, Occult 1, Performance 1 (Ghastly Displays +3), Presence 3 (Torture +2), Stealth 2, Survival 1 (Training Hungry Ghosts +3), War 3

**Backgrounds:** Followers 2

#### Arcanoi:

Common Arcanoi: Moon's Cold Glow, Ox-Body Technique, Scent of Sweet Blood

Savage Ghost-Tamer Arts: Call the Ravening Hound, Command the Hungry Devil, Diversion of the Savage Hunger, Tame the Wicked Appetite, Taste the Demon Wind

Terror-Spreading Art: Black Breath of the Abyss, Corpse-Fed Radiance

**Join Battle:** 7

#### Attacks:

Bite: Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 8L, Parry DV —, Rate 2

Claw: Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 7L, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 9, Damage 7B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

Soak: 3L/5B

**Corpus Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

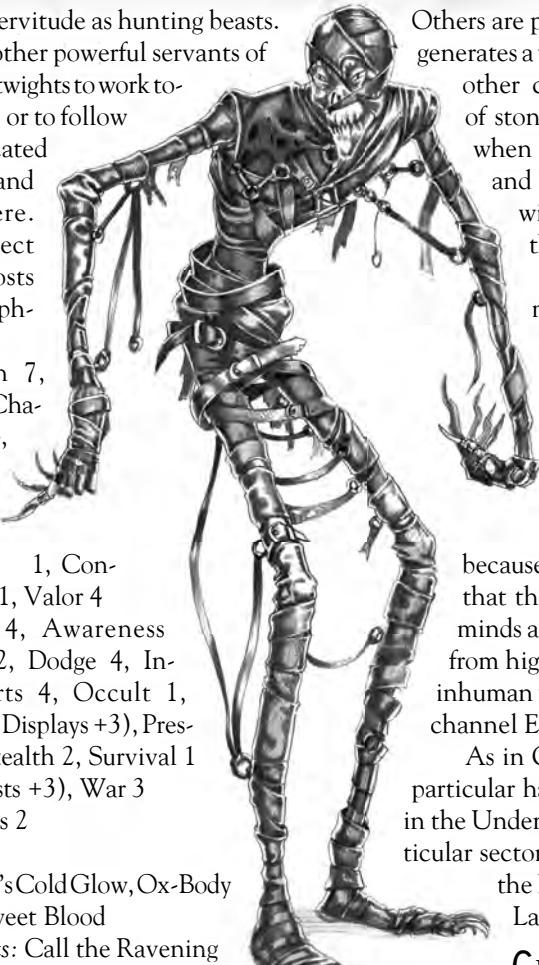
Dodge DV: 6 Willpower: 7

Essence: 2 Essence Pool: 59

**Other Notes:** Mortwrights are seldom extras. They are important lieutenants in the legions of the Labyrinth.

## CREATURES OF THE UNDERWORLD

Many diverse creatures dwell in the Underworld. Some are living creatures adapted to the world of the dead.



Others are peculiar sorts of ghosts. The Underworld itself generates a variety of quasi-living plants and animals. Still other creatures are magically animated constructs of stone or bone. Many creatures, however, appear when powerful emotions, large Essence discharges and the death-dreams of the Neverborn interact with each other and the psychic substance of the Underworld.

These last are called plasmic entities, for no matter how they differ in appearance, they are all made of the same soul-stuff, more or less rarified or condensed. A destroyed plasmic entity leaves a residue of thin, transparent slime that quickly evaporates. Most plasmic entities inherit an incomprehensible malevolence from their Neverborn creators.

Most sorts are also immune to mental influence because they follow instinctive patterns of behavior that they cannot change. Plasmics that have actual minds also tend to have a high Dodge MDVs (derived from high Willpower and Integrity) to represent their inhuman ways of thinking. Some powerful plasmics can channel Essence.

As in Creation, the beings of the Underworld have particular habitats. Some creatures can appear anywhere in the Underworld. Others are usually encountered in particular sectors of the Underworld: the great isle of Stygia, the East, South, West or North, or in the dreadful Labyrinth.

## GENERAL

### Barghest

The Deathlords bred these coal-black mastiffs and imbued them with uncanny cunning. Their flaming, pale-green eyes can see through even the deepest darkness. Abyssals sometimes direct hunting packs of barghests. Other packs run wild and hunt whatever ghosts they choose. Barghests are loyal to those they accept as their master, but they tear apart anyone who tries to command them without the strength to back it up.

### Cabeza

Skilled moliators combine bones and mortwright-broken hungry ghosts to forge an obedient steed. A *cabeza* looks like a gigantic skeletal horse with the skull's brain pan opened to form a seat for the rider. It trots along on four skeletal legs or gallops tirelessly as fast as any mortal horse. The rider can control a *cabeza* using reins or voice commands. *Cabezas* cannot speak, but they can erupt in mad, screaming laughter.

### Jade Effigy

Some long-forgotten god-king of the First Age ordered an entire army of jade statues as part of his funeral panoply. The jade soldiers passed to the Underworld and became weapons for the Dual Monarchs and a few of the more powerful nephwracks. Millennia have worn away the features of the original jade effigies, but nephwracks have carved new ones



from Labyrinth stone. These effigies are just as powerful as the originals, though they look like twisted nightmare images of soldiers rather than warriors bearing the strange but artistic weapons and armor of the First Age. Despite being made of solid stone, jade effigies move as quickly as any mortal soldier. Even without weapons, their jade fists strike with tremendous, crushing force.

#### River Wraith

This fierce beast hunts in rivers and along coastlines throughout the Underworld, and sometimes ventures far into the Sea of Shadows. It resembles a river dragon, but changes color from ebon darkness to translucent pallor, depending on which affords it the best concealment. Like river dragons, these creatures try to eat anything that can't escape them. River wraiths can also leave the water and drag themselves across the shore, but their Move drops to one yard and they cannot Dash.

#### Tomb Golem

Carved effigies or statues can become faithful (if dim-witted) servants in the Underworld. These animate statues can follow fairly complex instructions, but the unexpected confuses them. They can fight with weapons or without, but they move a little stiffly, which often reduces the Rate

of their attacks. Tomb golems may bear whatever weapons, armor or tools were carved into their source effigy. They may also have traits beyond those listed for this "generic" golem. A soldier golem could have higher Physical Attributes and combat Abilities; effigies of artisans could have Craft; a golem musician would add Performance.

## STYGIA

#### Alaun

For ages, the birdlike humanoids called the alaun dwelled on the southwest of the Blessed Isle and worshiped the Primordials. Legend says their necks stretched miles high so they could behold their creators in Heaven. Whatever the truth, the Solar Exalted slew the alaun, and they joined their dead masters in the Underworld. Dwelling in sprawling stone fortresses in the part of Stygia that corresponds to Lord's Crossing, these ancient, mad ghosts still worship the Neverborn. The alaun-ghosts constantly rebuild these citadels, though no one knows why. They also hate humanity. A chance to attack human ghosts is one of the few things that can draw them from their castles. Alaun have long necks like those of cranes, and thin, many-jointed legs that make them unusually agile. Black feathers cover an alaun's arms, but the alaun cannot fly.

## GRIEFBEES

The Underworld's ivory-hued, plasmic bees feed on strong emotions, especially grief, rather than nectar. When they feed, they glow in the same rotten, dark green hue as the corpses of the Great Contagion's victims. Like an ordinary bee, they can sting but do so only if disturbed. They present little danger to ordinary ghosts, let alone Exalts—but their keepers seek out ghosts (or mortals) in the grip of strong passions. Ghosts can feed on the griefbee's plasmic honey and feel the emotions collected by the bees. Since this is one of the few ways that ghosts can feel intense emotions, a pint of griefbee honey is a Resources 2 purchase in the Underworld. Even the pangs of grief are better than the gray emotional desolation of the Underworld.

## Cobbler

These plasmic nightmares look like mangled corpses pierced with black iron nails and held together by webs spun by the maggots that crawl through their torn flesh. A cobbler's legs are broken and twisted backward, but long spikes through their knees prop them upright. Cobblers attack almost anything they encounter, flailing wildly with their nail-studded hands and arms. Their mindless fury contributes to their MDV and resistance to stunning.

## Malefic Stalker

These plasmic entities consist of a humanoid torso on five insectile legs, with hair on their shoulders and crab-like claws instead of arms. Empty eye sockets and a distended, flattened jaw further deform their hairless, pointed heads. They lurk and hunt through remote areas of the Stygian Isle. They have little intelligence, but they know many secrets of the Neverborn and use the corpus of their victims in strange rituals. These creatures have Essence 3, which contributes to their Dodge DV.

## Portee Dog

Even in death, Dynasts wished to own their coveted Portee ivory dogs. (See *The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. I—The Blessed Isle*, p. 159). In response, the Underworld's plasm shaped itself into Portee dogs the size of bears. Their bodies are made of hanks of silk bound into canine shape, with clusters of beetles for eyes. This does not make their teeth any less sharp. Whereas true Portee dogs are among the tamest animals in Creation, the feral plasmic version seems utterly savage. Like their living counterparts, however, Stygia's Portee dogs do not bark. The silk from a slain and unraveled Portee dog can be woven into clothing equal to silken armor (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex*, p. 159), though the clothing tends to growl and whine a bit.

## Walker of the Midnight Sun

The Neverborn's hatred of their killers spawned these plasmic entities. A Walker of the Midnight Sun is a humanoid figure in a hooded and tattered white robe. A dark cloth marked with the warped and broken symbol of the Dawn Caste





covers its face. Its body, however, is a shifting jumble of bone fragments and rats that gnaw upon them. Chains around the creature's neck bear blackened symbols of the sun.

Walkers of the Midnight Sun view themselves as champions of the Neverborn. They search for and try to destroy anyone who works against their masters. They hate Solars above all other creatures. In combat, they attack with bony claws or any weapon that a human could hold, including artifact weapons. They can attune to such weapons without the need for Essence (though they cannot gain magical material bonuses).

## EAST

### Chameleon Monkey

These plasmic creatures plague Southeastern communities. They look like translucent, decayed images of small monkeys with long, agile fingers, big eyes and prehensile tails. Chameleon monkeys look like whatever they're in front of, giving them superb camouflage. Unlike Creation's chattering primates, they never make a sound.

Chameleon monkeys love to associate with ghosts. They silently move about ghostly communities, stealing whatever small objects attract their notice. When one loses interest in a prize, the monkey returns it... to some other dwelling. Entire villages have torn themselves apart through accusations of theft because the ghosts didn't realize they had an infestation of chameleon monkeys.

### Hura

The First Age Lawgivers created the hura to protect their children from dematerialized entities. The hura can perceive

all dematerialized creatures and strike against them. During the Usurpation, the hura fled to the Underworld. Without their purpose, however, they went mad and passed from flesh to plasmic entities.

A hura looks like an old woman swathed in green veils. Beneath the layers of cloth they are pale, shriveled, decayed things. They cannot actually fly, but they can walk and run through the air. A hura's veils animate and strike like whips. These creatures can attack any and every target within three yards without a multiple action penalty, but once per action.

Hura act in groups of four. They loathe the Dragon-Blooded beyond reason but seldom find a chance to vent their hatred. Instead, they try to fulfill their ancient purpose by kidnapping the ghosts of children. The hura carry their captives to remote ruins or lock them in cages high in the treetops. They care for the child-ghost for a week or so, addressing it by the name of some long-dead Lawgiver's son or daughter. Eventually, some imaginary errand draws them away, and they forget about their captive, who remains trapped until she gives in to Lethe or Oblivion.

### Lethe Serpent

Few creatures terrify ghosts more than these plasmic serpents that hide among the roots of dead trees. Their venom can force a ghost into Lethe—and the serpents want nothing more than to perform this service. Assassins of the Underworld sometimes use Lethe serpents, though a ghostly handler takes a terrible risk herself. Lethe serpents naturally dwell in subterranean colonies of hundreds, but they never hunt in groups larger than three or four.

## WHITE ROBE

So much emotion is attached to the justly famed, white-robed professional mourners of Sijan that their image has imprinted itself on the Underworld, shaping these plasmic imitations. White robes are just that: white robes with no one wearing them, ornamented with funerary symbols in gray and bronze, walking on endless, aimless processions of mourning. They attack no one, but each robe radiates a paralyzing aura of grief and despair in a 10-yard radius. If a character comes within that distance, her player must succeed at a Compassion roll, difficulty 2, or the character suffers a -4 internal penalty to all actions for the rest of the scene. Success enables a character to resist the agonizing sense of loss for four actions (however long those actions are). The player must then roll again. White robes often attract griefbees, who feed on the sorrow but filter out the despair. Ghosts rightly avoid white robes, for the plasmic entities' aura makes them long for Lethe or Oblivion.

The mortuary symbols on a white robe spontaneously change as the creatures move through the Underworld. Underworld savants know that these symbols tell the way to the nearest Labyrinth entrance. A character can interpret the symbols only if she has at least Occult 3 and her player succeeds at a (Wits + Linguistics) roll at difficulty 3.

Lethe serpent venom does not cause normal damage. Instead, if the (Stamina + Resistance) roll fails, a ghost immediately enters Lethe. A botch sends the ghost to Oblivion instead. A mortal suffers a month of amnesia, losing no Abilities but forgetting her identity. Success renders the target immune to the poison's full effect from then on. Further exposures can still inflict a -2 internal penalty through a mixture of absent-mindedness and oozing warts covering the victim's body. This penalty lasts two full weeks.

### Scavenger

Tattered veils of dense black cobwebs drape these oversized, skeletal vultures. Scavengers fly throughout the East in search of victims to tear apart with their beaks. The plasmic creatures devour the remains and adorn themselves with some small object or token taken from the victim as a memento of the kill.

### Swamp Golem

Plasmic Essence can curdle in Eastern swamps to produce these creatures. While sessile, a swamp golem looks like a dark, oily heap of mud, rotted leaves and decaying frogs, fish and other marsh creatures. The stench of one can be smelled from a mile away. If any creature comes near, however, the swamp golem takes a miscellaneous action to

pull itself into a vaguely humanoid form then attacks. Its touch is poisonous.

## SOUTH

### Ashen Nomad

These plasmic entities look like faceless humanoid figures of tightly packed sand and ash held together with strings of rotted flesh and muscle. Each leaves a trail of ash wherever it walks. The creatures wander throughout the Underworld's South and attack any humanoid creatures other than themselves. When ashen nomads kill (or at least overpower) a foe, they bury him and perform a crude parody of mourning and homage. They do not understand this compulsion and, indeed, have no more intelligence than the average desert lizard.

### Black Garda

When the dreams of the Neverborn touch the dark fires of the uttermost South, sometimes they create flocks of black gardas. Each bird consists of a yard-wide cloud of dense black smoke around a bird's skeleton made of glowing red coals. When a black garda sees a ghost or a living creature, it dives in a suicidal plunge. On impact, it explodes in black flame, destroying itself.

A black garda's immolation costs it its entire 10-mote Essence pool. If it somehow loses motes (and therefore cannot fulfill its suicidal purpose), a black garda plunges instead into the nearest volcano. The garda is reborn with a full Essence pool, and the plasmic birds can regain Essence in no other way.

### Firedust Phantom

The deserts of the Underworld's Far South spawn clouds of plasmic animated firedust. Each has no desire except to find some other animate creature and explode, killing the creature and itself. They attack Abyssals, intruding mortal creatures, ghosts or other plasmics without distinction. If the victim already has a flame nearby (such as a campfire or lantern), the firedust phantom detonates right away, dealing 20 dice of lethal damage to its chosen victim. The explosion also deals environmental damage of 10L/Trauma 3 to anyone else within 10 yards and 5L/Trauma 1 to anyone from 10 to 20 yards away. (Fire-aspected Terrestrial Exalted can protect themselves using their anima, as against any mundane fire.)

If a prospective victim lacks a convenient ignition source, the phantom surrounds him, blinds him with its own condensed substance and tries to steer him toward the nearest flame or lava-pool. Each time the victim takes a Move or Dash action, his player rolls (Perception + Awareness) at difficulty 4. Failure means the character moves in the direction the firedust phantom wants. Since a firedust phantom flies at 10 yards per tick, outrunning them is quite difficult without Charms.

Since they are nothing but spiritually animate dust, these entities lack most traits and are hard to damage. They are easily and safely destroyed, however, by a flaming arrow shot from more than 20 yards away.



### Firefly

The fireflies of Creation are harmless little glowing insects. The fireflies of the Underworld are plasmic entities of gray fire and packed ash, spawned from Southern volcanoes. Moving objects attract fireflies, which burn whatever they touch. Charms, artifacts or other effects that protect against fire (such as Element-Resisting Prana or a Fire Aspect's anima) shield against them. Otherwise, a swarm of 1,000 fireflies can attempt the indicated attack.

### Hungry Mirror

Very hot sands generate these plasmic entities as an Underworld manifestation of all the mirrors sacrificed, broken or thrown away in Creation. These animate clumps of bent mirror shards move slowly (Move of one yard, no Dash) and seek places where other creatures might unexpectedly look into them. Once someone looks in a hungry mirror, it tries to overpower her will and feed upon her soul.

When a character looks in a hungry mirror, both player and Storyteller make an opposed Willpower roll. The victim's player may supplement this roll by channeling a point of Willpower through Temperance. If the victim's player fails the contest, the mirror consumes one dot of the victim's Virtues, and the victim cannot look away. Hungry mirrors drain Virtues in this order: Compassion, Valor, Temperance, Conviction. The contest continues until the victim's player wins the resisted roll, someone else blocks the character's view of the mirror or the victim loses all his

### SWARM CREATURES

Sometimes, it's easier to treat a swarm of minuscule creatures as one larger creatures. Such swarms tend to have low Strength or Stamina but high Dexterity. It's hard to evade thousands of tiny stinging or biting creatures (and parrying is impossible). It's also hard to strike them in any meaningful way, giving them high Dodge DV. If one can squish or swat enough of them, however, the swarm breaks up or moves away. The swarm is "Incapacitated," even though most of the component creatures suffered no harm at all.

Virtues. When all four Virtues reach 0, the hungry mirror shatters to dust, and the victim becomes a vengeful exile (see pp. 158 and 160). Victims who avoid this fate regain one Virtue dot per week.

### Rock Dragon

The Deathlords killed off most of these mighty plasmics, but a fit of rage from the Neverborn could create more. These enormous entities—up to a mile long—look like dragons composed of a mixture of seared flesh, black slag and glowing embers. Half-formed heads and torsos of devoured victims adorn the slag portions of the creature's surface. Rock dragons have an impressive Essence of 4, which contributes to their Dodge DV and Dodge MDV.

A rock dragon can attack with its immense claws, bite at foes or spit a gout of lava with a base range of 250 yards. It must wait 10 ticks before it can spit lava again. Rock dragons have no clever tactics. They attack directly, try to kill enemies quickly and enjoy causing widespread property damage.

#### Scorpion Wasp

As its name suggests, each of these minuscule plasmics has the body of a wasp and the tail of a scorpion. Its constant red glow makes a scorpion wasp easy to spot. Huge swarms of them nest in the Underworld region between Gem and the Font of Mourning. Their venomous stings do not cause normal poison damage. Instead, a sting incinerates a little patch of whatever the scorpion wasp attacks, inflicting aggravated damage. The traits given are for a swarm of 1,000 scorpion wasps. The swarm can attempt up to three attacks without multiple action penalties.

## WEST

#### Algal Dragon

An algal dragon looks like a sea or river dragon made of rotten algae and body parts from its victims. Its gigantic maw can stretch enough to chomp a small sailboat in half. After it kills a ship's crew, it smashes the ship and adds the wreckage to a nest it builds in a sea cavern, while the dismembered cadavers patch any wounds the plasmic beast suffered.

Algal dragons are well known to hunt alone. Nevertheless, the lone remaining crewmember of the cargo ship

Unrelenting Anger insists that 10 algal dragons cooperated to destroy it. The ship's precious cargo—soulsteel weapons and armor the Silver Prince was sending from Skullstone to his forces in Stygia—was never recovered.

#### Coral Mask

Reefs of a strange, feathery coral grow near islands throughout the Underworld's Southwest, with an especially large reef located due west of the Isle of Shadows. Coral masks appear among these reefs. These plasmic entities resemble the death masks worn in the city of Stygia, and masks of the lustrous, pale-hued coral are highly fashionable. Therefore, some brave souls hunt coral masks to turn them into the masks they so resemble.

The free-swimming masks themselves cannot harm anything larger than a guppy, but they can animate branches of coral to attack, draining Essence along with blood or ghostly corpus. Anyone who comes within two yards of the reef is subject to an environmental effect (Damage 3L/Miscellaneous Action, Trauma 2). On a successful (Stamina + Resistance) roll, the victim suffers only one die of bashing damage. For each level of damage sustained, however, be it lethal or bashing, the victim loses a mote of Essence (assuming she has any).

Eventually, a full-grown coral mask decides that it wants a face to wear it. The creature typically plays dead so a collector picks it up. Once someone places the coral mask over her face, it expands and tries to envelop its victim. The traits listed for a coral mask represent this stage, as it tries to





grapple and overpower a ghost or mortal. For each action in which the mask successfully controls the grapple, its player gains one additional bonus success on the next roll. If the mask holds its victim for five actions, it surrounds the host completely and can try to control her. Resisting possession by the mask requires a successful Willpower roll, difficulty 4. A coral mask cannot, however, possess entities with a permanent Essence of 4 or greater. It also cannot envelop and possess anyone larger than a husky adult human (living or ghost) and won't bother with anyone smaller than a child.

Once it possesses a host, the coral mask rampages and tries to cause all the chaos, confusion and destruction it can. It uses all the host's Attributes and Abilities but cannot use any Charms, Arcanoi or other supernatural powers. Stygian mask vendors must prove that any coral mask is safely dead by donning it themselves.

The only physical way to remove the parasitic mask is to strike it with an impact or flame that deals at least one level of damage. Unfortunately, the coral shell around the victim provides 13L/13B soak only to the mask itself—the victim receives no soak benefit at all. Unnatural mental influence could also force the mask to abandon its host once it runs out of Willpower points.

#### Eoi

These flightless bird-creatures of the Western isles look like a grotesque hybrid of crab and seagull. They dwell in cavities dug under the sand. Eoi sleep there during the day

and hunt for food at night. These creatures do not normally attack people, but they will defend themselves. Western ghosts hunt eoi because artisans can fashion tough but lightweight armor from their gray shells. Eoi shells can be fashioned into lamellar armor or reinforced buff jackets with mobility penalties and fatigue values reduced by one each. Such armor counts as superior equipment of exceptional quality.

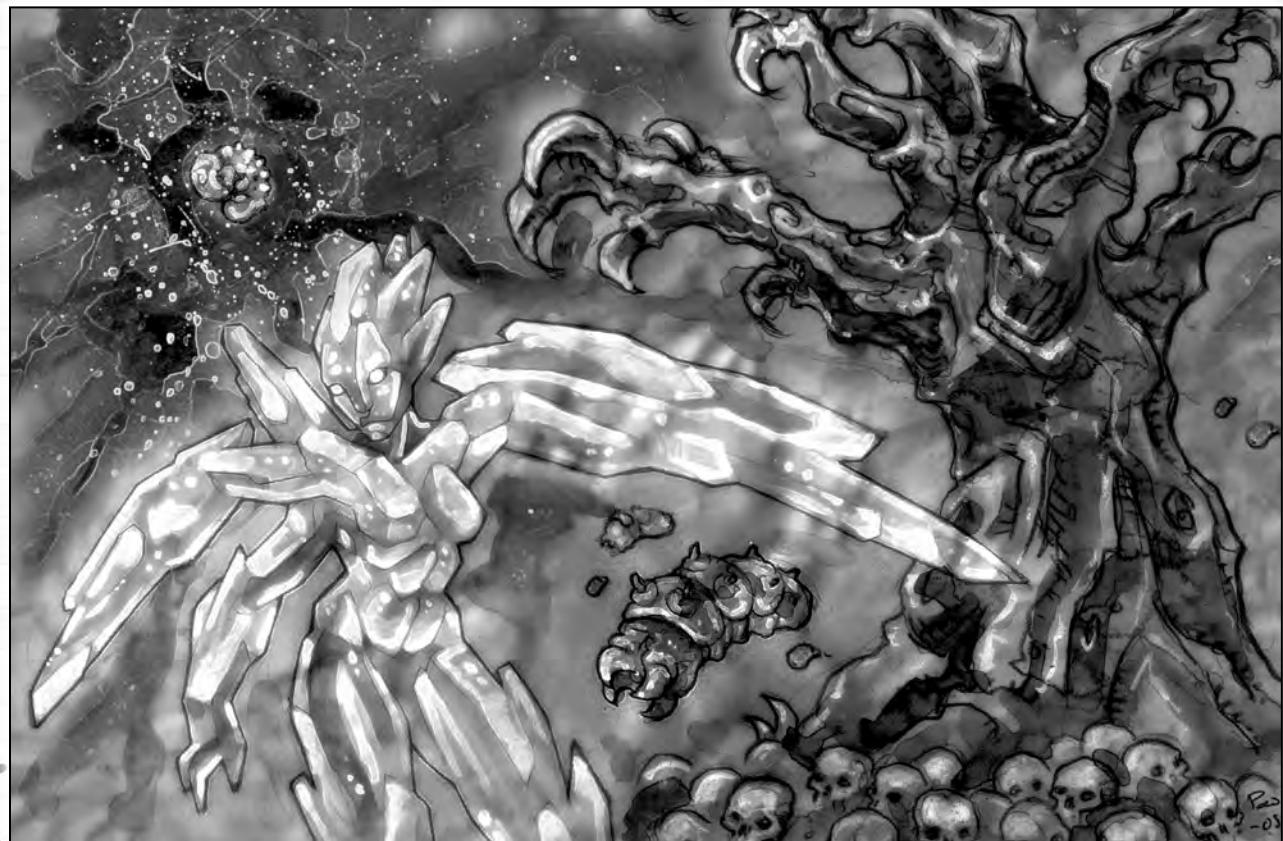
#### Essence Maelstrom

An Essence maelstrom is a man-sized, gray-and-white plasmic vortex floating in the air. The vaporous creature lashes out with bolts of black lightning that rip Essence from a victim. The maelstrom's attack is soaked as lethal damage, but it removes motes instead of health levels. Only when a victim has no motes left does it inflict levels of lethal damage. Essence maelstroms are completely mindless.

#### Resplendent Burning Lotus

Another one of the Underworld's many Essence-thieving creatures, the resplendent burning lotus (or dreamstealer) is an immense red flower floating on the Sea of Shadows. If anyone touches the five-yard-wide flower, it lashes out with tentacle-like stamens and tries to grapple its victim. It can attack up to three targets at once, with no multiple-action penalty.

The lotus never inflicts more than two levels of bashing damage from its clinch, but the target loses  $(6 - \text{target's permanent Essence})$  motes for each action in which the lotus holds her. What's more, the target's player must succeed on a Conviction roll each action the character is held, or the



target is lost in the languorous dreams and visions imparted by the lotus. The character can resist this Illusion effect by spending one Willpower per action. The lotus itself has a permanent Essence of 3.

As the lotus absorbs Essence, its hue changes from brilliant crimson to dusky rose. Once it drains 30 Essence from victims, it releases its prey. Shadowtides and other sea creatures often follow dreamstealers to feed on their dazed and drained victims. Some survivors of lotus attacks become addicted to the sweet dreams of the lotus and seek these creatures again.

#### Shadowtide

These strange plasmic entities manifest as a deep, oily blackness upon the water. They can grow as large as a ship and extrude a dozen tentacles to strike at foes up to 30 yards away. A shadowtide tries to grapple and eat anything living or ghostly. It can attack up to 12 targets at once with no penalty, either squeezing a grappled foe or lifting and slamming him down with bone-crushing force. The latter attack leaves the victim knocked down (see *Exalted*, p. 153) but also released from the clinch. Anything a shadowtide can pull into its body suffers an environmental effect (10L/action damage, Trauma 4). Shadowtides take half damage from blunt attacks but double damage from fire. They also have a permanent Essence of 3, but no Essence pool.

## NORTH

#### Cannibalized

These formidable plasmic entities look like shimmering, ever-changing ice sculptures that combine sharply angled abstraction with disjointed arms, legs and facial features. Sometimes they produce a complete face. A few ghosts have recognized the features of loved ones sacrificed and devoured by the savage Varajtul cannibals (see *The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. II—The Wyld*, p. 71, and pp. 97-98). Sometimes, one speaks in a victim's voice too—phrases the victim once favored, repeated without understanding. The cannibalized can form large, biting jaws or rending talons, but they prefer to extrude arms bearing large swords of jagged ice.

#### Entropic Fog

This plasmic consists of a decayed, humanoid fetus floating within a dense, yellowish-gray cloud. An entropic fog covers a 30-yard radius and reaches about 45 yards upward. Physical attacks that strike the fog compress and tear it into dissipating strands, but a person or ghost can move through it. Day or night, visibility within the fog equals that of a foggy night (see *Exalted*, p. 135).

An entropic fog has no physical attack. Instead, it attacks everyone caught within it, using its Willpower as strands of congealed fog trail greasily across their bodies. The fog can attack any number of targets, once per action, at no penalty. If an attack succeeds, the victim takes one

level of lethal damage as his body desiccates like a mummy. What's more, the target's player must make a successful Valor roll, or the target succumbs to panic, imposing a -3 internal penalty to all rolls for the rest of the scene. Characters with Temperance 4+ do not suffer this effect. For every four health levels lost to the entropic fog's attacks, a victim loses one dot of Strength or Stamina (player's choice). This loss is permanent, barring use of healing Charms such as Wholeness-Restoring Meditation that can cure Crippling or entropic/necrotic effects.

#### Frostbite

A frostbite is a worm of slimy slush the size of a man's finger, wriggling through the air. Frostbites often travel in swarms, especially during snowstorms. Their small size makes them hard to spot (difficulty 5) before they strike, though any impact incapacitates them. A frostbite melts when it touches another creature, destroying itself but infusing its victim, ghost or mortal, with joint-stiffening cold. The player of a frostbite's victim must make a successful (Stamina + Resistance) roll, or the character suffers a -1 internal penalty to all actions until she spends three hours warming herself by a fire.

#### Ygdra

Appearing in the Northeast forests of the Underworld, ygdras look like ash trees with squat, gnarled trunks. A ydgra tries to grapple any creature that comes near and drain its Essence. The plasmic entity can attack up to three targets simultaneously at no penalty and hold up to three victims. Crushing is optional, but for each net success achieved in the contested roll to control the grapple, the ydgra drains three motes of Essence from a held victim. (If a victim's player wins the contested roll, that victim controls the grapple and the ydgra cannot drain Essence.)

## LABYRINTH

#### Cerement

These plasmic horrors look like humanoid masses of shriveled muscles and dried veins within a crackling, translucent husk. They cause no physical harm, but they destroy memories as their offering to Oblivion. To do so, a cerement must grapple its victim for three actions. On the fourth and subsequent actions spent held by the cerement, a character loses one year's worth of memories unless her player succeeds at a Conviction roll, difficulty 3. Loss of memories does not change a character's traits, but the character certainly forgets why she entered the Labyrinth, as the cerement starts from the present and works back.

#### Consumption Cloud

The touch of this pale cloud of gray and mauve vapor dissolves metal as easily as flesh. Mundane armor provides soak against only one attack from a consumption cloud before falling apart. After that, a character has only her intrinsic soak from Stamina and Charms or other magic. The plasmic cloud also inflicts tremendous pain with each attack that



deals damage. For the next (10 – Stamina) actions after taking damage from a cloud's attack, that character suffers a -3 internal penalty to her actions, unless her player succeeds at a Valor roll. For Exalted and other supernatural characters, however, that roll receives a three-die bonus.

Consumption clouds often move in packs of three to five. They also often attack from surprise due to their high Stealth and ability to fly.

#### Contagion Parasite

The sheer magical power that evoked the Great Contagion and the horror it caused echoed into the Labyrinth and spawned these plasmics. A contagion parasite resembles a dark-green mass of matted cobwebs until it animates and attacks. These creatures prefer to infest ghosts of the Great Contagion's victims, but they'll settle for other ghosts if they're hungry enough.

The parasite gathers itself into tendrils that grapple with a victim. If the parasite can inflict even a single level of damage on a ghost, it can start to infiltrate the ghost's corpus. The clinch continues, but the victim's player must roll Willpower at difficulty 2 for each action of the clinch. Failure means the parasite slides all the way into the ghost and takes control. Success allows the victim to continue fighting the parasite, but the victim himself also suffers any damage inflicted on the parasite. Once the parasite enters and controls a host, removing it requires a successful (Intelligence + Medicine) roll at difficulty 5, and a doctor who knows how to treat ghosts.

A parasite sends its host on mad, destructive errands designed to draw the Underworld closer to Oblivion. The host can try to regain control for a scene, but only if his player

wins a contested Willpower roll against the parasite. Making this roll costs one Willpower point. Each day, the parasite also consumes four motes of the victim's Essence. The victim cannot recover Essence or health levels through normal rest and recuperation. He regains Essence only from blood, manses, hearthstones or other external sources. He heals damage not at all. When the victim dies from normal damage or complete loss of Essence, the parasite consumes him (anything left goes to Oblivion). If the victim can somehow hold out for (Essence + 28) days, the parasite consumes him and divides into five parasites, each one ready to infest more victims in turn.

#### Ferryman

Rivers of bile, lymph, putrid blood and black water run through some tunnels of the Labyrinth, and the ferrymen ply those rivers in skiffs of bone. A ferryman consists of nothing but a hooded, translucent, empty black robe and the shadowy, claw-hands that work the skiff's single oar. These creatures protect the Labyrinth from creatures that attack it but readily take passengers who pay with one significant memory they are willing to feed to the Void. The ferryman takes this memory in the form of a small white moth it pulls from the client's mouth. Ferrymen know a great deal about the Labyrinth and its inhabitants. Each answer from a ferryman costs another memory, however.

In combat, a ferryman pulls a scythe from the Void. One strikes with such speed that any foe who lacks magically enhanced perception suffers a -2 penalty to her Parry DV against its attacks. A ferryman also has a permanent Essence of 3 and a 30-mote pool. By spending 10 motes during an attack, a ferryman can convert the scythe's damage from



lethal to aggravated. If the ferryman slays a foe, all of that creature's remaining motes pass to the ferryman, even if this outpouring pushes the ferryman's total beyond 30. (The extra Essence drains away at the end of the scene.)

#### Steel Ant

These plasmic scavengers look like ordinary ants magnified to six inches long, with patches of steel-gray, bits of bronze and flecks of copper, silver and gold on their glossy black chitin. A few sages speculate that the dreams of the Neverborn shaped them in parody of the pattern spiders wrought by the traitor Primordial Autochthon.

Steel ants carry bits of metal back to their massive hives. They attack ghosts and mortals alike to gain metal—they hunger for soulsteel most of all—or soulfire crystals for their queen. They attack as swarm creatures.

At the heart of the nest rests the queen, five feet long and equipped with powerful mandibles and a poisoned sting that affects both the living and the dead. What's more, steel ant queens have Essence 2, a pool of 23 motes and four to six Arcanoi.

#### Stillborn

This plasmic entity resembles a nude but hairless pregnant woman with the head of her fetus protruding from her torn belly. The fetus squirms and stares at anyone who encounters the stillborn. A stillborn has a permanent Essence of 4 and an Essence pool of 40 motes.

A stillborn's presence inspires fear and nausea in any ghost or living creature that comes within four yards of it. A character can overcome this Emotion effect for a scene by spending two Willpower, or by his player succeeding at

a Valor roll with a difficulty equal to the character's Compassion. Failure to resist this unnatural mental influence imposes a -2 internal penalty on all the character's actions for the rest of the scene.

The "mother" and fetus can both attack on each action, with no multiple action penalty. The "mother" can strike with hands or feet, inflicting lethal damage through her speed, strength and sheer force of necrotic Essence. The fetus can attack in one of two ways. It can leap out from the stillborn's body to bite at a foe with a suddenly distending mouth and razor-sharp teeth. Its rotten umbilical cord immediately pulls it back into the stillborn's tattered womb. Alternatively, the

#### WHISPERER

Anywhere in the Labyrinth, one might encounter whisperers, masklike translucent faces fixed to a tunnel's surface. Each such creature is immobile and has no physical attacks but radiates an entropic Essence (perceived as mocking, sourceless whispering) that confuses a traveler's perceptions. The player of every character who comes within five yards of a whisperer makes a contested roll of the character's Temperance against four dice for the whisperer. If the character's player loses the contest, that player's next roll for the character to navigate the Labyrinth takes an internal penalty equal to the number of successes rolled for the whisperer.

fetus merely stares at a foe while the stillborn expends five motes of Essence. Should the chosen victim's player fail a (Willpower + Essence) roll at difficulty 4, that character loses a dot of permanent Willpower. A perfect block or dodge can protect a character from this attack. Characters recover one dot of lost Willpower per month.

Severing the fetus from the stillborn paralyzes both halves of the creature and renders it inactive for three miscellaneous actions. To do this, however, a character must attack on the same tick that the fetus bites. The character's attack also takes an external penalty for a called shot against a small target (-2 with a close combat attack, -4 with ranged). A single level of damage to the stillborn, however, is enough to cut the fetus's umbilical cord.

### Vengeful Exile

Ghosts that lose all their Virtues to a hungry mirror (see p. 152) become vengeful exiles. These near-mindless creatures roam the Labyrinth in search of something to kill, or something to kill them. An exile looks like it did as a ghost, but

radiates the ultimate cold of Oblivion. Any thinking creature that sees a vengeful exile knows that it serves the Final End. This aura terrifies animals (even Underworld animals) the same way a Dawn Caste's anima affects mortals.

A vengeful exile tears at enemies with its hands, and the sheer entropic force it carries inflicts aggravated damage. What's more, the creature's hatred suppresses the higher soul of any ghost or living person who comes within five yards of it. Every action a character spends within range, her player must successfully roll Temperance or spend one Willpower to resist this Emotion effect. Failure to resist the exile's aura results in the character going berserk and attacking whoever is closest, for a number of actions equal to the character's Valor. Success adds one Limit to an Exalt character's total (or Resonance, for Abyssals). Ghosts, however, suffer the worst from the exile's aura. A ghost is nothing but higher soul, so failure to resist the exile inflicts three dice of lethal damage that action, which the ghost may resist only with innate soak from Stamina or Arcanoi.

Name	Str/Dex/Sta	Per/Int/ Wits/WP	Health Levels	Attack (Spd/Acc/Dmg/Rate)	Dodge DV/Soak
<b>General</b>					
<b>Barghest</b>	4/3/3	4/2/5/3	-0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 5/6/5L/1	2/2L/5B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Dodge 1, Integrity 1, Investigation 1, Martial Arts 2 (Bite +1), Presence 1 (Intimidation +2), Resistance 3, Stealth 2 (Hide in Shadows +1), Survival 3 (Tracking +3)					
<b>Cabeza</b>	4/3/5	3/2/2/3	-0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 5/5/6L/1, Kick: 5/5/6B/2	3/2L/5B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Martial Arts 2, Presence 3 (Unnerving Cachinnation +3)					
<b>Jade Effigy</b>	6/3/6	2/1/1/6	-0x3/-1x3/-2x4/-4x2/I	Punch: 5/8/10B/3, Bow: 6/8/8L/1, Spear: 5/8/10L/2, Sword: 4/9/9L/3	2/12L/18B
<b>Abilities:</b> Archery 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 3 (Punch +1), Melee 3 (Spear +1, Sword +2), Presence 2 (Intimidate +3), Stealth 1 (Motionless +2)					
<b>River Wraith</b>	10/2/12	3/1/3/4	-0x2/-1x4/-2x4/-4x3/I	Bite: 5/7/11L/1	2/8L/14B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 3 (Swim +1), Awareness 3, Dodge 2, Integrity 2, Martial Arts 3 (Bite +2), Presence 3 (Intimidation +2), Resistance 4, Stealth 4, Survival 3					
<b>Tomb Golem</b>	3/2/4	2/1/1/3	-0x2/-1x2/-2/-4/I	Punch: 5/5/3B/2, Kick: 5/4/6B/1, Clinch: 6/4/3B/1, Chopping Sword: 4/5/8L/1	2/4L/4B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 2, Melee 2, (other assorted Abilities as needed)					
<b>Stygia</b>					
<b>Alaun</b>	2/5/2	2/2/2/6	-0x3/-1x2/-2/I	Slashing Sword: 4/10/5L/3, War hammer: 5/10/10B/2	3/1L/2B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Craft (Earth) 2, Dodge 2, Melee 4, Presence 1					
<b>Cobbler</b>	2/2/2	2/1/2/4	-0x2/-2x3/-4x2/I	Punch: 5/6/7L/2	2/1L/2B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 1, Dodge 2, Integrity 4, Martial Arts 3, Presence 1, Resistance 4					
<b>Malefic Stalker</b>	4/4/5	4/1/2/2	-0/-1x6/-2x2/-4/I	Claws: 5/8/9L/2	5/2L/5B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Dodge 4, Martial Arts 4, Occult 1 (Secrets of the Neverborn +3), Presence 4 (Intimidation +1), Stealth 4, Survival 3					

Name	Str/Dex/Sta	Per/Int/ Wits/WP	Health Levels	Attack (Spd/Acc/Dmg/Rate)	Dodge DV/Soak
Portee Dog	7/3/5	2/2/3/3	-0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 5/5/7L/1	2/2L/5B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Dodge 1, Integrity 1, Investigation 1, Martial Arts 2, Presence 2 (Intimidation +1), Resistance 1, Stealth 1, Survival 3					
Walker of the Midnight Sun	3/4/4	2/2/3/8	-0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Punch: 5/7/3L/3, Weapon (varies)	3/2L/4B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Integrity 5, Investigation 1 (Interrogation +3), Martial Arts 2, Melee 2, Presence 2 (Intimidation +2)					
<i>East</i>					
Chameleon Monkey	1/4/2	3/1/3/1	-0/-2/I	Bite: 5/6/2L/1, Claw: 5/6/2L/1	3/1L/2B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 4, Awareness 1, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 2, Stealth 5, Survival 2					
Hura	4/4/4	4/2/3/4	-0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Veil Whips: 5/8/5B/1*	3/2L/5B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 3, Dodge 2, Integrity 4, Investigation 2 (Finding children +2), Larceny 1 (Breaking and Entering +3), Martial Arts 3, Stealth 5					
Lethe Serpent	1/3/1	2/1/3/1	-0/-1/-4/I	Bite: 5/6/2L + poison*/1	3/0L/1B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Dodge 4, Integrity 3, Martial Arts 3, Stealth 4					
Scavenger	3/3/2	4/2/3/3	-0/x3/I	Bite: 5/8/4L/1	4/1L/2B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 2, Dodge 5, Martial Arts 5, Stealth 3, Survival 3					
Swamp Golem	5/2/5	2/1/3/2	-0x4/-1x2/-2/-4/I	Punch: 5/6/5B + poison (6L, 3, -/-, -5)/2	2/2L/5B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 3, Dodge 3, Martial Arts 3					
<i>South</i>					
Ashen Nomad	2/2/2	2/1/2/3	-0/-1/-2/-4x2/I	Punch: 5/5/2B/3	2/1L/2B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 1, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 2, Survival 4 (Desert +2)					
Black Garda	1/3/1	4/1/3/4	-0/I	Fiery Crash: 6/8/16L + Special*/1	3/0L/3B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 5 (Flight +3), Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Martial Arts 5					
Firedust Phantom	0/5/0	2/1/3/1	Special*	Special*	10†/10L/10B
<b>Abilities:</b> Dodge 5					
Firefly	0/5/1	2/1/2/1	-0x3/-2/I	Fiery Touch: 5/3/2L/1	7†/0L/1B
<b>Abilities:</b> Dodge 2, Martial Arts 3					
Hungry Mirror	0/0/2	3/1/3/7	-0/-2x3/-4/I	Virtue Drain: 5/Special*	0/1L/2B
<b>Abilities:</b> —					
Rock Dragon	15/3/20	3/1/3/5	-0x7/-1x4/-2x3/-4/I	Bite: 6/7/20L/1, Claw: 5/7/15L/2, Lava: 6/7/30L/1	4/10L/20B
<b>Abilities:</b> Archery 4, Athletics 2 (Flight +1), Awareness 3 (Personal Domain +2), Dodge 1, Integrity 5, Martial Arts 4, Presence 2 (Intimidation +3), Resistance 5					
Scorpion Wasp	1/4/3	2/1/3/5	-0/-1/-2x2/I	Sting: 4/7/1A/3*	8†/2L/5B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 4 (Flight +1), Awareness 2, Dodge 4, Martial Arts 3					
<i>West</i>					
Algal Dragon	8/6/7	4/1/3/4	-0x3/-1x2/-2/-4/I	Bite: 5/9/8L/2	4/3L/7B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 3 (Swim +2), Awareness 1, Dodge 2, Integrity 4, Martial Arts 3, Presence 4, Resistance 4					

Name	Str/Dex/Sta	Per/Int/ Wits/WP	Health Levels	Attack (Spd/Acc/Dmg/Rate)	Dodge DV/Soak
<b>Coral Mask</b>	2/5/5	3/3/5/8	-0/I	Clinch: 5/10/2B/1	4/13L/13B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 2 (Swimming +1), Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Integrity 5, Martial Arts 5					
<b>Eoi</b>	2/1/2	3/1/2/1	-0x2/-2/I	Pincer: 5/3/2L/2	1/3L/6B
<b>Abilities:</b> Dodge 1, Martial Arts 2, Survival 2					
<b>Essence</b>					
<b>Maelstrom</b>	5/7/5	2/1/3/4	-0x4/-1x2/-2/-4/I	Bolt: 4/11/5L*/3	6/2L/5B
<b>Abilities:</b> Archery 4, Awareness 4					
<b>Resplendent</b>					
<b>Burning Lotus</b>	4/3/4	1/1/3/4	-0/-1/-2x2/-4x2/I	Clinch: 5/6/4B/3*	1/3L/6B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 2 (Swim +1), Awareness 3, Martial Arts 3, Presence 2 (Allure +2)					
<b>Shadowtide</b>	6/2/8	2/1/3/3	-0/-1x2/-2x2/-4x4/I	Clinch: 5/8/6B/12*, Smash: 5/7/6L/12*	4/4L/8B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 4 (Swim +2), Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Integrity 3, Martial Arts 4 (Cinch +2, Smash +1), Presence 3 (Intimidation +2), Stealth 5					
<b>North</b>					
<b>Cannibalized</b>	8/6/7	2/1/3/4	-0x3/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 5/8/8L/1, Claw: 5/8/8L/3, Ice Sword: 4/12/10L/2	4/3L/7B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Martial Arts 2, Melee 5					
<b>Entropic Fog</b>	0/4/0	2/1/3/6	-0/-1/-2/I	Envelop: 5/6/Special*/1	3/6L/6B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 3 (Flight +1), Dodge 2, Integrity 4					
<b>Frostbite</b>	0/5/0	2/1/2/1	-0/I	Touch: 5/7/Special*/1	3/0L/0B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 2, Dodge 1, Martial Arts 2, Stealth 5					
<b>Ygdra</b>	8/3/10	2/1/3/2	-0x5/-1x3/-2/-4/I	Clinch: 5/8/10B/3*	1/5L/10B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 1, Integrity 5, Martial Arts 5, Resistance 5					
<b>Labyrinth</b>					
<b>Cerement</b>	5/2/4	2/1/2/3	-0x2/-2x2/I	Clinch: 5/4/5L/1	2/2L/4B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 2, Stealth 2					
<b>Consumption</b>					
<b>Cloud</b>	2/4/4	2/1/3/3	-0/-1/-2x2/-4x3/I	Envelop: 4/6/4L*/1	4/4L/8B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 2 (Flight +1), Awareness 1, Dodge 4, Martial Arts 2, Stealth 4					
<b>Contagion</b>					
<b>Parasite</b>	5/5/2	4/1/2/6	-0x7/I	Clinch: 5/10/5B/1	5/1L/2B
<b>Abilities:</b> Dodge 5, Martial Arts 5					
<b>Ferryman</b>	4/6/8	3/2/3/9	-0x4/-1x3/-2x2/-4/I	Scythe: 6/11/11L/2	5/4L/8B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 5, Dodge 1, Integrity 5, Melee 4, Presence 3 (Intimidation +2), Sail 4, Survival 5 (Labyrinth +2)					
<b>Steel Ant</b>	1/2/1	2/1/2/2	-0x6/-1x4/-2x4/-4x2/I	Swarm: 5/6/2L/1	4/1L/2B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 4, Resistance 3, Survival 2					
<b>Steel Ant Queen</b>	5/3/6	4/2/4/6	-0/-1x2/-2x2/-4x2/I	Bite: 5/6/4L/1, Stinger: 4/6/2L + poison (6L, 3, -/, -5)/1	4/10L/16B
<b>Abilities:</b> Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Integrity 4, Martial Arts 3, Resistance 5					
<b>Stillborn</b>	3/4/5	2/2/3/5	-0x3/-1x5/-2x4/I	Fetus Bite: 5/8/2A/1, Kick: 5/8/6L/2, Punch: 5/9/3L/3	6 / 1 2 L / 1 6 B
<b>Abilities:</b> Dodge 4, Martial Arts 4					
<b>Vengeful Exile</b>	2/3/2	2/0/2/2	-0/-1/-4/I	Claw: 5/7/2A/2	2/1L/2B
<b>Abilities:</b> Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 4					

\* See text for details.

† Dodge DV bonus for being a swarm creature.

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